

Sunday, December 1 The Light of Hope

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
“May those who love you be secure.
May there be peace within your walls
and security within your citadels.”
For the sake of my family and friends,
I will say, “Peace be within you.”
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek your prosperity.*

Psalm 122

Todd and Erick moved out of their pew at Bruton Parish Church and were caught in the throng of folks who had come to church for the first Sunday of Advent. They felt fortunate that they were at The College of William and Mary and lived close to this colonial church. People greeted them and seemed genuinely pleased that students and faculty from W&M would come to church. Both men were gracious in returning greetings though they were somewhat anxious to get out and head down to the Raleigh Tavern. They had a lunch reservation and didn't want to be late. The colonial town was quickly filling with people who were coming to see all of the colonial Christmas decorations. All of the buildings were decorated, the Fife and Drum Corp were marching through the historic district and people had paid extra attention to their finery for the day. There was a feeling of festivity everywhere.

After telling the Rector they had enjoyed the sermon they quickly walked to the Tavern. They were relieved when they saw Mikey was the host for lunch. He would have saved their table even if they were late.

“Gentlemen, welcome to Raleigh Tavern on this fine day.”

“Thank you, kind sir, for your most gracious welcome. Dr. Emmanuelson and I have a reservation in your fine establishment.”

Erick stood back and snickered as Todd and Mikey took up banter in a supposed colonial style.

Dr. Emmanuelson! Erick could hardly believe that he was now a Ph.D. and had a title with his name. He had struggled with his dissertation but had been awarded the degree the previous May at Yale University. He knew most people struggled with their dissertations so he didn't begrudge (too much) the professor who made his life a living hell for two years. He now had a faculty appointment at William & Mary with a rank of Assistant Professor. It was a last-minute occurrence. A long tenured professor had passed away on the same day that Erick's Curriculum Vitae arrived on the department chairman's desk. Erick saw it as fate.

Erick liked the fact that Todd always referred to him as Dr. Emmanuelson. He smiled thinking of a General's wife wearing her husband's military rank. Todd was also proud of the fact that his partner was on faculty. He let all of his friends know that they were partners. It was a badge of honor among certain groups for an undergraduate to be dating a member of the faculty. Actually, that had caused a bit of consternation among members of the Faculty Senate until they were assured that Todd was a math major in his senior year and would not be taking any courses from his partner.

Todd had even adopted Erick's style of dressing. Grey or black suit, white shirt, bowtie, and cap toe shoes were now his standard attire. Prior to that, Todd had been a hit or miss kind of dresser. He would do the sniff test on his clothes and that would help decide what he wore that day. Luckily, he and Erick were the same size and could share a wardrobe. There were fewer bowties to buy. Those things were expensive to be such little pieces of cloth. The local haberdashery, Beecroft and Bull, was their favorite place to shop.

Erick was from Newport, Rhode Island and Todd was from Richmond, Virginia. Both were snobbish towns in their own ways. Both men had each adopted the characteristics of their native towns with one major difference. Todd grew up at St. Paul's Episcopal Church and insisted the family sit in the pew where Robert E. Lee was seated when he was notified that the Yankee troops had broken through the lines at Petersburg. He went to St. Christopher's Episcopal School and lived in the West End. His parents were of the old Richmond power set. They were discreet about their wealth but were powerful in the city and state cliques that made decisions.

Erick however grew up as a twin son of Holocaust survivors. His parents had emigrated to the United States in the 1950s. They were in their twenties and had recently married. Being the only survivors from both families, they met, had fallen in love and decided they wanted to live in the United States. The couple wanted to get out of Europe and had ended up in Newport. Except for the elite in their "summer cottages" the town was filled with frugal New Englanders. The Emmanuelsons tried to have children and the doctor told them they would probably never conceive. This was seen as one more horror of the Holocaust that would forever haunt their lives. Both were surprised when after several years Rachel became pregnant. The surprise was doubled when she found out she was carrying twins. Then the worrying set in. Would the experiments at the hands of the Nazi's have affected the health of the babies? What would they do if the children were deformed? Luckily, the worrying was for naught. Two healthy boys were born to Abraham and Rachel Emmanuelson. Both boys were handsome, smart and excelled at school. Erick decided to go to Yale and Eron went to Harvard. Erick was the historian and Eron was the lawyer. They were both gay and preferred dating gentile boys. They had grown up hearing the stories of the Holocaust and the horrors of so many people and felt they needed a break from that tragic past. Their parents only went to synagogue during high holy days. Erick and Eron went to synagogue when requested by their parents but they were mostly non-observant.

Erick and Todd met at the LGBT Halloween dance. Erick was new on campus that fall and decided that the dance was a perfect opportunity to meet other gay men. The history department had colonial costumes that students would wear when serving as docents at the college so Erick borrowed one thinking it would help him fit in with the crowd. He felt a little odd in a costume as that wasn't something his parents encouraged him and his brother to do. Even for Halloween. He could count on one hand the number of times he had dressed in a costume. He felt anomalous walking in the door. He paid the entry fee and scanned the hall. Erick had always been shy and he wanted to find a corner to hide in for the evening. As he was heading over to purchase a beer, he noticed two Indian braves wearing loin clothes. They were standing with a fellow in a colonial costume.

Erick stopped and stared. The colonist happened to look over at that time and their eyes met. Erick couldn't move. He was mesmerized by this handsome young man. The braves realized their companion was looking elsewhere and turned to see what had captured his attention. The red headed Indian brave said something to the colonist and pushed him in Erick's direction. The fellow tripped over his feet and stumbled into Erick's arms. They looked in each other's eyes and then both jumped back embarrassed over what had just happened. The Indian braves were falling into each other's arms laughing. He heard the blond say that there were two Indians and two white men – it was time for an Indian attack.

Todd told Erick that he owed him a drink because he saved him from falling. Erick finally agreed and Todd walked over to the beverage station. He returned with two beers. Introductions were made to the two Indian braves: Degataga and Chea Sequah.

“Actually, we are Matan and Yonatan.” The red headed brave spoke first.

Degataga then spoke and said, “If you want, you can call us Mason and Jimbo but we are ditching those names.”

Matan and Yonatan leaned in, kissed each other, and looking at each other, both said, “I am thankful you are in my life. I love you so much.” It was if this mantra was rehearsed, but it was genuine in feeling none the less.

During the ensuing conversation they disclosed to Erick they had just returned from Paris. Erick looked at the two and asked if they were Jewish.

“I mean you have Jewish names. That doesn’t necessarily make you Jewish. I don’t understand why you have Indian names, though.”

Matan suggested Erick come to dinner on Saturday night. “I think this deserves a more detailed conversation. We will explain all.” Erick readily agreed. “And bring the other white man colonist with you. We promise to be dressed in regular clothes and not these little scraps of fabric.”

Everyone grinned and then took to the dance floor. Chea Sequah moved to the center of the floor and was the envy of many. His body twirled and circled around Degataga. The bells on their anklets sounded with their moves. People were mesmerized because they realized they were seeing more than just two men in costumes – they were observing men who were committed to each other and the loin clothes held some special significance.

When Erick left the dance hall he was holding onto Todd’s hand. They were kissing before they were outside. The next week Erick moved into Todd’s apartment. They felt it was destiny that brought them together.

The dinner with Matan and Yonatan was a revelation to both Erick and Todd. They knew they had met a couple who would be their friends for life. They were puzzled over the presence of a fellow named Black but they decided not to ask. They assumed that Matan and Yonatan were rich and had a man who took care of them and their home. Erick was entranced with the house especially when they told him of the secret passageway where run-away slaves would hide until they were secreted out into boats at night. Black refused for them to see the passage claiming it was unsafe. Matan blushed and immediately changed the subject. It was as if he had disclosed something that he should not have. After dinner, they put on jackets and had dessert on the deck while looking across the river at the lights. They promised to have many more dinners together.

Erick took the train to Providence, Rhode Island for Thanksgiving. Eron met him at Union Station in Washington, D.C. and they rode the rest of the way together. Their parents met them in Providence and took them to their home in Newport. It was an unpretentious Cape Cod style house befitting a working-class family.

Over Thanksgiving lunch, Erick told them about meeting Matan and Yonatan. He mentioned that they had been in Paris over fall break visiting the Jenner’s.

His father looked deep into his eyes, “Are his parents Herbert and Judy Jenner?”

“I think those were the names he mentioned.”

“And you met Matan Jenner?”

“Yes, that is one of the names he uses. He is also called Mason and Chea Sequah.”

Eron was laughing, “What kind of name is Chea Sequah?”

“Native American. These guys are fascinating. They will be moving to Boston at some point to attend Harvard. I will have to introduce you.”

“Ahhh, the Creator of the Universe is at work. You go to work in Williamsburg and meet the person who, it is said, will probably become a great Rebbe. The Chief Rabbi of Paris had them come to his office every day they were in Paris.”

“How do you know this, papa?”

“I have my ways, I have my ways. Now let’s watch some football.” They threw a few logs on the fire to warm the house and then Erick and Eron curled up together on the sofa and grabbed a blanket to help keep them warm. They had always been very affectionate with each other and it was not unusual for them to kiss.

Five hundred miles south, Todd and his family had lunch at their home overlooking the James River. The large home had been in the family for several generations and his parents had updated all of the systems in the prior decade. It had the look of old money but was very modern in many ways. There was a large crowd of extended family who had come for lunch.

There were questions for Todd. His mother wanted to know the names of the girls he was dating. There were questions about his grades. There were questions about where he wanted to go to graduate school. His mother wanted to make sure he was attending church. After lunch, the women went to the kitchen to clean up and the men went to the den to watch football. Todd answered questions that were directed at him. His answers were always given in a joking manner and he laughed. His brother, Tayloe, knew something wasn’t right and kept asking him if he was okay.

“Are you alright little brother?”

“Yes, I am fine. The professors are piling on the work because we are closing in on the end of the semester. In fact, I will probably go back early to study and to work on some papers.”

His father spoke up and said he would do no such thing.

“You are staying here until after lunch on Sunday. You will not disappoint your mother by going back early.”

“Dad, I.....”

“End of discussion, young man. You will do as I say. Now watch the game.” Todd and Tayloe threw some logs on the fire, grabbed a blanket and curled up together on the sofa. This had been their pattern throughout their life. They often held hands and were not ashamed when people mentioned it.

Todd just slumped further back into the corner of the sofa. He had a special endeavor he wanted to work on so when Erick came back from Newport, he could talk with him and convince him to

participate. Todd felt it was important for them as a couple to grow together and though they were different faiths he saw this could lead to meaningful discussions.

After dinner on Saturday night, Todd told his parents that he had to get back to Williamsburg. His mother expressed regret that his schedule was so awful that semester.

“You are going to miss the first Sunday in Advent at St. Paul’s. You have always loved that service. I don’t understand how you would give up something you like so much.”

“Mother, I will miss being with you but I don’t want to fail this semester. I want to go to grad school.”

His father wouldn’t look at him. His brother followed him to his bedroom and closed the door.

“Okay bro. Spill it. Something is up. You are acing all of your classes so this isn’t about school. You’ve found a girl, right? Is my little brother in love?”

Todd flushed and his cheeks flushed bright red.

“I knew it, I knew it.” Tayloe pumped his fist in the air. “I am so glad that you are getting some. I was afraid you would always be the bachelor uncle. What is her name?”

Todd looked Tayloe in the eyes. “His name is Erick.” At that moment, Todd started shaking. Without missing a beat, Tayloe grabbed his brother and started kissing the top of his head. Tayloe had always been his protector and would always kiss the top of Todd’s head to make him feel better.

When Todd stopped weeping and shaking, Tayloe pushed him back slightly without letting go and said, “I need for you to talk to me. When did you know you were gay? Obviously, the parents don’t know. When do I get to meet this man?”

The two boys sat on the edge of the bed while Todd poured his heart out to his older brother and told him of his love for Erick. He told Tayloe everything he knew about his one month romance.

“I don’t know what will upset mom and dad the most; the fact that you are gay or that your boyfriend is Jewish.” Todd nodded his head in agreement. “Let’s get you packed so you can get back to your Erick. I am coming for dinner on Wednesday night so tell him to be prepared.” Again, Todd could only nod his head in agreement.

There was a knock on the bedroom door. His father opened the door and spoke to Tayloe.

Pointing at Todd, he said, “You, I am not talking to right now. I told you to stay until after lunch tomorrow and you went against my wishes. I know the two of you are thick as thieves. Remember that the Christmas holiday is coming and you will be here and follow all of our customs. Do I make myself clear?”

Todd nodded his head. He didn’t know what would happen with Erick and decided to not rock the boat too much.

He packed his suitcase and went down the stairs. He kissed his mother on the cheek, turned and shook his father’s hand and then kissed Tayloe on the cheek.

“I will see you on Wednesday night. We will grab a sandwich somewhere.”

Out the door he went. After tomorrow, he didn't know if he would have a boyfriend or not. What he had planned would be the real test.

Todd drove down Monument Avenue for a view of the trees as they were in full blaze of oranges and yellows. The avenue was always beautiful but Todd thought it was especially spectacular this time of the year. It made Todd think of the grand avenues in European cities. He wished that he was living in Europe except now he had a boyfriend and there was only one place he wanted to be: with Erick.

He opened the door and saw Erick asleep on the sofa. His boyfriend roused from his slumber and gave him a broad smile. It was all Todd needed to feel weak in the knees. Erick jumped across the back of the sofa and threw himself into Todd's arms and started kissing. Todd gasped not knowing that Erick was returning early. They continued holding each other and kissing while they maneuvered to the bedroom. Clothes were pulled from each other as they tried to get as close as possible.

It looked like a bomb had exploded in the bedroom. There was a path of clothes from the door to the bed. Their underwear was tangled in the bedsheets. They lay on their backs. Erick's normally manageable mane of black hair was a mass of curls dripping with sweat and his chest hair was glistening. Todd could see Erick's heart beating against his chest wall. He gave a big sigh and said they should have a cup of tea. They each grabbed the nearest pair of briefs and pulled them up their hairy legs. Todd liked the fact that they were both hairy beasts.

When they entered the living room, they saw the suitcase and bags of food that had been dropped by the front door. Todd chuckled and said there was cake in one of the bags.

"Mother gave me fruit cake. We can have it with the tea." Erick pulled a face.

"I brought back some apple walnut cake and a box of cookies. Mother was afraid that I was a starving young professor so she sent me back with enough sugar to get the freshman class through the exam period."

Both guys naturally moved toward each other and held on before kissing.

"I missed you so much." They both said it at the same time and then started laughing. Their love was reflected in their eyes.

The tea kettle whistled and they grabbed the tin with the fruit cake and headed to the kitchen.

"Now, you must know that this is a Martha Washington Fruit Cake. My mother swears a connection with the family and insists that the recipe was passed down to her. We never challenge her because we all like the cake."

"It has cherries in it!"

"Of course, you know about George Washington and the cherry tree."

"That story was made up. Parson Weems was a PR guy extraordinaire. I am the historian and I know these things."

"Here, eat another cherry." Todd popped the cherry into Erick's mouth and then followed with a kiss.

“You should know that being a descendant of George Washington, I have been drilled in the family history. Careful what you say about my ancestor.”

“Then you should know that George had no children. Martha had two children but dear ole George was shooting blanks.”

They were both giggling while feeding each other bites of fruit cake. Washing the dishes was part of their routine before heading back to the bedroom.

“Next, you will be telling me that George and Martha slept in our bed.”

Todd gave Erick a mischievous look and said, “In fact, it isn’t of the Washington line. It is a Carter family bed. You know Carter’s Grove.....” Todd let the sentence hang in the air. Erick rolled his eyes.

“We need to make sense of these bedclothes. Someone made a mess in here.” The guys then made quick work of the tangled sheets and bedspread. They were adamant that everything had a place to live so their home was always ready for guests if someone stopped by.

When Erick had moved in, he brought his clothes and a few personal items. They had held a ceremony when the mezuzah was placed on the front door post. Todd had even gotten into the practice of touching it whenever he left and entered the front door. It made him think of Erick and that this was where Erick lived. He would have nailed one to his heart if possible because he knew that was where Erick actually resided: in his heart. Also, Erick had a yarmulke which lived on the dresser top. Erick had no family mementos to spread around; there was only a copy of his parent’s wedding picture and a picture of Eron, his parents and himself at high school graduation. His parents always said they were creating new memories in this new world.

The apartment was not in the usual housing complexes set aside for students. His mother had connections and found a lovely older apartment in a small village like setting that had been built for genteel people who no longer wished to maintain their large homes. Todd was given strict instructions from his parents about the importance of behaving while he lived there. After all, the family name was at stake. She had decorated the unit with family furniture. It was the envy of many of the residents such was the quality of the furnishings. It had an old-world charm. Family portraits lined one of the hall ways. Probably no other college student lived in such a well-furnished accommodation.

After a quick shower and cleaning their teeth they crawled into bed. Erick threw an arm across Todd’s chest and tweaked his nipple. Todd had a concerned look on his face. Erick raised himself on an elbow and looked at his lover. Lover. Yes, that was the appropriate word. That was better than luster. They were in lust and in love. They each knew they had found that special someone.

“Okay, tell me handsome. Something has been bothering you all night. Talk to me.”

Todd swallowed hard and his Adam’s apple rose and fell.

“I don’t know where to start.”

“At the beginning, of course.” Todd gave Erick a swat after he said that. There was a lengthy silence. Erick’s smile started fading as he looked at Todd. All of a sudden it hit him. Todd was going to break up with him. Todd had tired of him and was going to kick him out. They had just had one last love making session. Todd’s silence continued.

Erick burst into tears and he was convulsed in pain. His cry sounded like a child screaming and wailing. He was lying in a fetal position.

“Oh my God, Erick. What’s wrong? Please, baby, tell me what’s wrong? I can’t stand to see you in such pain. Please, talk to me. Please.”

“I can’t live without you. I will do whatever you want. Please don’t kick me out. Please don’t stop loving me. I can’t live without you.”

Todd was astounded. Where did that reaction come from? The last thing in the world he would do would be to kick Erick out of his life. Todd reached out and pulled Erick into an embrace. He rocked him and cuddled him while making soothing sounds. He kissed the top of Erick’s head the same way that Tayloe had kissed him earlier in the evening.

“Shush, darling. No more of that kind of talk. No more crying...for either of us. We have both been too weepy today.” He continued to rock the broken man. Finally, he heard a quivering exhale of breath and knew that the worst was over. Slowly, Erick relaxed and fully extended his body in the bed while never losing touch with Todd.

They looked at each other and then gently kissed. They pulled the covers to their waists.

“Tell me what you were thinking to have that reaction.”

Erick explained about being afraid of rejection and being sent away. His parents, though loving, always withheld emotion fearing that the family would be ripped apart. That was their experience. They didn’t want Erick and Eron to become too dependent. Jewish families were used to being ripped apart and sent separate directions. One could never trust that even in the United States that emigrants wouldn’t be separated and sent to camps. There were always suitcases packed in case they needed to steal away in the middle of the night. They were Jews and Jews knew they were never safe.

Todd lay overwhelmed with everything that Erick had just told him. He couldn’t imagine living life in such fear. Then he reflected of what had happened that day.

“I came out to Tayloe tonight. He knows that I am gay. He knows about you and he is coming for dinner on Wednesday night.”

“I take it he was accepting if he is coming to dinner. I look forward to meeting him.”

“Well, he was accepting but I know his lawyer brain is already coming up with a list of questions to ask you. It will be like you are on the witness stand. I know my brother. I love him but he is a good attorney and can be very strategic.”

“Ahh, I have told you that my brother Eron is a prosecutor. He has to be in Richmond on Wednesday and said that he wanted to drive to meet the man who has captured my heart. He is coming on Wednesday night, also. Our brothers should have a great time. We can get it all out of the way in one visit.”

The tension was broken. They both laughed at the happy coincidence. Of course, it also gave them pause to have dinner with their brothers who were also lawyers.

“One of us can be the judge and the other the bailiff in case things get out of hand.” Erick smiled trying to decide which role he preferred.

“Okay, there is one more thing I need to talk about. I don’t know how you will react but it is very important to me.”

Erick nodded his head and waited for Todd to continue.

“Tomorrow is the beginning of Advent. Advent is a Christian season leading up to Christmas which is the second coming of God through Jesus. You light candles each day in Advent and there are certain readings. I don’t expect you to be at Christmas Eve or Day Services and we don’t have to put up a Christmas tree but Advent has always been one of my favorite times in the church year. It is the beginning of the church year and it is about the anticipation that comes with something new. It is about preparation. It is about contemplation and prayer. Erick, this is important to me and I would like for you to join me each night. We can talk about the scripture assigned for the day. We can learn more about each other and I think it will tighten the bond that we have.” Todd had rushed through his prepared statement. He believed that he had presented his case succinctly and factually. He was looking in the middle distance afraid to focus on Erick. He felt a hand touch his cheek and then turn his head. He was looking in Erick’s eyes.

“Alright, lover we will do this. I need to say that if it gets too uncomfortable for me that I will drop out. I will only stop if it is too Christian. I am a Jew. If I stop it will not be about you even though it will affect you. Is there anything else you need for me to know? I don’t like to be surprised.”

“Would you be okay going to church with me in Advent? I would like you by my side.”

“I will go tomorrow but I can’t promise anything after that. I have seen the preachers on television and cannot participate in something like that.”

Todd smiled thinking that Bruton Parish was nothing like television evangelism.

On Sunday morning, they were both introspective. Todd always turned inward on the first Sunday of Advent. He was serious in his practice of preparing for the birth of Christ. Erick spent time wondering if he had made a mistake dating a Christian who was actually faithful in his religious practice. For the past month, he had enjoyed the quiet time in their home when Todd went to church. He used it for contemplation and prayer. They would meet for brunch afterwards. Erick would always dress down and wear his kippah so not as to be confused with all of the people who had just left church.

The men were tender with each other as they showered and dressed on Sunday morning. Todd looked at Erick and saw fear and apprehension in his eyes. He kissed his man and told him that if it got to be too uncomfortable, they would leave. That made Erick feel better. They drove into the historic district and parked behind the church. Todd grabbed Erick’s hand and would not let go. Except for their coloring, they looked like brothers. They were wearing black suits, white shirts, purple ties and their black cap-toe shoes. Todd had explained the reason for the color purple and decried those churches that now used Sarum blue instead of the traditional penitential purple.

The greeters did not bat an eye as they were handed bulletins. They were still hand in hand. Todd found the pew he wanted and knelt in the aisle. Erick didn’t know what to do and nodded his head. He wasn’t sure when he was supposed to bow and it didn’t feel right to him. The organist had chosen a prelude for the day that felt particularly funereal. Someone in the back of the church announced for them to kneel. Todd knelt and Erick followed suit. The opening sentence of The Great

Litany made Erick feel welcome. "O God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth." The language reminded him of what he had heard in synagogue. The next sentence about Jesus jolted him and reinforced that he was in a church not a synagogue. The litany went on and on and on. Erick listened intensely. Many of the petitions spoke to his heart. The Jesus specific petitions did not resonate as well. Erick reflected that he could rewrite the petitions to better fit them as a couple.

There were readings, hymns, a sermon and more prayers. The reverence he felt in synagogue was the same reverence he felt in this church. He could do this for the four Sundays in Advent. He knew it was important to do this for the two of them. Todd reached out and touched his hand. Erick looked to Todd and nodded his head - he was okay. After the service they went to the Raleigh Tavern where Mikey had a table waiting for them. Many heads turned in the restaurant because they were such a handsome pair and they were obviously in love. The meal was delicious and they sampled each other's dishes. They each had a glass of Williamsburg wine with their meal. Todd wanted it to be a special day for them.

They were finishing a final cup of coffee when they looked up and saw Yonatan and Matan coming in. They were accompanied by two handsome men; one tall and broad shouldered and the other shorter, slender and somewhat bookish looking. Erick and Todd stood to greet them. There were solid hand-shakes, hugs and air kisses all around. Mikey approached and said a six top had come available and asked Todd and Erick if they were leaving or wanted to join the other four.

Pate and Timmy had driven up from the Outer Banks to do some Christmas shopping. While sorting through some merchandise at Beecroft and Bull, Matan caught Timmy's eye and smiled at him. The smile was so open and welcoming that he and Pate went over and introduced themselves. When Yonatan put his arm across Matan's shoulder and pulled him in close they all knew that they were two couples. They agreed their stomach rumbles needed attention and Yonatan suggested they go to Raleigh Tavern. It was happenstance they saw Erick and Todd.

The table was in the center of the room and they drew the attention of some of the diners in the tavern. Six handsome young men sitting together, enjoying the others' company was a sight to behold. The afternoon slipped by. Finally, Mikey came up and said the table was reserved for another party and needed to be prepped. The sun was setting in the western sky and they had spent the entire afternoon becoming acquainted. After exchanging addresses and telephone numbers, it was agreed they would get together the next Sunday for the annual Illumination of the Historic District. Pate and Timmy said they would drive up for the afternoon and evening. Both Todd and Yonatan offered them accommodations if they wanted to spend the night. The good-byes were filled with genuine affection and joy.

Todd and Erick headed home. Todd had bought an Advent wreath at the local florist. Of course, it looked like something for one of the historic homes. Three purple candles and one pink candle plus a white candle in the middle of the wreath held special significance which Todd explained. Todd put it in the center of the dining room table. They sat beside each other. Todd had turned off the overhead lights before he lit a purple candle and then offered a prayer. He gave Erick a piece of paper with Psalm 122 printed on it.

"Read the Psalm for us."

Erick could barely see the writing on the paper because of the low light level but fortunately he knew the Psalm by heart. He put the paper down, closed his eyes and started reciting the Psalm. He then waited for Todd to speak. This was new to him and it obviously meant a lot to Todd and he didn't want to mess up.

“You are my Jerusalem. You are where my heart resides. Peace is within me when we are together. Because we are one, there is fullness and prosperity in my life. You make me feel safe. I am reminded of the love between David and Jonathan and hope that our love matches theirs.”

Todd finished and waited for Erick. He looked at him to let him know to speak.

“When I moved in with you and you let me put the mezuzah on the door post I knew this was a safe place. When we are here, we are safe from others who may not like a Christian and Jew being together. We are safe from those who hate gays. During this sacred time this is our Jerusalem. This is the center of our universe. Together we go forward to talk to your family about us being a couple. We go in peace and ask their blessing.”

Todd’s eyes were big and bright.

They spent time talking about their statements, wishes and desires.

“Do you really want to talk with my parents? We have only been together for a month. Perhaps we should give this more time.”

Erick reached out and took Todd’s hands in his. “I know what I know. I love you. Time is a gift from God to help us order our lives. God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. He made Adam and Eve a couple in that first week. I knew when you fell into my arms at the dance that God had sent you to me. Matan helped but his act of pushing you was a holy act. God has put us together and I want to spend the rest of my life with you. We will talk to others, then, in God’s time. We have the rest of our lives together to make those decisions. For the sake of our family and friends, I say to you, *Peace be within us.*”

Todd was overcome with emotions. Erick stood, lifted his arms and recited a prayer.

May his great Name grow exalted and sanctified in the world that He created as He willed. May He give reign to His kingship, and cause His salvation to sprout, and bring near His Messiah in your lifetimes and in your days, and in the lifetimes of the entire household of Israel, speedily and soon. And let us say, “Amen.”

May his great Name be blessed forever and ever. Blessed, praised, glorified, exalted, extolled, mighty, upraised, and lauded by the Name of the Holy One Blessed be He beyond any blessing and song, praise and consolation that are uttered in the world. And let us say, “Amen.”

May there be abundant peace from heaven and good life upon us and upon all Israel. And let us say, “Amen.”

He who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace upon us, and upon all Israel. And let us say, “Amen.”

Erick lowered his arms while his head was still bowed. Todd rose from his seat and encircled his lover in his arms. They blew out the candle, Todd kissed Erick again, took his hand and led him to bed. They were at peace.

Suggested Music:

“O Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem”

Composer: Herbert Howells

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvycNXMUcMY>

Monday December 2

The Light of Hope

Our help is in the name of the Lord who created heaven and earth.

Psalm 124

“No cake for breakfast!” Erick looked at Todd and wondered how much his mother had spoiled him as a child. Todd looked at Erick with a huge grin on his face so that Erick could see the remnants of a cherry stuck to his teeth.

“And brush your teeth before you get dressed!” Erick walked out of the kitchen and headed to the bedroom to finish getting dressed for school.

Erick had eaten his bowl of Cream of Wheat. It was his breakfast routine every winter morning except on weekends when he would splurge and have a bagel with cream cheese. In the summer it was bran flakes with milk and banana. Todd said it made him want to puke. Erick said it made him regular...in more ways than one.

Todd told Erick to also brush his teeth because he wouldn't kiss him while tasting of that 'nasty' Cream of Wheat.

They had been living together less than a month. Going to the grocery store together the first time had been a revelation to each of them. Erick had a list of groceries to purchase arranged in order of where items were on the grocery aisles. Todd was a catch as catch can type of shopper. He would toss things in the cart because he took a fancy to them. When Erick would ask when they were going to eat something put into the cart Todd was at a loss to tell him. After that one trip, Erick made them sit down and write out a menu for the week and the food that needed to be purchased. Todd said he felt like he was being punished.

“You are a mathematician and your life is supposed to be ordered in a certain way.”

“Think of my grocery shopping as chaos theory, my lover boy.” Todd smiled and Erick looked dumbfounded. “Do you even know what chaos theory is?”

Erick shook his said.

“I am okay living with chaos except in the apartment and in the classroom. Until you came along, the rest of my life was chaos. I didn't care what I ate and when I ate it except that now it has to be with you. Chaos theory posits that in this environment there are patterns of behaviors, patterns of numbers, and in a practical way, it has application in genetics and can be used to reduce bias in clinical trials. I use that merely as one example of how the theory can be applied. There are many more. There can be a lot of noise in chaos theory depending on the discipline and most people don't have the patience to sort through the noise to get to the meaningful data.”

“I know who is full of noise and bullshit this morning.”

“Not at all. We are talking about my discipline of studies and I am very serious. Applying it to our grocery shopping may be a stretch, but perhaps not. I can live with a certain level of unknowingness in my life. See, I haven't been bothered with what I ate as it didn't matter. Now that I have you, and you are so anal retentive, except you are regular because of your nasty breakfast food, I will now pay attention to my grocery list. You may be sorry that you are forcing this idea.”

Erick just looked at his lover and smiled. “God help me. I didn’t know that the person I was destined to be with would challenge me in such basic ways.”

They had finished dressing and were standing in the living room. They checked each other to make sure that everything was exactly right with their presentations. Neither of them would admit that this was elemental to who they were. They were both anal-retentive types.

“You know, before I met you, I went by the sniff test and now you make me dress for school each day.”

“I don’t make you dress each day. You choose to dress like me. I like you regardless of your attire. Actually, I prefer when you are unattired.” Erick had a smirk on his face when he said that.

Todd slapped Erick’s butt and said they needed to get to campus.

They decided to take one car that day. The BMW convertible. Todd’s car. Erick drove a sensible Hondo Civic.

“Remind me again how it is that you live in these luxury apartments and drive a luxury sports car.” Erick kept needling Todd about his apparently bottomless back account.

In a smart-alecky voice, Todd countered, “Remind me again how it is that you live in these luxury apartments.”

“Easy, I live here with the most wonderful, handsome man on campus.” They both smiled. “And, we need to talk about rent and utilities. I need to pay you my part.”

“It’s a piffle. Are you spoiling for a fight today? First, you don’t like my choice of breakfast food and now it is about the finances. You know, most couple break up over money issues and I don’t plan to break up with you thus we are not discussing finances.”

“I only have one question. Is piffle a mathematic measurement? I never learned that in school.” Erick smirked as he looked at Todd who was grinning.

Todd reached across the console and took Erick’s hand. He brought it up to his lips and kissed it. Erick had tensed up because every time he brought up money issues, Todd clammed up or deflected the conversation. Erick decided to talk with his brother, Eron, who might be able to offer advice.

Todd liked that Erick had gotten a faculty parking sticker for the BMW and he wheeled into a lot close to the education building.

“See you at lunch time. By the way, you’re buying.” Todd grinned and hooted as he ran to class. Todd thought it was cold outside but Erick knew it to be a pleasant fall day. Erick walked into his office, dropped his briefcase and hurried to class.

His first class was on European History. Erick knew the material backward and forward. As the new faculty member, Erick was prepared to be assigned most of the survey classes for freshmen and he sometimes found it difficult to inspire students with such basic information. The Monday 8 a.m. class was the worst. Many of the students were hungover from the weekend and would sleep through the class. He tried to make it interesting but felt that for many of them it was a box to be checked off for their required curricula. He also realized that getting into William and Mary was not easy and these

were genuinely smart students. He had shaken the class one morning when he brought in a CD of a Mozart concerto. He started playing it and many of the students had quizzical looks on their faces. After the initial shock he could see some of them nodding their heads in time with the music. He then talked about the Habsburg lands under the rule of Joseph II, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Hungary. He traced the line of the royal family until the lead up to World War I. The students were energized as Erick talked about education, medicine, arts, life and diplomacy in the royal court. The class time flew by and the students didn't want to leave. Their homework, which drew a groan, was to watch the movie, *Amadeus*, directed by Milos Forman. The students who actually watched it came back asking for more. They spent an entire hour talking about the historical minutiae they noticed in the movie. The next week he introduced Judith Leyster, a female painter from Amsterdam who was one of the first women to earn a living as an artist. That led to a discussion about the Low Countries and their importance in commerce. Erick was able to put out a teaser for the next semester when he talked about the importance of Amsterdam as the center of trading and how that impacted all of Europe and the new world. The students liked the "coming attractions" promotion. Erick had become a popular teacher. When pre-registration for the next semester was finished there were waiting lists for all of his classes. The Dean took note and told Erick he was off to a good start.

Todd was enjoying his classes and knew they were preparing him for his focused work in operational research. He relished the theoretical world of some of the higher-level mathematics classes but he wanted to know how this knowledge could help with real world problems. He was ever the pragmatist. He was looking for the companion field to couple with his math skills as he wanted the application of his knowledge to help people in need. He thought that the social sciences or medicine were areas where he could make an impact. He loved the idea of working in the medical field. He was lost in his imagining until he heard a growl from his stomach. Just like clockwork he knew it was lunchtime.

He headed to the student union to meet Erick. They always ate lunch there on Mondays. There was also the soup and sandwich special that appealed. Erick always had a grilled pimento cheese sandwich with tomato basil soup. Todd had turkey on wheat with lettuce and tomato and chicken noodle soup. They were regular as clock work. Todd chuckled at that thought after the discussion earlier that morning.

Erick was already at the table with their food and drinks. Todd slid in beside him and Erick led them in a short prayer. At one time, Todd would have been uncomfortable about praying in public but with Erick it felt natural. They were about to take their first bites when Yonatan and Matan asked if they could join them. The lunch hour went by quickly as they talked about what they had done for the Thanksgiving holiday. Erick and Todd gave an abbreviated account of their holiday. Yonatan and Matan had invited friends over and they braved the weather and ate on the deck. Black had arranged for them to take a cruise down the river which they enjoyed. It was closing in on dark when they returned to shore and the guys were wrapped up in all weather gear. Green had forewarned them that it got cold on the water. They ate leftovers for dinner and then had warmed apple cider and sweet potato pie for dessert. They had enjoyed entertaining friends they had made at William and Mary.

Erick brought them back to the present. "Okay, the big event is happening in less than two weeks. Are you guys ready?" Erick already knew his role in the upcoming commitment ceremony and enjoyed teasing the fellows. He knew that Matan was on top of every detail.

"Yonatan has left it all up to me and we are set. I have a notebook filled with the particulars. Is there such a thing as a groomzilla?"

Erick and Yonatan had been in discussion about one important aspect of the ceremony that had not been shared with Matan. Yonatan had decided that during the ceremony Erick would read a list of gifts being bestowed on Matan. It followed a tradition of the “husband” announcing his gifts to the “bride”. Matan was absolutely clear that they were both husbands and that no bride was involved. However, as Yonatan headed up the family trusts and was responsible for finances, Matan let him take the lead and do what he wanted. When asked, Erick had agreed to read the Ketubah (contract) to the congregation who gathered at the ceremony. It was be a public announcement of the largess of Yonatan’s love for his mate. There was a wonderful mood at the table of two young couples in love.

Erick leaned in and kissed Todd. Todd just smiled because Erick wasn’t generally prone to such public displays of affection.

“I will be finished by 2 pm today. Meet you at your car. It is a beautiful day, perhaps we can go riding this afternoon.”

The guys loved driving throughout southeast Virginia. When Erick got to the car Todd was already waiting and had the top down. Erick was about to say it was too cold for such an outing when Todd pulled out barn jackets and hats. Todd quickly maneuvered the car onto the Colonial Parkway and they headed to Yorktown. It was such a lovely drive and they appreciated that they encountered very few cars.

They sat at the base of the monument where Cornwallis had surrendered to the upstart American forces while the sun lowered in the western sky. They held hands.... rather they held gloves as they were bundled up on the ridge above the river. Neither spoke because they were so in sync. They enjoyed watching the town lights come on as they sat in the twilight. Todd’s stomach growled. They laughed.

“Let’s eat at the Pub. Nothing too pretentious and hopefully there is a table so we can look at the river.”

“You are the driver. Let’s do it.”

Todd had seafood while Erick ate his burger. It was filling and they slaked their thirst with draft beers. It was wholly satisfying.

“Top up. It is too cold and we don’t want to get sick since it is almost exam time.” Erick helped Todd with the top. It wasn’t surprising to either of them how cold it got when the sun went down.

“I want a fire tonight. You get the fire started and I will get everything set for our Advent reading.” Erick nodded his head and thought how nice it would be to lie on the sofa with Todd while the flames flickered in the fireplace.

They were seated at the dining room table while Todd read the short lesson. He and Erick had a brief discussion about being created in the image of God and how they each turned to God for help. Erick had brought up the notion that God was genderless and they should try not to define God using a human binary construct. This was a new way of thinking for Todd.

“But God is a ‘he’ and Mother Nature is a ‘she’. That is the way the world was constructed. When we ask for God’s help we are asking our father because we know he will provide.” Todd had firm convictions on this topic.

“Yet, when something goes wrong you blame Mother Nature. Don’t you see the gender bias in your thinking? Men wrote the Bible and generally men were the theologians so we get this subtle yet strong notion of the roles for men and women. Also, people didn’t have access to Holy text so they depended on the interpreters. What sex were the interpreters? Want to take a guess?”

“Okay, boyfriend. You took too many philosophy courses. I am just a mathematician. We don’t have gender issues in math.”

“Ahhh, but you do. How many females are in your math courses?”

Todd gave a surprised look at Erick. He didn’t know how to respond.

“Math is for boys because it is ‘hard’ science. Women are supposed to be nurses or social workers.” Erick smiled as he offered up his thoughts.

“God help me.”

“You are on step one of figuring this out when you ask for God’s help.” Erick smiled as he pulled Todd from the table to the living room sofa.

“Can we have an evening of just relaxing without debating everything?”

“Yes, lover we can. There is no debating that I love you and always want to be with you.”

Erick laid down on the sofa and Todd snuggled into him. They started kissing and holding each other as the fire smoldered and eventually burned itself out. The fellows were still on the sofa when they awoke the next morning.

Suggested Music:

“Just A Closer Walk with Thee”

Mahalia Jackson and Louis Armstrong

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wX-YWOr8RQ>

Tuesday December 3
The Light of Hope

And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

Genesis 9

Erick was adamant. "No, we are not hanging a rainbow flag on the front of the house. Besides, the Home Owner's Association will not allow it." Erick then smiled. Todd was too easy to rile up.

"I just thought it would answer all of the questions the neighbors have about our living together."

"They see us and know that we are lovers. You are just pushing my buttons again, aren't you?"

"They are so plentiful and so easy to push."

Erick started laughing. Todd joined in.

They had been at the LGBT meeting that night where there had been a heated discussion about the rainbow flag. Some of the students wanted the flag to be prominently displayed on campus the following spring when tours were being given to applicants for admission. They thought it was important to make the political statement. Others thought a more subdued approach would work better for those students who were still in the closet.

Yonatan and Matan had taken opposite view points and very quickly had the members debating the issue. The two sat back and enjoyed watching the witch's brew they had stirred bubble and boil over. It had been a boring meeting up to that point. Erick and Todd decided to follow the lead of their friends and took opposite sides in debating the obviously touchy topic.

Todd had argued that he was out, proud, and queer. Erick gave him a skeptical look when he said that.

"Todd, tell the group exactly how you are queer."

Todd couldn't believe they were going to fight this publicly. He then told the group about how he was out to all of them and to his friends. He said the rainbow flag should be proudly flown across the campus during recruitment time. He also felt that the student representatives should speak out to each potential student and espouse the fact that in the State of Virginia the college was a bastion of free speech and queer pride. There was much applause when he finished his diatribe. Erick sat back with a smile on his face at his partner's enthusiasm.

When Todd attempted to goad Erick to stand and give his more conservative viewpoint, Erick was clear that Todd had convinced him that being out and proud was a service to all. Matan jumped into the conversation and talked about being a young queer boy who was ready to rush the barricades of intolerance. He said that Yonatan would fund the purchase of the rainbow flags to place across the campus. Yonatan was not amused by that comment but was ever ready to support his partner. What

started as a prod to further the discussion had turned into a referendum on the political stance of each member. Matan and Todd convinced the membership to approach the college administration with their ideas. It was acknowledged that whatever the compromise it would be better than the current position which was a token nod to their group.

Todd was fired up and continued the conversation when they got into the BMW. Erick made a point of looking at the bumper and asking Todd where his rainbow sticker was.

“Put your money where your mouth is.” Todd shut his mouth and then said they should fly a flag at their apartment.

Erick had Todd in such a state that he was rejecting his earlier comments. Erick was enjoying every minute of the debate. It was obvious that Todd had never taken a debating course in college. They touched the Mezuzah as they unlocked their front door and walked into the apartment. Erick thought it was fairly amazing that Todd had so readily agreed to nail the Mezuzah to the door post. Perhaps putting rainbow stickers on their bumpers was the compromise instead of flying a flag front their porch post.

As soon as the door closed, Todd turned and wrapped his arms around Erick.

“I love you so much.”

That was followed by a kiss. Both boys were avid kissers. Erick slid his hands down Todd’s back and grabbed his butt.

“Stop, we have to do our Advent meditation. That does not include groping.”

They laughed and separated. They removed their coats and put their book satchels away before heading to the dining room.

Todd was practically doubled over laughing. He had opened his Advent meditation guide and saw the reading for the day.

“You must agree that God has a sense of humor.”

Todd lit the candle while Erick read the scripture passage.

It took all of Erick’s inner strength not to burst out laughing. A smile did cross his face.

“Okay, let’s focus on the covenant part and not on the rainbow. God made several covenants with his people.”

“Yeah, but there was only one time he used the rainbow as a sign of the covenant. That was after the flood. I think it is appropriate that the rainbow flag is used as a sign for gay rights.”

“How do you correlate the flood of the earth and gay rights?”

“You miss the point, the rainbow is a visible sign of the covenant between God and his people. Perhaps there is a correlation in that gay people were persecuted before and now we are free. We are no longer being wiped from the earth. Change is coming. How perfectly appropriate that we use the rainbow flag because it has spiritual significance and is inclusive of the diversity in our world.”

“A lot of people don’t understand that connection between God’s covenant and gay rights. They are so anti-religious.”

“There are many people who have been hurt by the church. They conflate and confuse that with God’s love of his people. I understand that. The church has said it is God’s voice for people when it is actually the interpretation of some religious leaders. I have less regard for the institutional church but it is a connection to the spirit of God for me. However, I love Bruton Parish.”

“Okay, Judy. Don’t start singing “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” or I will have to smack you. You know, many other cultures honored the rainbow.”

“I am sure there were, Herr Docktor Professor. Let me have it.” Todd sat back with an expectant grin look on his face.

“The Albanian people believed the rainbow to be the belt of the goddess of beauty. Later when the church became the primary religion, she became a saint by the name of Prende, whose name means heaven. Swallows were harnessed to her carriage and pulled her through the gates of heaven. The rainbow was her belt.

In Greek mythology the rainbow was associated with the goddess Iris who was the daughter of Thaumias and Elektra, the sisters of the Harpies and a messenger of the gods of Olympus. Iris used the rainbow as a belt and also the pathway between heaven and earth. That is how messengers from the Gods could come and go from heaven to earth.

In Australia, a serpent was used as a symbol of the rainbow. This same metaphor was used in parts of Africa and Brazil. And of course, we know about Ireland and lots of little Leprechauns dancing around the pot of gold.

In 1939 MGM used that song in “The Wizard of Oz” which became the anthem of the gay community. You’ve gotta love Judy. And let’s not forget that crazy frog, Kermit, and the rainbow connection.

The Jewish people got to it first however. They were taking that seven-day Caribbean cruise which turned into 40 days floating around the Tigris and Euphrates with a boat load of animals. Can you imagine the smell? Then they saw the rainbow and God made a covenant with them. No more flooding the earth. Of course, a Godly covenant had two parts; both sides had to commit to something. As usual, God held up his end of the bargain. Humans had a much harder time. There were many covenants in holy scripture but we usually just associate a covenant between God and man with the rainbow.”

Todd sat and did not immediately respond.

“Could it be said, Herr Docktor Professor, that the rainbow flag is a covenant amongst gay people to support each other, to honor and cherish each other, and to love each other as children of God?”

Erick thought for a minute.

“Usually, a covenant is explicit and the terms are spelled out ahead of time before there is agreement, but I think you have a valid point. It is a symbol of what we value as a community. And rainbows are not always visible everywhere. If they were, they might lose their meaning. They are brought out when we need to remind the world and ourselves that we are God’s people and loved and honored by God. People may forget that God loves everyone, regardless of sexuality, but God never

forgets. People confuse religion with God and that is where we get the division and strife. They lose the holy in the midst of that division. We need to remember that God loves us because we are of God.”

Erick reached for Todd’s hand which was freely given. They stood and held each other recognizing the holy in the other.

Suggested Music:

“A Change is Gonna Come”

Brian and Thomas Owens

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cEXhZ8PwM-Y>

Wednesday, December 4
The Light of Hope

For false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand.

The Gospel of Matthew 24

“I don’t wanna get up.” Todd snuggled further under the covers.

“Well, you are going to get up whether you want to or not. Get that gorgeous hairy butt out of bed and fix your lover some breakfast.”

It wasn’t even dawn and the household was awake.

“Let’s pretend it is Saturday and we don’t have to do anything.” Todd was grinning at Erick.

“Todd, it is only an exam you have today. This is not an existential crisis, merely a knowledge test of those dreadful things you mathematicians call formulas.” There was no reaction from Todd.

“You are right, let’s stay in bed.”

Both were laughing as Erick pulled the covers back and gazed longingly at his lover. He never tired of seeing Todd in the nude. Both boys had athletic frames, they were both hairy, and they were blessed with their essential equipment. Todd loved to compare the two of them. Erick had black hair and dark piercing eyes. His hair was curly and usually out of control. He was slightly longer in the torso and shorter in the legs than Todd but it was so minimus that they could wear each other’s clothes. Todd had sandy blond hair which would fall into his blue eyes. He hoped it would last his lifetime and not fall out. His smile revealed his perfect white teeth. Many a woman and man had melted when Todd smiled at them. He thought himself fortunate that he was a hairy blond beast. He, more than Erick, was aware of his good looks and it easily settled on his shoulders as a mantle of who he was as a scion of an old Virginia family. Erick was always surprised when people thought he was handsome. He had been brought up to not think about something so egocentric as his being handsome. He and his brother instead had focused on their intellect.

“I could worship you, you know. I could put you on a pedestal and bow down to your good looks.”

“Hey prof, I am more than merely good looks, I taste good also.” Todd tackled Erick and they ended up worshipping each other’s bodies. The room smelled of potent sex when they finally walked to the kitchen to turn on the coffee pot. They were thankful that breakfast was a quick meal because they had spent too much time making love. Todd did not believe that such a notion of merely good looks had merit. Life was meant for love. Everything else was secondary.

They got in the shower while the coffee was brewing. Erick loved shampooing Todd’s hair and now considered it part of their daily ritual. Todd enjoyed lathering Erick’s hairy chest and playing with the suds while tweaking his nipples. This usually resulted in erections and kisses but today they were running late and both had important things to do at school.

“You know, it isn’t fair. We have exams starting soon and the professor is giving us a major test today. Did you have to take a course in sadism to become a professor?”

“Hmmm, yes and I passed it with flying colors, or switches or paddles or something like that. Todd, my love, you will be okay. Drink your coffee.”

“OK, today is Wednesday, our brothers are coming to visit us tonight and on this day in 1783 George Washington said farewell to his officers after the Revolutionary War. They were in New York City. My great great whatever grandfather was able to get home by Christmas to see his wife and children. I am sure that was a great celebration.”

“Well, bully for them as Teddy Roosevelt would say. Also, on this day in 1864, Romania decreed that Jews could not be lawyers. That is not something we Jews celebrate.”

Todd felt that for each and every thing to celebrate, Erick had some part of Jewish history that would take the air out of the room. Erick noted the chill in the air and pulled Todd to him.

“I am sorry. I do that all of the time, don’t I. Make me stop. Please, make me stop. It is part of what I am trying to escape. My parents knew every bad thing that happened to the Jewish people. They would recite them to us year after year after year. Instead of celebrating, my parents made sure we were grounded in the struggles of our people.”

“Erick, we are in this together. We will learn to temper the other with our highs and lows. And now, speaking of lows, I am heading to a math exam that I am not ready for because someone prevented me from studying last night.” An evil grin crossed his face as he kissed his Herr Docktor Professor goodbye for the day.

It was another typical day in the world of the second oldest college in the United States.

Eron was not familiar with downtown Richmond but managed to leave his meeting a little earlier than planned to get to the Interstate. He had been meeting in the U.S. Court House and appreciated the beauty of the old building. At lunchtime he and some other attorneys from the Washington office had crossed the street and had taken a tour of the Virginia State Capitol. He loved being in historic cities. He grew up in Newport, went to school in Boston, worked in Washington, DC, was in a meeting in Richmond and was heading to Williamsburg. The opportunities for history lessons were vast.

He briefly looked at a map before starting the day but couldn’t figure out how to get out of downtown. A secretary in the meeting drew him a map of how to move from the parking garage he was in to the Downtown Expressway then to Interstate 95 and finally to Interstate 64. He had to leave during rush hour and all of these interchanges were within one mile of each other. As he was moving from the Expressway to the Interstate, he realized he was in the wrong lane. As he started to move over he cut someone off. Damn. He chuckled thinking of his Toyota Corolla cutting off a Mercedes sedan. He hoped the person wasn’t prone to road rage. He then easily slid onto Interstate 64 and the vehicle was still behind him. The other car picked up speed and moved into the passing lane. Eron looked over and mouthed that he was sorry. The man looked at him and Eron practically melted because the man was so handsome. The man smiled and mouthed that it was okay. His movie star smile put butterflies in Eron’s stomach. Eron paid attention to the roadway as the other fellow pushed along passing other vehicles. He seemed to be in a hurry.

It was only an hour to Williamsburg and Eron was relieved because he would have time to find the Williamsburg Inn. Erick said they preferred to eat in the historic district but given how busy it was during the holidays they were only able to get reservations at the Inn. It didn’t really matter to Eron

because he had two goals for the night: to see his brother and to make sure this new lover was worthy of his brother's love. The food didn't matter. Eron noticed how upscale the restaurant was and knew that as a new professor, his brother was not earning the big bucks to afford such a swanky place. He decided that he would pay for the meal and put it on his credit card. He would pay it off over a couple of months. As a prosecutor he wasn't flush with cash like those fancy lawyers in private law firms.

Eron sat in the lobby waiting. The well-heeled crowd were enjoying themselves. He stood when he saw Erick walk into the lobby. He was accompanied by two men. One was the fellow in the other car and all of the color drained from Eron's face. The man was holding hands with another startlingly handsome man. They were laughing at something that had just been said. Erick was in high spirits as he crossed the lobby and grabbed his brother. They hugged and kissed like they always did. The other two men stood by and smiled indulgently. Todd was introduced who then immediately kissed Eron. He laughed and commented that he liked getting two for one. The other man was introduced as Tayloe. The man immediately extended his hand for shaking. It was obvious he was not going to give a kiss. Tayloe looked at Eron and they visually acknowledged that they knew the other from the drive down.

Their table was available and they were seated in the middle of the dining room next to the Christmas tree. Eron inwardly gasped when he saw the prices. He thought it might take three months to pay off the dinner bill. It was worth it to him because it was obvious his brother was in love. Totally smitten. Todd was also. He looked up and noticed that Tayloe was looking back and forth between the two. Tayloe ordered a bottle of wine and had it uncorked, tasted and then poured. Tayloe then offered a toast to Erick and Todd. Tayloe stood when making the toast and the others did the same. They were all in great spirits.

Eron decided that the meal was worth the price. Tayloe and Todd were nonchalant about considering a variety of foods to order. Eron and Erick were more restrained. Tayloe noticed and then asked if he could order for everyone. Eron meekly nodded his head thinking it might take four months to pay off the card. Eron also noticed that whenever he looked up that Tayloe was looking at him and smiling.

"I can't get over that my little brother has a lover and that his lover is a twin. Are you gay also? I hope that I am not being impertinent."

"Yes, you are counselor but it is okay tonight. Yes, we are both gay."

"Well, I'll be damned. I never thought about it."

The two lawyers then started their bantering. They were enjoying themselves. Todd and Erick looked at each other and excused themselves to go to the men's room. When they returned, they discovered that Tayloe had slid his chair around and was sitting next to Eron. The waiter came and asked about desserts and Tayloe ordered for everyone including a pot of coffee for the table. Todd noticed that when Tayloe wanted to make a point with Eron he would reach over and touch his arm. Eron started doing the same in return.

The hour was getting late and Eron said that he needed to drive back to Richmond. Todd then said that he and Erick did an Advent blessing each night and asked the guys if they wanted to stop by.

"It doesn't take long. It would be meaningful to us if you participated."

Eron said he would follow them to the apartment before heading back. Tayloe agreed that he would stop by also.

Eron signaled the waiter for the check but discovered that Tayloe had already taken care of it. He whispered to Tayloe that he had planned to pay. Tayloe said he could pay the next time. That made Eron smile knowing there would be a next time.

When they arrived at the apartment, Eron immediately noticed the mezuzah on the door post and touched it before entering the apartment. Tayloe was right behind him and did the same. Tayloe recognized the long metallic object as a mezuzah and decided that it was important if Todd had let Erick put it up.

They gathered in the dining room. Todd lit a purple candle and started off with a prayer. He asked they all hold hands. Tayloe reached out for Eron's hand and turned to smile as their fingers touched. A spark of electricity passed between them. They had a short but lively discussion of the scripture and the notion of false prophets. Tayloe and Eron seemed to think alike talking about the false prophets they encountered in the law profession. They looked at each other and seemed to be in sync. Todd sat back wondering about the grilling that Tayloe said he was going to do. That had not happened; in fact, his brother seemed to be on his best behavior. Erick then stood to say the final prayers. Eron practically turned over his chair as he stood and joined in. The two men's voices resonated as they bowed their heads and said the words. Tayloe noticed that they swayed while saying the verses. He was mesmerized.

They were putting on their top coats when Tayloe asked Eron where he was staying. Eron told him.

"I love the Linden Row Inn. That's near the Jefferson. Why don't we meet there for a drink before we turn in for the night?"

Eron agreed and said that he would park at the Linden Row and walk over. When he arrived at the Inn he noticed that Tayloe parked behind him on the street.

Tayloe reached out and grabbed Eron's hand to walk to the Jefferson. He had always held his younger brother's hand and it felt natural to hold Eron's hand.

The Jefferson was fully decorated for the holidays and both men were appreciative at how beautiful the old hotel was. They talked about their law careers. Eron was a Harvard Man and Tayloe was a Lawn Scholar at UVA. They enjoyed their brandies and then Eron said he needed to go to bed. Tayloe smiled and said he needed to find a bed also. They walked back holding hands to where they had parked their cars. Tayloe kissed Eron on the lips and said he had a wonderful evening. He then got in his car and drove away.

Eron stood there trying to figure out how he had misread Tayloe's actions. The man had been very touchy feely all night. Eron had inwardly chuckled to himself about dating Tayloe and how incredible it would be that two sets of brothers were dating each other. Tayloe gave Eron every indication that he was gay and wanted to be with him. Then he drove off. Eron could only wonder if Tayloe was a false prophet.

Suggested Music:

"Someone Like You"

Van Morrison

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tIrJK19dADI>

Thursday, December 5
The Light of Hope

Seek justice, rescue the oppressed

Defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

Isaiah 1:17

Todd was about to pop the last bite of buttered toast into his mouth when the inevitable question came.

“Is your brother gay?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Was he playing my brother last night?”

“Not that I know of.”

“What the hell was that behavior about?”

They just looked at each other.

“I don’t want my brother to be hurt. There was a connection between Tayloe and Eron. It was electric. I expected one of them to mount the other right there in the restaurant. I don’t understand.”

“Erick, I can’t explain what happened. I have never seen Tayloe act like that with a man before. A woman, yes. A man, no.”

A sly smile crept across Todd’s face. “Wouldn’t it be so cool if they became a couple? Brother couples. Fuck, that would be cool.”

The look of horror on Erick’s face silenced any glee that was coming from his partner.

“I mean, if they really love each other, it would be cool.”

Erick said he was going to call Eron later that day to find out what was going on. He asked Todd to call Tayloe to find out why he was acting like he was in rut.

“Now, my boyfriend, we need to tackle the academy. Are you driving, or am I?”

Todd called his brother quickly after his 9 am class. Tayloe was nonchalant and pretended he didn’t understand what Todd was talking about. He said it was a lovely evening at the restaurant and then he met Eron for a quick drink before heading home.

“I am overwhelmed with some court cases right now. The fucking feds are going after one of our pharmacy manufacturer clients. The cunts. They are opposed to anyone making a profit. Assholes.”

Todd chuckled at his brother's use of language. That language meant that the feds had them by the short hairs. Tayloe wasn't given to using profane words. Todd then looped the conversation back to his topic.

"So, what did you think of Eron?"

"Well, he is your lover's twin. They look alike, they talk alike, they act alike. If I say anything bad about Eron I would be talking about your boyfriend also. I plead the fifth." At that point Tayloe laughed.

"Did you like him?"

"Yeah, he is a pleasant sort of guy. He is wasting his time working for the U.S. Attorney. He should be in a major firm like where I work. He is really smart, handsome, well spoken. He could have a jury eating out of his hands."

Todd reminded Tayloe that not all lawyers were greedy bastards like him. He said that some lawyers helped the most downtrodden. He suggested that Tayloe assist at the AIDS clinic in Richmond by providing pro-bono services.

"I will take that under advisement."

"What the hell does that mean?"

"That I will consider it, when I have time, and if it doesn't conflict with the work I am doing for paid clients."

"Your greedy instincts will always ensure that the family wealth is maintained."

"Thank God one of us is interested in our wealth. You would probably give it all away if you could. You are such a bleeding-heart liberal."

"How is it that we get along so well and love each other so much, yet our world views are so different?"

"If you weren't my brother, I would probably intensely dislike you?"

"You wouldn't hate me?"

"No, I do not hate. No one should hate another person. No matter how vile they are, it is God's to judge, not ours."

"We are called upon to help the needy."

"How are your mathematical formulas going to help the needy?"

"I don't know yet. That is what I am struggling with as I apply to graduate school. My work needs to be practical. Tayloe, I love helping people."

“I know, but I was the one who brought home all of the injured puppies and kitties. I have a heart also.”

“Yes, I remember. I would like to see more of that side of you. I love you so much.”

“I love you too. Money calls. I bill every six minutes and you owe me hundreds of dollars already.

“One more question. Are you seeing him again?”

“Excuse me. Am I seeing who again?”

“You know who I am talking about.”

“Well, little brother, you never know. You just never know.”

Todd hung up from the extremely frustrating telephone call. Tayloe was generally not ambiguous but the conversation felt tautological. They were walking circles around each other.

After Erick finished his morning classes at 11 a.m. he called Eron. His brother talked about Todd being a wonderful man and that they were so perfectly paired. He then talked about the court cases he was working on.

“I am working on a case against big pharmacy manufacturers. I have been reviewing data all morning. It is unbelievable the profits these shysters earn while many people with chronic diseases are bankrupt or right on the verge.” Erick could hear the fire in Eron’s belly. He thought it good that his brother loved his work so much and that he was fighting for the common man.

“I listen to people’s stories and am struck blind by the injustice. I just let them talk. Listening is a moral act and if they don’t receive relief through the courts at least they have told their stories. However, I want to nail the bastards.”

They both laughed at his statement because the use of word bastard was not in Eron’s everyday vocabulary. His was a righteous anger.

“Umm, Eron I have one more question. Did you sleep with Tayloe last night?”

“NO!!” There was silence on the phone line. “He kissed me good night and drove off after we had a drink. I was standing on the sidewalk outside of my hotel and thought I had been played. He was a dick in the worst kind of way.”

“So, do you think he is gay?”

“What does Todd say?”

“Todd said he doesn’t think his brother is gay. He has never known him to go out with a man.”

“Well, he had me going all night. I swear I thought we were going back to my room to have at least a jerk-off session but there was nothing. He walked right up to the edge and then ran. Chicken shit lawyer.”

Erick started laughing.

“So how are your blue balls this morning?”

“They aren’t blue at all. I took things in hand.” They both laughed.

“Do you plan to see him again?”

“I don’t think so. Well, except when I am invited to things with you and Todd. I don’t expect to hear from him.”

“Okay, I just want to make sure you are okay, little brother.”

“Hey, I am just five minutes younger than you but my dick is bigger.”

The fellows continued their long-held bantering, laughing at each other’s antics and foibles.

“Hey, I’ve got another call coming in. Let me talk to you later.”

Eron disconnected the line and pushed the button on his phone for the incoming call. Little did he know who awaited him on the line.

At dinner Todd and Erick each told the other about their respective calls. They both realized that their brothers were working on opposite sides of the same case.

“We have to stay out of this.”

“Todd, I swear if your brother hurts Eron I will kill him.”

Todd had never heard Erick use such language. He looked in Erick’s eyes and saw black fire shooting out. It was quite unsettling.

“I think we need to do our Advent meditation.”

Todd lit the candle and they spent time exploring how the reading applied in their lives and how they could help those in need in Williamsburg. They were both still unsettled about their conversations during the day and how fiercely protective each was of his brother. They crawled into bed facing away from each other, each on his own side hugging the edge of the mattress, finally Erick turned and held onto Todd.

“I love you. I will not hurt Tayloe but I can’t stand it if Eron is hurt in anyway. It is more than a brother thing, it is a twin thing. Can we pray for them?”

Todd and Erick got out of bed and went to the dining room. Erick lit the Advent candle again and they each prayed for Tayloe and Eron. They laid out their hopes and fears for their brothers and themselves. There was lots of intense silence as Erick held onto Todd's hand as if it was the anchor in their lives holding them safe from the rocks as the waves crashed about them.

“Both Sides Now”

Composer/Performer: Joni Mitchell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCnf46boC3I&list=RDLm7b-32Mpbs&index=5>

Friday, December 6
The Light of Hope

As John was completing his work, he said,

“Who do you suppose I am?”

I am not the one you are looking for.

But there is one coming after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”

Acts 13: 25

Erick was about to leave the apartment when the telephone rang. He hesitated because he was running late. Todd had left earlier to attend his weekly study group. The group consisted of math majors who met at a diner and reviewed their work for the week and talked about upcoming assignments. Today, they were going to obsess about their upcoming exams. Erick joked that they were a tortured lot of insecure geniuses.

Erick went back into the apartment and answered the telephone. He did his normal greeting of “hello.”

“I must have the wrong telephone number. I apologize. I was calling my son, Todd.”

“Todd has already left for class this morning.”

“Oh, may I ask to whom I am speaking?”

“Yes, this is Dr. Emmanuelson. May I take a message for Todd?”

“Yes, ask him to call his mother. His father and I will be in Williamsburg tonight and want to make dinner plans with him.”

“I will be happy to give him the message.”

“I am not quite sure how to ask this, but what are you doing answering the telephone in Todd’s apartment when he is not there.”

“Yes, ma’am. I live here.”

The telephone line instantly froze from Richmond to Williamsburg.

“Well, I thank you for giving him the message.”

“I will. I am late and must run if there is nothing else.”

“I’m sorry, I forgot. What did you say your name was?”

“Dr. Erick Emmanuelson.”

Erick heard the line disconnect.

Todd was sitting in the diner and he sensed something wasn't right. It was like a signal from the universe. He was lost in his world until Bobby punched him in the side and asked if he was alright.

"Yes, I am fine. My mind just wandered for a minute."

The students grabbed their books, dropped money on the table and ran to class.

Erick drove to campus and thought that the ice had been broken about Todd's parents knowing that he was living in the apartment. He would give Todd the message from his mother at lunch time. They had planned to go to the movies with some friends that night but it seemed that those plans had changed. Erick was meeting Todd for lunch at a sandwich shop across the street from campus. Erick had office hours from 1-3 on that Friday afternoon. He expected to see a couple of students who were at risk of failing. He already anticipated their pleas for help. It was too late for him to offer them anything. There would be no extra credit this late in the semester. He wasn't planning to spend his entire winter holiday grading papers and listening to whining students.

Erick was five minutes late getting to the sandwich shop and slid into the booth where Todd sat. He leaned over and gave his lover a kiss. Todd was wearing an aubergine bowtie with his black sweater and slacks. Erick was wearing a lavender bowtie with his black sweater and slacks. Todd enjoyed the fact that they usually dressed alike. Erick was completely indifferent as he had spent most of his life wearing the same thing as his brother, Eron.

"What do you want to eat?"

"I have already ordered for both of us." Erick raised his eyebrow and looked at Todd.

"It is Friday, so I ordered a fish sandwich for myself with a bowl of clam chowder. I ordered a grilled pimento cheese sandwich and tomato soup for you."

"Thank you, my love."

Todd had a strange look on his face which prompted a question from Erick.

"What are you thinking?"

"This morning while I was still at breakfast, right before we left for class, it felt like someone walked on my grave."

"Well, since you are alive nobody could have walked on your grave."

"It is just a saying down here. I had a premonition that something wasn't right."

"Well, this morning your mother called." Just at that moment the waitress brought their food. Todd's mouth was hanging open.

"Did you speak with my mother?"

"Yes, I told her that you were too tired from our incredible love making to come to the telephone and that when you were able to drag your body from our marriage bed I would have you return the call."

“Erick. What was said? I can’t believe you talked to my mother.”

“Todd, it was okay. Your parents are coming into town tonight and want to meet for dinner. She asked why I was answering the telephone and I told her I lived there also. She then proceeded to ask my name again and then hung up.”

Todd pushed his plate to the middle of the table. He had no appetite.

“Eat your lunch, Todd. It will be alright.” Erick reached across the table and held Todd’s hand. When they left the sandwich shop the bowl of chowder and the sandwich were still on the table.

“I am going to call Tayloe. He will know what is going on. I am going back to the apartment.”

Erick was upset that Todd was so distressed. He also knew it was only a matter of time before his parent’s knew about their younger son. As predicted, a couple of students stopped by Erick’s office to ask what they could do to improve their grades. Erick was direct, if even somewhat short, and said they needed to get a perfect score on their exams to pass the course.

Todd had returned to the apartment and called Tayloe at his office. His secretary told Todd that Tayloe was in a mediation session all afternoon and wasn’t expected to return to the office until Monday. Todd calmed his nerves and dialed his parent’s telephone number. The maid greeted Todd and said his mother wasn’t home but was due back in a half an hour.

“Please let her know I returned her call. Thank you, Sarah.”

“Take care, Mr. Todd. I will tell her.”

Todd paced the apartment. He went into the dining room and lit the Advent candle and prayed. He wasn’t ready for a conversation about his sexuality. He hoped this visit wasn’t about his sexuality. Tayloe would not have told them. Surely, it was just coincidental.

The telephone rang.

“Hello.”

“Hi darling. Are you okay? It sounds like you just ran up the stairs.”

“I’m fine. I did just run into the house expecting you to call. I had left something in the car and ran down to get it.”

“Was it my Christmas present?” Todd cringed because he hadn’t thought of Christmas presents for his parents and his mother turned into a ten year old girl on Christmas Day.

“Well, you just never know. There are some beautiful things in shops down here.”

His mother giggled. Todd felt relieved because the call was so normal.

“Listen, your father and I have to be in Williamsburg and we thought it would be great to have dinner. Meet us at the Inn at 7 pm. I have already called Hubert and reserved a table for us.”

“I will see you then. Have a safe drive. Friday afternoon traffic can be murder.”

“See you then. Bye.”

Todd felt like a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. It was just dinner with his parents. No biggie.

Erick didn't know what to expect when he got home. Todd met him at the door and kissed him. The tension that Todd had been carrying earlier had dissipated.

“Did you have a good conversation with your mother?”

“Yes, she and dad are going to be in town and we are going to have dinner.”

“What time do we meet them?”

Todd just looked at Erick and didn't know what to say. He stared at Erick without speaking.

“I see. Well, I will go to the movies with the gang. Yonatan and Matan are coming over. I am going to take a shower to freshen up.”

Erick turned quickly because he didn't want Todd to see the tears in his eyes. The shower covered the sound of his crying. It was only when the shower curtain was pulled back that he knew that Todd had been in the bathroom. They held each other but neither knew what to say so they didn't say anything. Todd was trying to get Erick to laugh but he was not successful. As Erick was leaving, he turned to kiss Todd goodbye. He touched the mezuzah as he walked out. He walked to his car without turning back. He didn't see Todd standing at the window. He drove to their usual diner and ordered a salad. He stirred it around the plate and couldn't get anything down. The fork would approach his lips and then he would put it back down on the plate. He left the restaurant without eating anything.

Matan and Yonatan spied him sitting on a bench at Market Square. Erick was trying to put on a good face for them and said that Todd's parents were in town so they were having dinner. Matan gave Yonatan a knowing look before he threw his arm across Erick's shoulder and said it was going to be a threesome. The look on Erick's face was priceless.

“Only for the movies, Erick. You are sitting between Yonatan and me and you get to hold the large container of buttered popcorn. We will be reaching into your crotch all night as we pick out the perfect kernels of corn. If you are really good, I will feed you some popcorn.”

“It is really sexy when Matan feeds me popcorn. Of course, that always leads to something more intimate but we don't share that. You only get popcorn and Coke. Hopefully, by the time we have played in your crotch all night you will be in the mood to be with your boyfriend and show him a really good time.

The guys laughed and Erick was in a somewhat better mood. There was, however, an empty feeling in his heart.

Todd arrived at the Williamsburg Inn and couldn't remember if he had ever eaten there twice in one week before. This should have been a treat but he wasn't looking forward to dinner because he had seriously wounded Erick. He didn't know how to tell his parents he wanted to bring Erick to dinner. Todd was wearing one of Erick's charcoal grey suits. He had on a fresh white shirt and Erick's lavender bowtie. This made him close to Erick.

His parents were already at the table. His father had on a grey suit and was wearing a Christmas necktie. His mother was wearing a winter white cashmere dress with an expensive broach. She loved jewelry. Most people would not know that those were real diamonds, rubies and emeralds in the broach. She knew and that was important to her.

His father was having his usual scotch on the rocks. His mother was drinking white wine. Todd ordered a Rioja. His parents both gave him a look because he wasn't old enough to drink wine in Virginia. Todd noticed that his mother kept moving her flatware as if she were setting the table. She was nervous about something if she was fidgeting in that way.

"I understand you ate dinner here on Wednesday night."

"Yes, Tayloe came down and we had dinner here."

"Hmmm, what did you have to eat that night? No need to have the same thing again."

Todd laughed. "You know how Tayloe is. He insisted on ordering. I had a great Crab Norfolk. It is Friday night and I know they have prime rib so that is what I want."

Todd's father nodded at what he heard. "Did he tell you what he was planning to do?"

"No, what has Tayloe done now?"

"He went out with Cynthia last night and broke up with her."

Todd was glad he was drinking water and not wine as he snorted it through his nose.

"He what?"

Todd looked at his mother and saw that she was one moment from crying.

"He didn't tell you what he was going to do?"

"Not a word."

Todd father nodded his head again. He wondered if Todd would have told him the truth. His boys kept secrets for each other.

Todd's mother took a lacy handkerchief from her purse and dabbed her eyes.

"We thought he was going to give her a diamond for Christmas. He recently went to the bank to look at grandmother's diamond engagement ring. It had been a long time since he had seen it and he probably couldn't remember what it looked like. I almost called Swartzchild's to tell them I wanted to see how he was having it remounted. I am glad I didn't do that. Tayloe doesn't have the best taste, you know."

"Well, he said nothing to me. He was in a good mood. He drove back to Richmond that night."

"Was he drinking too much?"

"No sir, he had a cocktail and then a glass of wine with dinner."

The waiter appeared and they ordered. Todd felt that the worst was past. He relaxed. Shrimp cocktails were placed on the table for each of them. They came without being ordered. Robert had told the waiter to bring them 'the usual'. His parents were old fashioned in their food choices at the Inn. They came from a gentler, more formal time.

"Well, it is nice to see you so dressed up. That suit cost a pretty penny and that bow-tie came from Beecroft and Bull. I can tell. I was wondering about your finances, so I checked your trust fund accounts today. While I was reviewing things, I looked at your bank balances because your mother thought you might need to draw down more from your trusts. You seem to have plenty of money in your accounts. If you are not able to pay your bills just let me know and I can adjust your monthly payout."

Todd looked at his father and then understood the purpose of the conversation.

"I am fine with what I am drawing now. There is no need to increase the amount. If I ever have that need, I will let you know." Todd looked directly in his father's eyes as he said this.

"I see. Then can you help your mother understand why you need a roommate?"

Todd knew it was now or never. He took a large gulp of his wine and put his hands in his lap because they were shaking so much.

"I have a roommate so that takes some of the financial pressure off of me. Erick moved in with me early in November."

"My dear, you don't need a roommate? He told me he is a doctor. What is his specialty?"

"Mom, he is a PhD, not a MD. He is a history professor."

Todd looked down at the table top and was about to speak when the waiter appeared with their main courses. No one spoke while the plates were placed on the table. The waiter asked if everything was alright and his father thanked him and then gave a cursory dismissal.

"Why do you have a history professor living with you?" His father's voice was direct but not raised.

"Because I love him."

Todd said that and then excused himself from the table. He quickly walked to the men's room where he finally caught his breath. He regulated his breathing, washed his face and then returned to the table. He sat and his parents looked at him.

His father started, "You were saying."

Todd was stupefied. He had just told them he was in love with a man and they were acting like this was the most normal thing in the world.

"I said I am gay and in love with a man."

There was silence. Then his father said, "As you were saying. Tell us more."

Todd caught his breath and thought about what he should tell his parents. Todd then told them about meeting Erick. He told them he had known that he was gay since high school and had dated men in college.

“I think your father and I would like to know more about Dr. Emmanuelson.”

Todd was rhapsodic. His father raised his right eyebrow when the praise became a little too hagiographic.

“I am glad to see you are in love. We were afraid you would always be alone in your life. When can we meet him? Why didn’t you bring him tonight?”

“How are you accepting this so easily? Aren’t you supposed to be disowning me or shouting or something? I have made myself sick today worrying. I love you and I love him.” Todd fought to catch his breath. His father suggested another trip to the men’s room was in order so he could pull himself together. The men in the Reynold’s family did not make scenes in public. Certainly, there were no raised voices in public.

Todd returned to the table and realized that his Prime Rib had barely been touched. He dug in. His parents had more questions.

“We ate here Wednesday night with Tayloe and Erick’s brother, Eron. Eron was in Richmond for some meetings at the Federal Court House. Afterwards they joined us at the apartment for a short Advent service.”

“Excuse me for asking, but a name like Emmanuelson would suggest he is Jewish.” Todd’s mother had reached out and touched his hand while asking the question.

“He is. The family is not very observant. He agreed to the nightly Advent service and he is going to the Sunday Advent services with me. We will observe Hanukkah starting on the 22nd. I came back early so we could celebrate together.”

“Well, son, you have given your mother and me a lot to think about. We have suspected you were gay for a long time. It is not a shock, but it is a shock. We came tonight to talk about Tayloe because something is going on in his life. We are really concerned about him. We did not expect to have this conversation. It wouldn’t be fair to Erick for us to unexpectedly go to the apartment tonight. You will bring him for Christmas Day.”

They finished with brandy and coffee while they talked more about Christmas Day, Tayloe, Erick, and Todd’s plans for graduate school. It was as if all of Todd’s worrying had been for naught.

Todd returned to the apartment to find it empty. He had expected that Erick would have already returned from the movie. He prepared for bed but couldn’t fall asleep alone. He laid on the living room sofa waiting for Erick’s return. He realized they had not done their Advent reading.

Todd awoke when he heard the front door open. Erick came staggering into the apartment. He was right royally pissed. Todd hoped he had walked home instead of driving given his level of inebriation. Erick kept telling Todd how much he loved him. Over and over and over he said the same thing. Todd gently helped Erick undress and got him into bed. He then curled his body around his lover as he fell asleep.

Suggested Music:

“Hymn to John the Baptist”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVgWbLUkgY4>

Saturday, December 7
The Light of Hope

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.*

Isaiah 40

Erick was dumbfounded when Todd told him about the dinner. They dissected every sentence, every inflection, every concern. Todd said he would reach out to Tayloe to ask him what was happening. He also needed to tell Tayloe that their parents knew about his sexuality and being in a relationship and that the sky hadn't fallen. Better yet, they hadn't disowned him.

"Are you relieved?"

"Yep, I still find it hard to believe. They have suspected I was gay for a long time but never said anything. They were so in their public persona mode while we were in the restaurant. I wonder what they are thinking this morning?"

"Well, there is one way to find out." Erick grabbed the telephone and handed it to Todd.

Todd took a deep breath and dialed his parent's number. "Hey mom, I just wanted to call and say thanks again for dinner last night. Did you have any problems getting home?" Todd realized he had not taken a breath the entire time he was speaking.

"We are fine. Your father is building a fire in the den so we can relax and watch some old movies. His golf game was cancelled because of the weather. May I speak with Dr. Emmanuelson?"

"Sure, let me get him." Todd put his hand over the receiver and told Erick his mother wanted to speak with him. Erick lost all color as he took the receiver in his hand.

"Hello."

"Dr. Emmanuelson, this is Marjorie Reynolds. First, I need to apologize for being short on the telephone yesterday. I was caught by surprise, which is no excuse for bad manners, so I wanted to let you know that I look forward to meeting you. I don't know if Todd told you, but we expect the two of you here for Christmas Day.

"Yes ma'am. Todd told me about Christmas Day. We will be there. May I ask that you call me Erick?"

"Of course, Erick. It will be a wonderful day. Todd knows the routine and can brief you ahead of time. If you have any questions, you just call me and I will fill you in."

"I am sure it will be fine. I look forward to meeting you and Mr. Reynolds. It was nice speaking with you. Let me hand you back to Todd."

Todd and his mother then continued their conversation. After Todd and Erick had finished running their weekly errands and cleaning the apartment, the guys settled in for the afternoon. Somehow, the events from the night before seemed the distant past to Todd and he was looking toward the future. Todd didn't dwell on the past. Erick, on the other hand, tended to fixate on things and dissect them and take them apart for hidden meaning. It took him a long time to ever finalize something and put it out of his mind. They were so opposite in that way.

Erick wondered if Todd's family was always going to take precedence in their relationship. Erick knew that Todd's family was extremely close and they tended to ignore boundaries when they felt it was in the best interest of the family. Erick, however, had one person who mattered most in his life and that was Todd. He realized that was significant because Eron had always been the most important person. Even Eron would have to take the second seat now. At least the secret with Todd's family was out and they no longer had to pretend they weren't a couple. He was trying not to obsess about Christmas Day at the Reynold's home but attempting to get information from Todd was not easy. He deflected talking about the day the same way he deflected talking about money. Erick wondered if Todd had the emotional intelligence to talk about these things or was it possible he was being dismissive? Erick couldn't tell. Erick realized it could drive him crazy if he worried about it. Todd had a fundamental belief that everything would turn out okay.

Todd had Christmas traditions that he held sacrosanct. Erick knew not to tread on them if they were to be a couple. Such was the reason they were listening to 'The Messiah.' Todd knew every word, every solo, every chorus, and every recitative. Todd had lit the Advent candle early and said this was the night when he always listened to the recording. The two men sat in the living room, enjoying a light dinner and a bottle of wine while listening. Todd had pulled the musical score out and wanted Erick to follow along but Erick had declined.

"I just want to listen. Somehow following the score makes me think of this as work instead of pleasure. There is a great oral tradition in Jewish life and we learn to listen intensely to scripture without always reading the words. I will listen intensely."

When the 'Hallelujah Chorus' started, Todd stood. Erick remained seated with his eyes closed listening and swaying in time with the tune. Todd was emotionally drained when the oratorio was finished. He and Erick sat and looked at each other. For Todd, it had been a religious experience that completely drained every ounce of energy he had. For Erick, it had been a well performed piece of music written by Handel. Erick appreciated the religious text but it was Christian in context and not Jewish. He would have enjoyed Mendelsohn's 'Elijah' more if he wanted to listen to religious music. They moved to the dining room table where they did their meditation each evening. Erick looked to Todd to start.

"Today is very important in my family. On December 7, 1941 Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. My great uncle was immediately called up to serve in the military. He had barely arrived in the Philippines when the Bataan march happened. He died on the march. When he left home, he was in remarkably good health and there was always the thought that he had somehow escaped. My grandfather was always bereft that his brother had died so soon in the war. Apparently, my great uncle was a great scholar and had a bright future. My grandfather would always tie black crepe bows on the house columns on December 7th. We didn't have a death date for my great uncle so my papa decided that Pearl Harbor Day was an appropriate day. The bows would go up in the morning and come down in the evening. We all had to be quiet that day. The family never recovered from his death. Maybe because there was no body, there was no funeral, and there was no memorial service that my papa thought one day he would just walk in the door and life would return to normal. It never did. When my papa died, my dad got out the black crepe bows and put them on the columns. My papa's funeral turned out to also be a memorial service for my great uncle. My father said it was time for him to be

honored and for his soul to rest in peace. The black crepe bows have never been put out since. I loved my papa; he was so kind to me as a little boy. He always had a piece of hard candy in his pocket and he would ask me questions if I gave him the right answer, I always got the candy. Even then I was a sucker for handsome older men.” Todd chuckled.

“My parents didn’t talk much about the war. My dad was in Brussels. He was sent there by his family to hide with a Roman Catholic family. He can still recite the Mass by heart. I remember one time he told us about hearing on the radio about the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor and how excited people were. He didn’t understand because it was such a horrible event. He said that only later did he understand the significance of the day and how that brought the United States into the war. All of my relatives were killed in the war. There was no one left. I am in a family with no history but we have each other and of course my parents were so thankful they even survived. We take comfort in that. Of course, if they had not survived, little Erick would not be here tonight.”

The fellows held each other’s hands as they sat in silence. Bringing up those old memories had put a pall on any happiness for the evening. Todd then stood and extinguished the candle.

They walked to the bedroom where they removed their clothes and hung shirts and pants in the closet, stepped out of their briefs and put them in the hamper and then crawled into bed. Erick kissed Todd on the top of his head and then held his hand. They lay like that for a minute and then Erick rolled over and embraced his lover. They hungrily met each other’s needs. After they had taken each other, they lay covered in sweat and semen. Each was too exhausted to go to the shower. Todd pulled Erick into his embrace and they immediately slept comforted and healed by being together.

Suggested Music:

“Comfort, Comfort Ye My People”

Composer: G. Frederick Handel

Performer: Jerry Hadley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8dDjva1ecYo>

Sunday, December 8
The Second Sunday in Advent

The Light of Love

*Endow the king with your justice, O God,
the royal son with your righteousness.
May he judge your people in righteousness,
your afflicted ones with justice.*

*May the mountains bring prosperity to the people,
the hills the fruit of righteousness.
May he defend the afflicted among the people
and save the children of the needy;
may he crush the oppressor.*

*May he endure as long as the sun,
as long as the moon, through all generations.
May he be like rain falling on a mown field,
like showers watering the earth.
In his days may the righteous flourish
and prosperity abound till the moon is no more.*

Isaiah 11:1-7

Todd was practically bouncing in his seat at Bruton Parish. Erick was sitting beside him smiling. Todd had sung each hymn in his full tenor voice. People actually turned and looked at the beautiful voice coming from the handsome young man. Todd followed along with each of the readings. The priest said it was “Faith” Sunday, the second Sunday in Advent, and then preached on the concept of being faithful: faithful to God, faithful to a spouse or partner, faithful to others and then faithful to God’s creation. Erick noticed himself nodding through most of the sermon as he agreed with what the priest was saying. Erick’s analytic mind could not find anything said with which he didn’t concur.

At the end of the service the fellows scurried from the church to go home. A pot of minestrone soup that Todd had made was heated and they filled their bowls along with the grilled cheese sandwiches that Erick had put together. They both thought it was the perfect lunch on a cold fall day. Yonatan and Matan were coming over for hot chocolate and gingerbread cookies before they went to the Grand Illumination in the historic district. It had turned cold and winter garb would be required especially after the sun set. They had a telephone call from Pate who said he and Timmy were coming up from the beach and would like to meet them for dinner and a stroll around town. They agreed to meet in front of Becroft and Bull.

Yonatan and Matan were quite excited when they arrived at the apartment. It was their first time being at the Grand Illumination. Yonatan was surprised to see the Advent Wreath on the dining room table and asked Erick if he was converting to Episcopalian.

“No, that is not happening.” He chuckled at the mere notion of becoming an Episcopalian. “It is very important to Todd and we do our own service each night. I am surprised at how meaningful it is to me. Didn’t you grow up celebrating Advent?”

“Oh, no. I grew up Southern Baptist. We went from Thanksgiving Day immediately into Christmas. We didn’t know from Advent. We thought it was something that Catholics did. My mother

would decorate the Christmas tree on Thanksgiving weekend. The day after Christmas everything was packed away until the next Thanksgiving. There were no 12 Days of Christmas in our house. We had already celebrated about 30 days.”

Matan was more interested in talking about his internship. He was having a great time working for the museums and auditing classes at W&M. Matan was beaming. The two guys were also in the final planning stages for their commitment ceremony. Todd didn't know how Yonatan and Matan had time to plan that major life event while in the midst of school. Matan looked at Yonatan, smiled and said that Yonatan had agreed with whatever he wanted to do. Matan's parents as well as Monsieur Lambert were flying in for the ceremony. They were expecting a lot of people to attend the ceremony and dinner.

They enjoyed their afternoon repast and then put on their winter garb to meet Pate and Timmy. Already the sun was going down as they drove to the historic district. They found parking on campus and then walked to Market Square where they did window shopping and then to the Palace Green for the lighting. Everything was decorated in the Williamsburg colonial style. Choirs were singing, the Fife and Drum Corp was parading down the street and they heard a proclamation about the illumination of the town. It was as if all of the lights in the world were on one switch when there was burst of light followed by exclamations and applause. The world went from darkness into light. There were white candles in all of the windows. Fireworks were going off behind the Capitol Building. People oohed and ahhed. It was really pretty. Pate had wrapped Timmy in his arms after he started shivering. They weren't wearing coats that were heavy enough for the cold. They were oblivious that people around were watching them. They were very comfortable taking care of each other. The group made their way through the crowds of people as they headed to the Raleigh Tavern. Todd chuckled thinking it was the place where they ate most when they did not eat at home.

As they were walking down the Duke of Gloucester Street, they heard someone call, “Todd, Erick. How are you?” Whoever was calling was also waving his arms. Yonatan got a strange look in his eyes and Matan began to gently speak to him. Matan was holding Yonatan's hands and looking directly in his eyes. Matan told the rest of them to go ahead and that they would join them soon. Everyone stayed and moved around the two so nobody would bump Yonatan or Matan. They knew something was going on but they didn't know what. Matan kept quietly talking to Yonatan when he suddenly responded. Matan immediately had a huge smile on his face. Yonatan looked at Matan and asked if everything was okay. Matan nodded yes and told him it wasn't a bad event so everything was fine. Yonatan looked embarrassed. Matan was smiling and not making any big deal of it. He grabbed Yonatan's hand and kissed it. Their man, Black, walked up and asked if they needed any help. Yonatan said they were fine and thanked Black for his assistance.

Todd and Erick saw Eron and Tayloe. They had been calling their names and waving their arms.

“Eron? What are you doing in Williamsburg tonight?”

Eron walked up to Erick to kiss and hug him. He was holding Tayloe's hand.

“Tayloe called me this week and asked me to come. He said it would be a fun evening. We thought we would surprise you. We went by the apartment and you weren't there. We are happy we found you in this crowd.”

“Well, we are surprised.” Todd gave his brother a strange look before he introduced everyone.

“We have reservations at the Raleigh Tavern. We will see if Mikey can make it for eight people instead of six.” Todd told them to stay put and he would go to the restaurant. He returned and told them that

Mikey was able to seat them in an hour. They all agreed to walk around and look at the houses. They enjoyed the camaraderie as they laughed and joked as if they had been close friends their entire lives. Tayloe held onto Eron's hand never once letting it loose. That did not go unnoticed by Todd and Erick.

When they arrived at the restaurant, Mikey was able to seat them very quickly. The waiter assumed that he was serving four couples and asked if he should divide the checks in any certain order. The guys were appreciative that he was so sensitive to their needs. Eron said that he was paying for Tayloe. It took everything in Todd to not ask his brother what he was doing. Erick was dying to ask his brother if he and Tayloe were dating. This was completely unexpected.

They ordered pints all around. Yonatan and Matan expected to be carded but they weren't. That brought a smile to their faces that they didn't have to use their fake I.D. cards. They figured most students had them and they were ready to test theirs. Matan's took a sip of the ale and gave Yonatan an odd look; he wasn't sure if he liked it but he wasn't going to turn it down. He realized that he hadn't consumed enough beer or ale in his life to make an informed decision. He felt like an adult being with their friends. He had never imagined his life would turn out so wonderfully. He had a loving partner, was immersed in his museum work, and was taking college classes. Life was good. Yonatan smiled and took it all in stride. He had Matan and that was all that mattered in his life.

Tayloe half stood, leaned over the table and asked if he could make a suggestion about dinner. He said if everyone would order something different from the menu, they could pass plates and taste a variety of food. Tayloe smiled at everyone as if it was the most brilliant idea in the world. Eron then said if people didn't want to do that, it was okay.

In a stage whisper Eron then said, "Sometimes, Tayloe likes to be in control." He smirked when he said it to let the table know that Tayloe always demanded to be in control. That broke the tension and everyone laughed.

"I don't care what you eat then. Order what you want." Tayloe smiled when he said it but listened closely as each person ordered something different. He and Eron ordered last and they asked for the most expensive things on the menu. They were planning to share. Tayloe laughed at Eron and said, "you said you were paying so I am getting my money's worth." Eron laughed also and leaned over and kissed Tayloe on the mouth. Tayloe actually stopped talking for a minute and sat with a dumbfounded smile on his face. He pulled up Eron's hand and kissed it.

Todd was about to freak out. When did his brother become gay? He thought Tayloe was straight. He had never talked about dating guys. Todd never knew him to date guys. Was he doing it because Todd was dating Eron's twin brother? This was just too fucked up. He worked hard to present a fun façade to the group but inside his stomach was roiling.

Erick and Todd were stumbling trying to keep the conversation going so Erick asked Pate about he and Timmy. Pate explained about his work in the development business. All of the couples expressed immediate interest and wanted to come visit the development. Pate and Timmy did a fun, modified sales approach that they had used in Richmond their first night together. They didn't have the models that Timmy had made but they briefly explained the design. Tayloe suggested that it sounded like good investment property and he might look for a partner to purchase one of the houses. He gave Eron a meaningful look. Todd and Erick said it would be a stretch for their budget but they would love to have a vacation home at the beach. Yonatan and Matan said their lives were too confused at the moment to even think about more property. Pate and Timmy looked at each other, leaned in, and kissed. The rest of the guys could see the love in their eyes.

“What do you do Timmy?” Todd wanted the conversation to continue to focus on these two guys.

“I am an artist. I was working for an advertising agency when Pate and I met. That came to an end in a less than satisfying way. After that, I struggled about what to do and Pate convinced me that I had the talent to move from the realm of commercial art to creating fine art to sell in galleries. I have my paintings in two galleries: one on the Outer Banks and the other in Northern Virginia. I miss the weekly paycheck but when a painting does sell, we have a celebratory dinner. It is now the off season at the beach so I am building up stock for next summer. It is a constant struggle of what I love to paint and what tourist might be looking for so some weeks are rather schizophrenic. I am planning a new schedule where I paint for the tourist market one week and ‘my art’ the next.” Timmy did air quotes around the words my art. “We have taken one of the bedrooms for me to use as a studio. I hope that next year I can afford to rent studio space but rent is so expensive on the Outer Banks. I thought maybe about opening a gallery and studio together. There are a lot of artists on the Outer Banks and quite a market.”

“Where is your art displayed in Northern Virginia? I live in Washington and would love to go see it.”

Timmy told Eron about Felecia Preston’s gallery.

“If you see something you like let me know. I can also send you slides of other paintings.”

Timmy realized that he had put himself out to people in a way that was not normal for him. He felt comfortable talking with these guys but the ever shy, introvert persona overtook him and he leaned into Pate for comfort. He held Pate’s hand for safety. Pate could only smile proudly at his partner.

The guys declined dessert but asked for coffee. After the checks were settled, Todd invited everyone to their apartment for their nightly Advent service. Erick could tell that people weren’t keen on the idea but knew it was important to Todd. “I promise it won’t be long. It is something that Todd and I do every night. I look forward to it each day. We would like to share it with you.” Everyone agreed. Directions were provided to Pate and Timmy since they had not been to the apartment.

Coats were shucked as Todd went to the kitchen to prepare eight small glasses of red wine. He had bought kosher wine for Erick and thought it would be nice to end the evening with a toast. A couple of extra chairs were put around the table so they would all fit. Todd noticed that each couple was holding hands. Eron and Tayloe knew the drill, thought Todd, but then again, they had been holding hands all night.

Todd lit two purple candles. Then he read from Isaiah. When he finished, Erick started speaking about what the reading meant to him. Everyone nodded in agreement. Todd asked if anyone else had any thoughts. They were surprised when Timmy started speaking with eloquence about the historical setting for the reading, the importance of justice in their lives and how the world would be at peace when justice was achieved. The two lawyers then started talking about justice from a jurisprudence standpoint. They were enjoying their verbal sparring. Timmy then jumped in and said they missed the point. It wasn’t merely justice for the poor and destitute but it was holding the wealthy accountable. It was about praying that the veil over their eyes would be lifted and the strictures around their hearts undone. It was to hold those who professed justice accountable for their actions. Everyone listened as this shy, quiet man shut down the lawyers as he spoke in a reassuring but knowing voice. They were left in awe as his wisdom. Pate smiled and nodded his head while Timmy spoke.

There was quiet, then Erick looked at Eron and they both stood and starting singing a final prayer. They intuitively switched off singing verses. Their voices were beautiful and the men were enthralled

especially when they sang together. Most felt chills running down their spines. They finished and Erick raised a glass of wine. Everyone stood.

“Today is Faith Sunday in the Christian tradition. This morning the priest at Bruton Parish talked about faithfulness to God, to each other and to the world. Tonight, I offer this toast to our faithfulness to who and what we are as gay men in God’s creation.”

Todd noticed that everyone raised their glasses except Tayloe. He looked Todd directly in the eyes and then slowly lifted his glass and drank the wine. He sat the glass on the table, turned to Eron and said they needed to leave and walked out of the door. There were no goodnights for anyone.

Todd and Erick stood looking at the open door as their brothers departed.

Suggested Music:

“Holiday Medley”

Williamsburg Fife and Drum Corps

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9N_7HjUaq8&t=47s

Monday, Advent 9
The Light of Love

*Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you,
for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.*

Thessalonians 4

Todd stretched when he awoke on Monday morning. It was the last week of classes and he could not have been happier. He leaned over and kissed Erick who started smiling when their lips met.

“Good morning, lover of mine.”

“Good morning, my wonderful man.”

They cuddled until the alarm clock foretold the hour when they needed to get out of bed and start to get ready for the school day.

Todd was scratching his belly when he walked into the kitchen to turn on the coffee pot.

“We need to exercise lover boy. I am getting a pot belly.”

Erick came in behind him pushing his abdomen out so it looked like he was pregnant.

“I have to feed me and the baby. I am eating for two.”

“I knew that if we kept doing it you would end up carrying a child. It took a lot of times but we were successful at last.”

“Yep, that means we can’t do it anymore because I can’t fuck when I’m pregnant. I don’t want you to hurt the baby with that big thing you stick in me. That means you are the bottom from now on. Hell, maybe we’ll both be pregnant at the same time.”

Todd had a look of shock on his face. Then they both burst out laughing.

“Seriously, with all of this eating out and lack of exercise we are going to get fat and I can’t abide that thought.”

“Let’s go to the pool this afternoon and swim. That is good exercise for our core muscles. We are in good shape except for that.”

Todd packed a gym bag for the two of them.

They hurried to their morning classes before meeting for lunch. When Erick arrived at the diner, Todd was already there with two salads on the table. Erick looked at the salads and said he didn’t know they weren’t going to have a full meal for lunch.

“This is all we are going to eat. Rabbit food. Then swimming. Then home to fuck like bunnies.”

“I need more food than this, Todd.”

“Nope, we are going to start weighing ourselves each morning and we will not gain weight. I refuse to have a fat boyfriend.”

“I am a long way from fat. I just need to tone up the stomach.”

“The holidays are coming and there will be a lot of food. If we starve ourselves now, we will be able to eat more then.”

Erick stabbed a piece of lettuce and put it in his mouth. He didn't look happy as he ate every bite of his lunch.

“Can we at least get a chef salad next time? We could share. I need the protein.”

“I'll give you protein later today.” Todd smirked as he grabbed Erick's hand and pulled him out of the diner.

They were the only people in the pool area. Todd pulled their suits out of the gym bag and Erick's face dropped.

“What is that?”

“Your swimsuit.”

“No, my swimsuit is orange with stripes down the side. What is this?”

“You are not going to wear that baggy old pair of trunks. I brought one of my suits for you to wear. It will look good on you.”

Erick held up the little piece of silver fabric.

“It is called a speedo so you can be speedy in the water.”

Erick put in on and his hands immediately dropped down to hide his crotch. Todd laughed. Todd was wearing a pair of red speedos.

“Let's shower first before we get into the pool. That will wash all of the cooties away so we don't share them.”

Erick was even more embarrassed when the fabric got wet, he could see the vein running down his penis. He thought it fortuitous that they were the only people in the pool.

Todd put them through a rigorous workout. They were both panting and gulping for air when they finished. But it felt very good. Erick realized that he had not been in a pool since the spring when he was at Yale and he never had workouts like he had just been through. Erick was hanging onto the side of the pool when he felt his swimsuit being pulled from his hips. Todd surfaced, threw the speedo across the deck and then laughed as he swam away. He turned his head to look at Erick and grinned. Erick took off in hot pursuit. It was only when Erick cornered Todd that he took the advantage and kissed Todd on the lips. As he did, Todd's defenses went down and Erick slipped his hands in the waistband of the speedo and in a quick move it was off. Erick let it drop to the bottom of the pool and the fellows dove trying to retrieve it. Erick won and put his head through the waist and leg holes of the suit so it draped around his neck. Todd swam up and kissed him. They were holding onto each other when they heard voices coming from the locker room: the girl's locker room. Erick

took that moment of distraction to take the red swimsuit off his head and pulled it up his legs. Todd looked at him and started laughing.

“You’re going to have to get the other suit and throw it to me.”

“Nope, you have to get it yourself.”

“Come on, lover boy. Get the suit for me.”

“Nope, you’re a big boy. Get your own suit. I dare you.”

Todd never refused a dare. He gave Erick a sly smile and then pulled himself out of the water and walked across the deck to get the suit. He didn’t bother to put it on as he walked to the men’s locker room. Todd grinned as he opened the door and disappeared. The last sight was his beautiful white ass. The tittering and laughing of the girls filled the space. It was Erick who was blushing as he climbed out of the pool and ran to the showers.

They shared a shower head and soaped each other thoroughly. They were at full attention and decided that their need had to be met immediately. They held each other as cum sprayed their torsos. After more washing they left the gym. Erick dropped Todd off at the apartment and went back to his office. He had work to do for the end of the semester. He left his office door open which was seen as an invitation for a couple of students to drop in and talk about their courses. He felt good when he convinced Nash, one of his more gifted students, to agree to pursue his Master’s in history. Even though he was a freshman, Nash was one of the top ranked football players at school as well as being strong academically. Erick promised him a reference letter when the time came. After completing that business, Nash stayed and made small talk. He was squirming in his chair which barely held his big bruiser body. Erick didn’t want to be rude and ask him to leave but there were things that he wanted to finish before he went home.

“Can I ask you a question, Dr. Emmanuelson?”

“Yes, sure. What do you want to ask?” Nash got up from his chair and closed the office door.

“Well, it is like this. I think maybe I am gay. I am not sure.”

“I see. I didn’t hear a question in that statement.”

“I don’t know what or who to ask. I just don’t know. How do you know if you’re gay?”

Erick took a deep breath and spent an hour talking with Nash. Nash admitted to having sex with guys and that he both loved it and hated himself afterwards. He told Erick he wanted to find someone who would just love him back and he couldn’t stand this secret sex that he was having in the men’s rooms.

“Don’t have sex in the men’s rooms. You will get picked up and arrested. It will happen in time if you keep doing that. You don’t want that on your record. There is a LGBT group here on campus. Why don’t you join Todd and I for the January meeting?”

“Who is Todd?”

“Todd is my boyfriend.”

“Oh. I didn’t know you were with someone. All of the good guys are taken.”

Erick laughed and said there were plenty of single guys available in the group.

“But what do I do until then? I mean, I get horny. Like really, really horny. You wouldn’t believe how it is for a young guy like me. Not that you’re that old, but it’s different.”

“Perhaps you should come by and have dinner with Todd and me one night.”

Nash’s eyes lit up.

“Yeah? Ya’ll would have me over? That would be cool. I would enjoy getting together with two guys.”

“Just to be clear. I was inviting you for dinner not for sex.”

Nash blinked his eyes a couple of times.

“Yeah, sure. That would be good.” He didn’t look as ecstatic as he had a minute before.

“I will ask Todd to invite a couple of guys over for you to meet. We don’t entertain enough. This will give us a reason to invite others.

“You are the greatest. I mean it. I can never repay you.”

“You can repay me by doing well in school and joining the ranks of academia.”

A happy Nash left the office.

Erick was in a good mood when he walked into the apartment. By habit, he touched the Mezuzah as he came in and then kissed his fingers before kissing Todd.

“I have Mezuzah mouth.”

“Better than potty mouth.”

They both laughed.

“What am I smelling. Mmmm, wonderful fragrance.”

“Beef stew. It won’t be ready for another hour or so. It will be better tomorrow but we will start on it tonight.”

Crusty French bread accompanied the stew. Erick was ready to get a second bowl when Todd’s hand touched his arm.

“Portion control, my love. Only one bowl. If we are going to manage our health then we manage caloric intake.”

Erick looked like he had been slapped. He slumped back into his chair and then said he would clean the kitchen. Todd found him eating out of the pot when he looked in the kitchen. They both laughed and agreed they would ease into this new way of living.

“Of course, it is all your fault because you are such a good cook.”

“It is all my fault because I love you with all of my heart, all of my soul, and all of my mind. I want us to be together for many years so we will take care of our health so we grow old together.”

They sat in the dining room and Todd lit two Advent candles. Erick read the lesson and then elided into a Psalm. They then talked about their love for each other and their ability to laugh and have fun together. After finishing, they grabbed books and sat in the living room reading until it was bedtime. Todd said they would get up early the next day for swimming since they had other things to do after school. Erick would have sworn that he still smelled chlorine in Todd’s hair when he wrapped him in his arms as they fell asleep.

Suggested Music:

“Vergnugte Ruh”

Composer: J.S. Bach

Performer: Jakub Jozef Orlinski

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9W40e0VO98>

Tuesday, December 10
The Light of Love

*Be exalted, O Lord, in your strength!
We will sing and praise your power.*

Psalm 21: 13

"Come on, come on. You can do it."

Todd was standing on the pool deck with a stopwatch. He had decided that they would time each other to best their own records rather than compete against each other. Todd had helped Tayloe train when they were in high school and knew what to do. Plus, he was a much stronger swimmer than Erick and it was unfair for them to compete against each other.

Erick was gasping for breath when he finished his final lap but also had a huge smile on his face. Todd dutifully wrote down the time.

"One more and we will have baseline times for you. Are you ready?"

Erick grinned, gave two thumbs up and positioned himself for the next swim: the butterfly. He knew that this was his strongest. Todd gave the signal and Erick's body sliced into the water. Midway down the lane he got a cramp in his leg and he convulsed. He was taking in water. He felt himself sinking until a pair of arms scooped under him and brought him to the surface. Erick was thrashing about because the pain was so crippling. Todd efficiently got him on the deck and turned him on his side until he puked out the pool water he had taken in. His leg was still cramped and Todd very gently started massaging it. Erick's arm was thrown across his eyes as the aftershocks of pain coursed through his body. When Todd felt the last quivers erode and was able to flex the leg without Erick wincing in pain, he finally stopped. He then leaned over and kissed Erick on the lips.

"Do you feel better, baby?"

Erick muttered that he thought so.

"Can I help you get up? No more swimming today."

Erick took his arm away and Todd could see the tears in his eyes. He knew it had been a bad, painful cramp. Todd very gently helped Erick to his feet and then to the shower. Erick was favoring the leg and Todd figured that it would take the rest of the day to work out the cramp. While Erick was teaching, Todd went to the pharmacy to pick up pain relievers, vitamins and minerals that he knew that Tayloe had taken when he was a swimmer. He almost bought a pair of crutches but decided he didn't want to make more of this than it was. He did however purchase a cane.

When he left the pharmacy, he headed back to campus to meet Erick at his office before they went to lunch. Todd saw Erick walking down the hall being assisted by a man. Todd stayed behind to watch them. When they got to Erick's office, the man took the office keys and opened the door. When Todd approached the door, he saw the man helping Erick into his chair and then kiss him on the cheek. Todd caught his breath.

Erick jolted in his chair and the man looked up. Todd recognized him as being a football player. Todd told himself not to get upset. He pushed down the gorge of jealousy and he somehow maintained his cool.

“I see you found someone to help you. That is good.” Todd looked at the football player. “My name is Todd Reynolds, I am Dr. Erickson’s partner. I don’t believe we have met.”

Nash stepped around the desk and looked Todd in the eyes. “Hi Mr. Reynolds, my name is Nash Gillette. I am glad that you got Dr. Emmanuelson a cane. He was having a hard time walking and I couldn’t let my favorite professor fall in the hallway.”

There was no guile or guilt in Nash’s face or statement.

“Did he tell you how he hurt his leg?”

“Yes, he told me the two of you were swimming when he got the cramp. It is a good thing you were there to help or he may have drowned. You know, there is a whirlpool in the gym. That may be helpful to his leg.”

Todd stopped his racing mind and appraised the man standing in front of him. He didn’t respond to the comment about the whirlpool.

“I think I recognize you. Aren’t you on the football team?” Nash nodded. Todd stood looking at the big hunk of a boy/man. “Would you like to join us in our morning swim? We start at 7 and are finished by the time we have our first class.”

Nash smiled and said that he would like to join them but didn’t have any swimwear.

“Well, one thing is for sure. Ours are too small to fit a big guy like you. Check with the swim coach to see if the school has one you can borrow.”

“I sure will. That is really nice of you. One more thing. I hate to be a nag, but I really believe that Dr. Emmanuelson would benefit from the whirlpool this afternoon. Do you mind if I take him in for our doc to look at his leg and have him soak for a while?”

Todd looked at Nash and wondered why he was asking him the question instead of Erick. Todd pondered the question.

“Let me get his swimsuit from the car. I am glad that you are willing to help the old man professor this afternoon. Do you think when we get as old as him that we will start having those problems?” Todd looked directly at Erick and smirked as he asked the question.

“I don’t know, but I can’t think of anything greater than being like Dr. Emmanuelson when I get his age. He is perfect.”

Erick blushed and Todd felt like he was sinking into the abyss of green. He knew he could trust Erick but didn’t know if he could trust Nash.

“Let me get his suit.”

“Where did you park? We will follow you out and then I will take him straight to the gym.”

Nash quickly moved behind the desk and helped Erick out of the chair. He assisted Erick down the hallway while talking with Todd.

They reached the car and Todd got the gym bag from the trunk.

“The suits are still wet. There are only our speedos and towels in the bag.”

“That will be great. Hey, I will bring him home later this afternoon so you don’t have to come back to campus. If he can stand it, I will get in my exercise routine while he is here. He can’t spot me with his bad leg but it would be great to have him there with me. He is a great inspiration. That is, if that is okay with you.”

Again, Todd noticed the questions were coming his way.

“That would be great. Why don’t you plan to stay for supper? I have made some chicken barley soup and we can have salad and bread. It is a simple meal and may not be filling for a big boy like you.”

Nash grinned from ear to ear.

“You can count on it. This is just so terrific.” At that point he let loose of Erick and grabbed Todd and held him in a bear hug.

Todd stood and watched them walk toward the gymnasium. Erick turned his head, gave Todd a wave, and then stumbled on.

Todd kept thinking he needed to take deep breaths. The green monster was beating at the gates. He felt that he had nothing to worry about but Nash was an incredibly handsome man and he couldn’t seem to keep his hands off of Erick. Would he need to help Erick put on his swimsuit? Would he try something with his boyfriend? Todd decided he wanted a different track playing in his brain and started to review mathematical equations. He chuckled thinking that would make most people sick to the stomach but he enjoyed those mental gymnastics.

When Erick and Nash arrived at the apartment, Todd had dinner ready. He had also chilled a bottle of Viognier for them to drink. Erick looked exhausted and Todd knew it would be an early night.

“How’s your leg?”

“His leg is much better. I had the doc look at it and I was right that he needed the whirlpool. The doc gave him a list of vitamins and minerals to take if he is going to swim each day.”

Todd smiled at Nash’s statement given that the question had been directed to Erick. He figured this was just Nash’s personality. The green haze was pushed back. Todd looked at the list and it was identical to what he had purchased earlier in the day. They sat at the dining room table and Todd brought the supper in. He also had a supply of pills for Erick.

“Todd, that is too many.”

“No, it isn’t. You are going to frontload the meds and then we will even it out. That way it will get into your system faster. Trust me, I am a math major.”

They all laughed.

Nash quickly went through his bowl of soup. Todd asked if he wanted more and Nash readily agreed. Todd turned to ask Erick who said that one bowl was enough. He smiled when he said that but he could have easily devoured the entire pot of soup which was a testament to Todd’s cooking. When they finished dinner, Todd lit the Advent candles and explained to Nash what they were doing.

“I’m an Episcopalian, Mr. Reynolds, so I am so glad to be doing this. I saw you guys at Bruton Parish on Sunday.”

Todd asked Nash to lead the prayer and to read the scripture. He looked like a choir boy with his expression of awe and reverence. Nash talked about his belief in the power of scripture and it had been a mainstay in his life. He then spoke about playing football in high school and being recruited for the team at W&M.

“I hope I have the power to be honest with my parents when I go home for Christmas. I think I have decided that I am going to come out. It is too painful to continue to tell lies. My brother will probably disown me and my sister will tell me that I am mistaken but I have to believe in the power of God to get me through this. I am so lonely and I can’t have a boyfriend unless I come out. I will not force someone else to live in my closet.”

“What about your parents?”

“I already know they will disown me. They are Episcopalian on Sunday morning but on Sunday afternoon and evening they go to a Pentecostal Church over in Rockfish Valley. It is far enough away from Charlottesville that their friends don’t know what they’re doing. They continue at the Episcopal Church because my dad is a big-time lawyer in town and it is important to his business that he goes to church there. He says he hates queers.”

Todd looked over and the big guy was quietly crying. Todd immediately jumped up and went around to table to hug Nash. Erick got up and was standing with his hands on Nash’s shoulders when he starting singing the Kaddish. All of the tension in the room dissipated as the three men hung together. When they finished, Erick leaned over and kissed Todd. Then he told him how much he loved and needed him.

Nash put on his jacket and was preparing to leave. He smiled and pulled a speedo from the pocket in his jacket.

“Look what I have! They found one in my size. They were going to send it back because so no member of the swim team is my size. The coach gave it to me and said he was glad that I was swimming.”

“Well, we will see you in the morning.”

One again there were hugs and then Nash asked Todd if he could kiss them good night.

Todd leaned into the big guy and kissed him on the mouth. Nash started grinning. Erick locked lips with him also.

Nash beamed. “There is power in the spirit of love. I will see you guys in the morning. Good night, Dr. Emmanuelson. Good night, Mr. Reynolds. Don’t be late.”

Suggested Music:

“I’ve Learned to Respect the Power of Love”

Performer: Stephanie Mills

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_PJA1jyx94

Wednesday, December 11
The Light of Love

*How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!
The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel.
He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.*

Psalm 147

“Erick, get me the box of salt, please. This soup needs some spicing up. Also, grab the container of thyme.”

Todd was in full cook mode. Todd had found a chef’s hat and was enjoying playing the television style guest chef role. Fortunately, he had the cooking chops to back up his bravado. He had volunteered the two of them to help at the homeless shelter. The shelter was sponsored by a coalition of churches in the Williamsburg area and Todd had volunteered their help when they were at church the prior Sunday morning. Erick felt helpless and was glad to take direction from Todd. People were scurrying around to finish setting the tables before the doors opened. At least Erick felt he could put the flatware and napkins on the tables. After that he would help in the serving line by putting a thick slice of Italian bread on the plates after Todd had ladled chicken barley soup into the bowls.

The doors opened and people flooded the dining hall. Most were men. Erick took note of a young man who could not have been more than sixteen. He was dirty and unkempt. Rebecca, who was the pastor at a local church, asked that everyone bow their heads while she led them in prayer. Arlene, who worked with Rebecca, went table to table to ask them to go to the serving window to get their food. They had the front side of the house well organized. Erick and Todd stood next to each other while serving and enjoyed bumping shoulders and smiling at each other. Erick was glad that Todd had volunteered them for this job. It felt so good to help others.

Most of the men knew each other and were chatting among themselves. Erick noticed that the young guy sat by himself and didn’t say anything to the others. He looked absolutely lost and terrified. Erick took him another bowl of soup after he had devoured the first one. That act of kindness engendered a smile and thank you.

“My name’s Erick let me know if you need anything. Okay? That is Todd and he will help also.”

The boy nodded his head. He gave Erick a strange look.

“Are you Jewish?”

“Yes, I am.” Erick had worn his kippah.

“So, am I.” The boy’s eyes welled with tears. Erick gave a pleading look to Todd who was better with this type of situation. Todd immediately came out from the kitchen. Erick moved out of the way and Todd sat in his place. He had a gentle conversation with the boy. To deflect attention, Erick went around offering dessert to the other men.

When it was time to clean up after dinner, put the tables away and get out the cots, Todd stayed close by the young man. They worked together as a team to help clean up from dinner and set up the room for sleeping.

Erick got everyone's attention and said that the bathrooms were down the hall. He told them there were supplies to wash their faces and brush their teeth. He then announced that when they came back, they would be offered foot washing and clean socks. The shelter had learned that washing feet and giving away clean socks was helpful to the homeless. Most were embarrassed about having someone wash their feet and just wanted the clean socks. The volunteers were adamant that it was a package deal. The old socks went into a garbage bag and were disposed of. Erick thought they needed to be burned.

The boy looked a lot better after washing his face and hands. He had brushed his teeth. Whereas many of the men were missing teeth or had bad orthodontics, the boy had beautiful, straight, white teeth. Todd and Erick were at different stations for foot washing and the boy chose Erick. He pulled off his Ralph Lauren boots and Erick got a whiff of the teenage foot pong. It smelled like a locker room. It didn't stink of foot rot which was a good thing. His toenails were painted bright red. His look challenged Erick to make a derogatory comment about his painted toenails. Erick smiled.

"Great color. It looks good on you." The boy relaxed and smiled.

"I call it 'whorehouse red'." Again, there was that challenging look.

"So, my name's Erick and you met Todd. What's your name?"

"Jeremiah." He whispered his name so Erick was the only one who could hear it.

Erick very gently lifted Jeremiah's left foot and started washing it. He noticed a large blister on the bottom of the foot. Jeremiah winced when Erick touched it.

"I guess my boots weren't made for walking."

Erick chuckled wondering if this young boy even knew from Nancy Sinatra. He put the left foot on a towel and then lifted the right. There was a blister on that foot also. How did the boy walk with bilateral blisters? Luckily, a nurse volunteered at the shelter and Erick got her attention. She came over and looked at Jeremiah's feet.

"Young man, you should not be walking for a couple of days. If the blister's break, you could get an infection in your feet. Do you have another pair of boots?"

Jeremiah hung his head. "No ma'am. I have nothing and nowhere to go."

Erick was astounded. The nurse left to get some ointment for Jeremiah's feet.

"Can I ask how old you are?"

"Yes, you can ask." Jeremiah smiled.

Erick also smiled. "Okay, smarty pants, how old are you?"

"I am fifteen. I turn sixteen in a few weeks."

"Will you tell me what happened?"

Jeremiah looked at Erick. He then looked at Todd.

“Is he your boyfriend?”

Erick swallowed hard. He wasn't sure about disclosing that he was gay in this shelter of men. He nodded his head.

Jeremiah smiled from ear to ear.

“It doesn't matter what happened. This is who I am now. A homeless queer Jew boy.”

“It matters to me and to Todd.”

“What can you do? I am good sex. Maybe ya'll need someone to spice things up for you. I will give you a discount on my usual rates.”

Erick was astounded by what was said. Jeremiah laughed.

“You need to toughen up if you are going to survive helping here, old man.” Jeremiah smiled when he called Erick an old man. He meant it as a joke and Erick received it that way.

“I am lucky that my parents accepted my brother and me.”

“You have a queer brother?”

“Yep. We are twins.”

“That would be fun having sex with twins. Can we get together? Hell, I would pay you.”

Erick was again taken aback by this young man. He seemed so brazen and out there. Yet he was so young.

“How long have you been homeless?”

“Three weeks. My parents kicked me out because I am queer. Fuck them. I am tough. I will probably get killed living on the streets. They will regret it then. That will teach them a big lesson.”

Erick didn't bother to correct the critically flawed rationalization. He, however, was surprised at the chutzpah of this young man. He was either tough as nails or was a marvelous actor. At first, Erick couldn't decide which but it was when he reached out and hugged him that he knew. Jeremiah slumped in his arms and held on as if his life depended on it. Just for a second he made himself vulnerable. Jeremiah wiped away a tear. Then the tough guy façade reappeared.

“You feel nice and tight. I bet you have a hot body under those clothes, big daddy and you have a hairy chest peeking out from your shirt. Dayyum, you are one hot Jew boy. Do you have the meat to go along with it?” Erick worked hard not to be surprised by what Jeremiah was saying to him. Erick knew that he and Todd had to do something to help.

“Do you always sleep here at night?”

“Yep, this place is safe. Also, they have the best food around. I can wash my face and brush my teeth. I am so mean to the old guys they are afraid to get near me. I told one guy I would cut off his balls if he touched me so they are all a little leery of me. They are too old and too nasty to fuck

anyway. I want a man with money. I need to be kept in style, honey.” The faux cocky, self-assured persona was back.

Erick told him good night and that he looked forward to seeing him the next time they volunteered. Jeremiah tried to bump fists with Erick. Jeremiah laughed when Erick didn’t know how to do it.

“You are such a white, white-boy. It is a good thing you have a partner because you wouldn’t survive in the real world. If you ever want some hot street boy let me know. I would rock your world.”

Erick knew that Jeremiah would rock his world if given the chance. But that wasn’t going to happen.

Erick and Todd got back to the apartment and they lit the Advent candles and reflected on their evening. Todd was the first to speak.

“Where was God in that gathering tonight? I know we were there helping but was God there?”

“I saw the face of God in those men. They had primal, basic needs and we were there to help. I don’t know that we were building them up though. We were giving food and shelter. That was good to do but they need so much more. Jeremiah was putting on a good front but he was one scared boy. How can we help him? I felt connected to him. He is young, gay and Jewish.”

“Well, we will find out tomorrow morning. I volunteered us to fix breakfast. The person who was supposed to cook called while you were talking with Jeremiah and I agreed that we would be back at 5 tomorrow morning. So lover boy, we need some sleep and no swimming tomorrow. Call Nash and let him know.”

They finished with prayer and while Todd was getting things put away, Erick went to the telephone and called Nash. His announcement was met with disappointment. Erick then called Yonatan. He gave a brief summary of what he knew. He told Yonatan that he and Todd would be back at the shelter at 5 in the morning and hopefully he could learn more then. Yonatan asked where the shelter was located.

“Let me talk with Matan. No, scratch that. Matan is solely focused on our ceremony on Saturday. I will speak with Black. Love you and see you on Friday night for dinner.”

Erick went to bed and snuggled next to his lover. He was grateful that he had a lover, an apartment, a job, a loving brother and loving parents. He said a prayer praising God for the life he was prone to take for granted. He realized that the encounter with Jeremiah had changed him forever.

Suggested Music:

“In the Arms of an Angel”

Performer: Sarah McLachlan

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SiyIvmFI_8

Thursday, December 12
The Light of Love

*He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets prisoners free, the Lord gives sight to the blind,
the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow,
but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.*

Psalm 146

A hand reached out and slapped the alarm clock at 4:15. Erick's brain was screaming that it was too early to get up. He then felt a hand grab his erection.

"Wakey, wakey, snakey, snakey."

Erick chuckled at Todd's silly sayings.

"We need to shower and get everything organized that we will need for school. We will not have time to come back here after fixing breakfast for everyone. We will eat breakfast at the shelter."

"I need coffee."

"At the shelter."

"Nope: shower, coffee, dress and then shelter."

Todd chuckled and knew that Erick was right. Without coffee neither of them functioned that well. He threw back the covers, jumped from the bed, grabbed Erick's arm and pulled him to the shower.

"Let me turn on the coffee pot while the water gets hot in the shower."

They left the apartment with their dress clothes on hangers. They decided they would dress at the shelter after cooking and serving breakfast. The overnight volunteer, Clyde, let them in the door and they quietly made their way to the kitchen. It was an easier task that they had first assumed. Breakfast was coffee with lots and lots of sugar, sweet rolls, fruit juice, grilled sausages and boiled eggs. They also prepared lunch bags for everyone. Those were easy and Erick lined up the bags. In each one he put a piece of fruit, a juice box, a sweet roll and a sandwich that he had assembled. Baloney and mustard on white bread. Erick wanted to throw up at the thought of eating such a sandwich.

Clyde had turned on the lights and the men were filing down the hallway to the bathroom. This would take a while as the men needed to take their morning piss, wash their faces, brush their teeth and comb their hair. Most were still in their underwear. Erick noticed that Jeremiah was fully dressed when he walked down the hall.

There was a knock at the outside door and Clyde went to see who it was. Two men were standing there asking for Erick and Todd. Clyde assumed they were there to help and let the men into the building. Black and Tim walked into the kitchen. They were all smiles.

“It smells good in here this morning. What are you cooking? Sausage and eggs? Mmmm, I am so glad we didn’t stop at McDonalds when we can eat here.”

They were all laughing as they filled coffee cups and enjoyed a minute of camaraderie.

“Tell us about the boy. Is his name Jeremiah?”

Erick told them what he knew. Black looked out the serving window and immediately identified the handsome young man.

“He is a looker.”

“Yes, with the mouth of a street walker.”

“Tim and I are here to help. What needs to be done?”

After instructions, they walked into the dining room and helped stow the cots and made a pile of blankets that would be put through a drier that day. If there were any bugs in the blankets, the heat in the drier would kill them. They gravitated toward Jeremiah who was walking around in his sock feet. Black and Tim were not overt in their affection for each other but made sure that Jeremiah saw them as a couple. Jeremiah’s gaydar worked like a heat seeking missile. He immediately was by their sides and asked who they were. They introduced themselves and asked if they could eat breakfast together. Jeremiah realized they had a purpose for being there and that he was the reason. He swallowed hard and nodded his head.

Rebecca and Arlene were not present for the breakfast so Erick stepped forward and offered a simple grace for the meal. Todd let everyone know it was turkey sausage for those who had an allergic reaction to pork. Both men were wearing their kippahs. Several men asked why they were wearing funny hats. Todd responded it was part of their religion and that seemed to satisfy.

Jeremiah had gotten a sweet roll and a cup of coffee. Black looked at him and asked about the rest of his breakfast. Jeremiah said he didn’t like breakfast food and besides it was too damned early in the morning. Black rose from his seat, walked to the serving line and told them to fix a plate for Jeremiah. Black returned to the table and set the plate in front of Jeremiah.

“Every bite. Hear me.”

Jeremiah looked at the two men and started to pout. Tim chuckled. Black allowed as how that pout did not pull at his heart strings. Jeremiah took the first bite and had a surprised look on his face.

“This is good.” He then plowed through the plate of food. He went back to the serving line to ask if there were seconds. He also grabbed his lunch bag while he was there. He returned to the table and sat the bag a few inches from his plate.

“What’s in the bag?”

“Lunch. They give us a bag lunch each day which is really nice of them.”

“Why don’t you let Tim and me take you to lunch?”

Jeremiah looked at the men trying to decide whether he could trust them. The man, Black, was intimidating as hell though his right arm was in a sling.

“How did you hurt yourself?”

“I tripped over my two clumsy feet, fell and broke my arm?”

“Really? Are you that clumsy?” He looked at Tim for verification. Tim nodded his head.

“Yep, you should always look where you are going and who may be in the way.”

“Well, I have a chipped tooth because I fell and hit my mouth.” Jeremiah used his finger and pulled his lip to the side so they could see his tooth. They asked him how he did that? Jeremiah looked at the table top and said he couldn’t remember. Black and Tim both knew that Jeremiah remembered but did not want to talk about it. That opened the door for further conversation. They quietly chatted while the dining room emptied.

Erick and Todd were standing in front of them dressed in their grey suits. Their bow ties were perfect. Jeremiah’s mouth fell open.

“Are you guys lawyers of something?”

“Nope, do you need a lawyer?”

“Yep, I want my stuff and my parents said they paid for it and it didn’t belong to me.” Jeremiah’s eyes teared up.

Todd grabbed an ink pen from his inside jacket pocket and wrote a telephone number on a piece of paper for Black. “Call Tayloe and ask him how to make this work. Tayloe is my brother and he is a lawyer. We have to go. Final exams are about to start. Call me tonight and let me know how this turns out. See you on Friday night.”

It seemed natural that Jeremiah followed Black and Tim to the parking lot. When he saw the black Chevy Tahoe, he stalled.

“Are you guy’s the police or something?”

“Nope, we are here to help a young man who needs assistance. That is, if you will let us.”

They got in the Tahoe and Black called the number given to him by Todd. He told a secretary who he was and that he had an emergency situation that involved Todd and needed to speak to Mr. Reynolds immediately.

“Todd, what’s wrong? Are you okay?” Tayloe’s voice was filled with urgency.

“Mr. Reynolds, my name is Black. I work for Yonatan and Matan Jenner-Ward. Your brother, Todd, gave me your telephone number. We have a young man with us who needs some legal advice. We are on speaker phone. Do you have time to answer a few questions we have?”

“Did you say my brother, Todd, gave you my number?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do I know you?”

“Well, we have not been introduced but I have seen you when Yonatan and Matan Jenner-Ward were with Erick and Todd.”

Tayloe remembered a shadowy figure who was always just a few feet away. It was only because he was paying such scrupulous attention that Tayloe recognized him as their security guard. Tayloe took a deep breath and said he only had a few minutes before a conference call so they should proceed with all due speed. Jeremiah told him the story of his parents kicking him out of the house three weeks prior. His parents had found out he was gay and were furious. There were questions and answers back and forth.

“Listen, I am due in another meeting but this needs my immediate attention. So, let me quickly talk through the steps I want you to take. You are to call me as soon as you complete them. If there is any trouble, and I mean any trouble, you are call me immediately. If there is adverse police interaction you are to call me and not talk to them until I can get to Newport News. Jeremiah, do you accept me as your attorney? You have to agree to that so I can help you.”

“Yes sir. Only I don’t know how I am going to pay you. I don’t have any money.”

“Let’s not worry about the payment. I want you to be safe. I need for you to do one more thing for me. Whatever Black tells you to do, I want you to do it. Okay?”

Jeremiah agreed.

Tayloe figured that Yonatan and Matan had asked Black to help and if they trusted him so would he. Tayloe ended the call and thought he had probably done the most important legal work he would do all day. Off he went to do battle for the Titans of Wall Street. That’s what paid the bills. He decided that he needed to call Eron who might have more experience in this type of case.

Tim had been meticulous in taking notes from the conversation.

A major problem was that Jeremiah was a minor. Black drove them directly to the courthouse where Jeremiah filed paperwork for emancipation. He cited physical abuse and that he had a broken tooth as a result. He listed Tayloe Reynolds as his legal counsel. Social Services was immediately called and they were told a case worker, Tina Jeffries, was already in the courthouse. Tim had requested that he be the foster parent until this was resolved. While they were filling out the paperwork two men in suits walked up and introduced themselves. They were from a law firm in Norfolk and a Mr. Cohen had directed them to provide assistance. Just as they finished introductions two more lawyers walked up. They were from Richmond and Tayloe Reynolds had sent them to come provide assistance, as needed.

Tina Jeffries was totally baffled that the young man had four high-powered attorneys representing him. This was not standard protocol when dealing with a homeless youth; hell, she was constantly badgering the court to cover legal costs for an attorney to represent the kids she worked with. She saw that her life could possibly be easier. She had Tim complete all of the paperwork to be a foster parent and if the judge granted temporary approval and everything checked out, she would let Jeremiah go home with Tim, pending a full review. It was early afternoon before they went into the courtroom. The woman judge was taken aback by this young man who was lawyered up. The lawyers introduced themselves as they were not known to the family and juvenile court in Newport News.

“Gentlemen, this is highly unusual. Who is the lead attorney?”

“Your honor, my name is Brandon James and I am taking the lead on this case.”

He then explained the situation and that Jeremiah Lipscomb was requesting emancipation at the time of his sixteenth birthday and also that Tim Sturdevant was requesting to become a foster parent during the interim time and that he was prepared for it to remain in effect for a longer period if emancipation was not approved.

The judge heard from Tina Jeffries who was prepared to allow Tim to be a foster parent. She talked about Tim’s background, his business acumen, and his financial ability to support Jeremiah.

The judge was not happy. She indicated for Mr. James to stand.

“Mr. James, I am used to attorneys representing clients in my court to understand family law. You obviously do not. I am not criticizing you because we all specialized when we went to law school. However, if you are going to continue to represent Mr. Lipscomb, I suggest you review Virginia law and be prepared to fully represent him and know what is allowed and not allowed under the law. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, your honor. We were called this morning and did not want this young man to be here without representation. I promise I will be prepared when I return”

Judge Williams smiled and asked Jeremiah to stand.

“Mr. Lipscomb, it is apparent that your lawyers do not know family law in the State of Virginia. I am not discounting their knowledge but it is obvious that they work in corporate law. However, I am going to go along with this because it seems that you have some powerful, wealthy people who are willing to help you.” She took a deep breath and looked down at the documents in front of her. “I cannot approve Tim Sturdevant as your foster parent. The state requires training and certification and he has neither. I trust Ms. Jeffries, your social worker, when she says that she believes everything will work out and he will be approved. I can’t deal with the future possibilities but the present day reality. I also cannot approve your request for emancipation. You have not demonstrated any means to support yourself. You have been living on the street and that is not a viable pathway to independence. I would be doing you a disservice if I granted emancipation no matter what horrible things your parents did to you.”

Jeremiah slumped and the attorney grabbed him and held him up. Tears were running down his face. Tim leaned over the rail and handed him a handkerchief. He too was crying.

“Mr. Sturdevant, would you please stand?”

Tim did as the judge requested.

“I am going to appoint you guardian for the next thirty days. During that time, the social services department will conduct inspections of your house, will have interviews with you and Jeremiah and will talk with your list of references. In the meantime, if anything, and I mean anything untoward happens I will have Jeremiah removed from your house and he will be put in a state facility until we work out placement. You should not take anything for granted and should contact social services with any and all questions. Do not make assumptions. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, your honor.”

“Jeremiah, I am on your side. It may not seem like it this time but I am. I don’t yet know who all is supporting you in your steps to adulthood but it is obvious they are highly motivated to see you succeed. You are a fortunate young man. There are not many young people who appear in my court who have that support. I am going to give you my telephone number and you are to call me if you have any needs. I mean it: any needs. I am proud of you for wanting to leave the streets and accept help. We will reconvene in one month’s time for an update hearing. In the meantime, the court order to retrieve your belongings from your parent’s home is granted. The clerk will also print out the orders regarding guardianship. Is there anything else that you need today?”

Jeremiah looked up and told her that he was good and thanked the judge for hearing his requests.

“Good luck and I will see you in January.”

When the clerk gave them the documents and explained what each one was for they left the courthouse. Each of the attorneys shook Jeremiah’s hand and wished him the best. Black, Tim and Jeremy climbed into the Tahoe and Tim said he was starving. Jeremiah laughed and said it was a good thing he had saved his lunch bag. He pulled out the food and gave Black the baloney sandwich and Tim the sweet roll. He kept the juice box and fruit for himself.

“I am glad you will eat that nasty baloney. I would have thrown that in the garbage.”

They all laughed and said it was just a snack before their next task. Black dialed from the car telephone and was connected with the local police department. He spoke to a sergeant and told him what he was going to do. The sergeant wanted the address and promised to have a policeman at the residence.

“Okay, Jeremiah, we are going to get your clothes. The police will be there to help in case your parents are difficult. I need for you to not say anything. I mean say nothing. Can you do that?”

“Suppose they say something to me first. I have a right to speak.” Both Black and Tim sighed. Teenagers!

Black looked in the rearview mirror and caught Jeremiah’s eye. “Like I said, nothing comes out of your mouth. I will speak to your parents.” Jeremiah scowled. Black figured there had been lots of verbal fights between them. “Jeremiah, this is important. I don’t want any of us to end up in jail as I try to protect you this afternoon. You saw how tough Judge Williams was to you; she would have my scalp. I will do whatever I have to do to protect you but please don’t make me break the law. Also, the police will be there to help if things get too bad.”

“Okay. I have a few things I really want to say to them but I promise that I will say nothing.”

“Get your clothes. Don’t worry about other things.”

“Okay.” The teenager was in full pout. He had slunk down in the seat so that Black couldn’t see him. At that point Jeremiah hated all adults. They just didn’t understand him.

The Tahoe pulled in front of a house in a middleclass neighborhood. There were two late model cars in the driveway. Black waited until he saw a police car pull behind the Tahoe before he got out. He had a few words with the officer, then got Jeremiah, and the three of them walked to the front door. Tim stayed in the car.

An overly obese woman came to the door. She was surprised and called out for her husband. He was a meek, skinny little runt. Black told them they were there to get Jeremiah's belongings. He gave them a copy of the court paperwork for guardianship and the court order for removal of personal items.

"That little shit isn't taking what we paid for. He ain't nothing but a little queer cock-sucker. He even stole my nail polish. I can't believe I gave birth to such a sissy little thing."

Jeremiah's mother stood in the door opening and wasn't letting them through. The police officer said they were there to get Jeremiah's clothes and nothing else.

"I burned them. I didn't want faggot clothes in my house. Did he suck your cock so that you would take up for him?"

The intensity of the hate from Jeremiah's mother caught both Black and the policeman temporarily off guard. His father didn't say a word. They had incorrectly assumed that he would have been the difficult one.

"Well, ma'am we have a court order to enter the house and remove Jeremiah's belongings. We will limit that to his clothes."

"I told you there is nothing here. Go to his room and you will see." She moved out of the way. Jeremiah led the way followed by the police officer and then Black. The woman had been truthful. The room was empty of everything including the furniture. There was not even a picture on the walls.

"He is dead to us. We have already sat Shiva for him. He doesn't exist."

Jeremiah crumbled to the floor and was crying. Black bent down to comfort him. That action resulted in an opposite effect than anticipated; Jeremiah cried even harder. Black scooped the boy in his arms. He winced. The hell with the pain in his arm. He would push through as needed. He looked at the officer and asked him to lead the way. As they were walking out of the room, Jeremiah's mother spit in Black's face. He thought about taking the bullet recently and that spit was easily washed off. It was nothing. As they exited the front door of the house, Tim saw Jeremiah in Black's arms and jumped from the vehicle to open the back door of the Tahoe. Jeremiah was slipped into the back seat and Tim closed the door. Tim went to the other side and crawled in beside Jeremiah. Black spoke to the police officer for a minute and then got into the driver's seat.

Black had to stifle his rage over the injustice of what he had just witnessed. How could a parent treat a child like that? He was more determined than ever that he and Tim would be there to help gay youth in the community. He turned the Tahoe toward Suffolk and hoped that Yonatan and Matan would welcome this boy into their home for the night.

As he predicted, Yonatan and Matan were wonderful. Black expected nothing less. When they arrived at the house, Jeremiah was still caught up in the emotional turmoil from the encounter with his parents. He asked Black and Tim if they lived there. Black said that he stayed there and Tim lived in town. They walked in from the garage where Jeremiah met Yonatan and Matan. Matan ushered him upstairs and told Jeremiah that he needed a shower. It was actually the first time that Jeremiah had showered in three weeks. He didn't realize how badly he smelled. His "cat baths" just didn't wash off the funk of a teenage boy.

Jeremiah looked at Matan and said, “But I don’t have any clothes. My parents got rid of all of my clothes.” Jeremiah slumped against the bathroom door and wondered how he would survive. Matan hugged him and told him that he had clothes that would probably fit. Matan had been so busy that he hadn’t taken his outgrown clothes to the Good Will store. He opened a closet and pulled out pants and shirts. He went to his room and grabbed some underwear for Jeremiah to have.

“Take your time. When you finish, come downstairs and we will talk. Some clean towels are hanging on the back of the door.”

When Jeremiah came down the steps he looked like a different person. He was clean and his eyes were bright. He asked where Black was. Matan and Tim looked at each other and swallowed hard.

“Yonatan took Black to the hospital.”

“What’s going on? Oh my God, is he okay? Tell me it’s not my fault.”

“It’s not your fault, Jeremiah. Black hurt his arms a few weeks ago and he wanted to have it checked after picking you up today.”

Jeremiah burst into tears, which led Tim to cry and finally Matan remembered the horrible afternoon in Vienna and he started crying. Green walked in and found three crying men. He looked from one to the other not knowing what to say or do. Finally, there was a pause in the crying.

“Gentlemen, I assume that things are not good. Can one of you tell me what is happening?”

Jeremiah had moved and stood behind Tim. He didn’t know this gruff man who had entered the house.

“Yonatan has taken Black to the hospital. He may have injured his arm this afternoon.”

Green just stared at Matan.

“Do you know which hospital?”

“Norfolk General. I called mom and she said she would call the Emergency Department. She still has some pull at the hospital.”

“Okay, gentlemen. What do we do? Do we stay here and cry or go to the Emergency Room and cry?”

They sniffled and said they preferred to cry in the Emergency Room. Green had them get into the Tahoe and they headed east to Norfolk. Yonatan had taken Black to the hospital in his Jeep. They arrived at the Emergency Department and waited for over an hour before they saw Yonatan and Black. Tim ran to Black and kissed him.

“Are you okay?”

“Yes, I am fine. There was some blood and I wanted it checked out. They said it is normal healing. They did say for me to not pick up any more fifteen year old boys for a few weeks.” He smiled and looked at Jeremiah. “You clean up right good.” Jeremiah blushed.

Yonatan said they were going into Ghent to eat dinner. They ate at their favorite restaurant. Jeremiah sat between Matan and Black and couldn't decide which one he wanted to lean on more. He kept thanking Matan for the clothes and then kept apologizing to Black for hurting his arm. Then the waiter appeared and Jeremiah stopped talking, blushed and lowered his head. He cut his eyes up to look at the handsome waiter who was also looking at him. They both smiled at the same time.

Suggested Music:

“You Will Be Found”

Composer/Lyrist: Penji Pesek & Jason Paul

Performers: Only Boys Aloud

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_dxoLMGe-M

Friday, December 13
The Light of Love

*Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.*

Psalm 130

Yonatan was up early on Friday morning to go to W&M for his last exam. He had convinced his professors to let him take his examinations early because of the commitment ceremony and honeymoon. They had agreed since he had superior marks on all of his work but they swore him to secrecy because they didn't want other students requesting early exams.

That morning he told Matan to stay home and that he would return as soon as he finished. Matan was busy all morning with last minute preparations for their commitment ceremony. He noticed that Jeremiah had not gotten out of bed. Tim had stayed with Black and checked on Jeremiah before he left early for the bookshop. He said he needed to check in with employees. He also told Matan that Jeremiah was out like a light.

"I don't know where he slept for the past few weeks, but last night he was able to sleep in a bed. I am sure that felt good. Being a teenager, he probably won't wake up until lunch time."

Matan smiled and knew that he was a teenager also and would have loved to sleep until lunchtime. But he had things to take care of. He worked hard not to be the ultimate groomzilla that day.

Black came downstairs shortly after Tim left. He winced in pain and Matan told him to take a pain pill.

"I hate to take those when Tim is here. He still thinks I broke my arm. It was a good thing I went to the hospital because there was a bolus of infection that was dislodged when I picked up Jeremiah. They were able to clean that and they said I will heal faster now. So, something good came out of something bad."

Matan nodded.

"Well, we will need to work extra hard on getting the foundation set up for gay youth. You and Tim did absolutely the right thing. We also need to pay Tayloe for his time. Oh my God, we should invite Tayloe and Eron to the commitment ceremony. Do you have Tayloe's telephone number? After a brief call, Matan was assured that Tayloe and Eron would be in attendance.

The morning slipped away and it was lunch time.

"Do we wake him or let him sleep?" Matan was growing concerned.

"Let him sleep. I will go up and check on him later."

Yonatan arrived home and the three of them ate lunch while looking across the river. A flock of geese moved overhead and then circled around Craney Island before setting down. Fishing boats were growing scarce this time of year. Only the big freighters passed by as they headed upriver to Richmond. All was quiet and peaceful on the river. The house would be quiet for a couple of hours and then the hoards would descend.

Matan got up and cleaned the kitchen. He told Black to relax because the next couple of days were going to be stressful. Black disappeared into his apartment.

It was early afternoon when Matan heard a vehicle pull into the driveway. Green had arrived after a trip to the airport. He had picked up Herbert and Judy Jenner and Max Lambert at the Norfolk airport. They had all arrived for the commitment ceremony on Saturday night. There was much talking, hugging, and kissing. Yonatan had prepared some snacks for them to eat knowing they would be hungry after being on a plane for most of the day.

“By the way, your favorite steward said his invitation must have gotten lost in the mail. Etienne sends his best.” Judy grinned at Yonatan and Matan.

Matan grinned from ear to ear. “How did he know who you were?”

“Well, he said two of his favorite passengers flew between New York and Paris and had the same last name as ours. After playing cat and mouse for a couple of minutes we both disclosed your names at the same time. We have never had such wonderful service on a plane before. He is such a lovely man.” Judy hugged them and said they did good so people had fond memories of them.

Green said he would unload the car and put the luggage in the bedrooms.

“Ahh, we have an additional guest. His name is Jeremiah. Please be gentle with him. He arrived just last night.”

Matan’s mother was giving him a quizzical look when Jeremiah stuck his head around the door frame. “Excuse me, Matan, do you have any socks I can wear? A blister burst on my foot and it really hurts.” He realized there were several folks looking at him. His skin pinked up. He was overwhelmed by the group of men and one woman.

“Let me see your foot. I am a doctor; I work in the medical field.” That was Judy Jenner’s favorite saying anytime someone in their circle of friends was hurt. She didn’t tell them that she was a psychiatrist.

Jeremiah sat in a breakfast room chair and Judy very gently took his foot in her hand. He winced from the pain. She knew not to let her concern show on her face.

“Let me see your other foot.” She examined that one also and noticed that the blisters had burst on both feet. One was infected already, the other not far behind.

“Yonatan, I need for you to go to the store for me.” She wrote out a list of medical supplies she wanted. She also asked for her pocketbook and pulled out a prescription pad from the hospital in Norfolk. She said it shouldn’t take too long for them to fill the prescription. She handed the papers to Yonatan. Green smiled and took the papers out of his hand. “You stay here, boss. I’ve got it.”

Judy immediately went into her clinical mode and suggested that she and Jeremiah go to the living room where they could have some peace and quiet. She held his arm for support even though he was taller and more robust than her. She wanted him to know that she was now his care giver. With a little coaxing, Judy was able to get the full story out of Jeremiah. She wavered between wanting to mother him and keeping her clinical distance. The clinician lost and she took him in her arms.

Before Green returned, the house started to fill with people. Ayal and Zeke arrived as did Todd and Erick. Matan had invited Mr. Reed’s son and his family to join them. Gino Antonucci arrived. Lester

and his partner, David, walked in and were surprised at the number of people in the house. Tim arrived about the same time that Green returned from the pharmacy. It was Shabbat and the family planned to celebrate.

Judy carefully tended to Jeremiah's feet and then bandaged them. She called out to Matan to get a pair of bedroom slippers for Jeremiah to wear.

"You are not to wear dress shoes until tomorrow night for the commitment ceremony."

"What commitment ceremony?"

"Why Yonatan and Matan's, of course. Didn't you know? That is why we are here."

Jeremiah understood that in the middle of this celebration that they had seen him in need and taken him in. He was choked up with emotion when Judy said she was now his mother.

The dinner was filled with laughter and celebration. People were scattered between the living and dining rooms. Yonatan went to the kitchen to get bottles of champagne to finish the meal. Herbert looked at Yonatan who laughed and said that Matan made him do it. Matan shrugged his shoulders and said that his mother said they had to have champagne. Judy spoke up and said that Max Lambert said he wasn't coming unless they had drinks to celebrate. Max pulled a face and said it wasn't a celebration without bubbly. By that time everyone was laughing. Finally, Ayal spoke up and said it was a gift from Mr. Cohen to celebrate the happy occasion. Herbert led them in cheers to Mr. Cohen.

As they were finishing their first glass of champagne there was a knock at the front door. Green went to answer it and found two gentlemen saying they had been invited. Green was confused because one looked exactly like one of the guests already in the house. Tayloe and Eron entered carrying a large box that was beautifully gift wrapped. Introductions were made.

They handed the box to Jeremiah.

It was a like a Chinese Game. There was a box inside a box inside a box inside a box. Each box was beautifully wrapped. Finally, there was a small box which Jeremiah opened. Inside he found a gift certificate for Beecroft and Bull. It didn't specify a dollar amount.

"You need a bow-tie for tomorrow night. And a suit. And a shirt. And some shoes. Have a fun morning shopping tomorrow. Ask for Wills. He will make sure that everything you need will be ready by the time of the commitment ceremony tomorrow night."

Tayloe leaned over and kissed Eron on the top of his head. They both smiled. They were holding hands.

Erick and Todd gave each other quizzical looks.

Tayloe spoke up and said that when he heard Jeremiah's voice on the telephone that he knew he needed to help. He called Eron and they decided that instead of giving the richest men in the world a gift (at that point they pointed to Yonatan and Matan) that they would give a gift to Jeremiah in Yonatan and Matan's name.

"So, this is actually a gift from Yonatan and Matan to you."

Jeremiah got up and hugged all four men. He then hugged Tim and leaned into him. He was cottoning to the idea that Tim was to be his guardian.

“I would like to thank everyone here. Everything has happened so fast. I met Erick and Todd two nights ago, then Black and Tim showed up yesterday morning. I spoke with Tayloe on the telephone and here I am at Yonatan and Matan’s house.”

Jeremiah looked around the room.

“God heard my cry for mercy and sent you. Thank you.”

Suggested Music:

“Out of the Depths”

Performer: Sinéad O’Connor

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m920jYP002c>

Saturday, December 14
The Light of Love

*John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should
share with the one who has none,
and anyone who has food should do the same."*

Luke 3: 11

The day started quiet enough as Todd slept in and Erick sat at the dining room table grading papers. It was Saturday morning and for Erick that meant it was still Shabbat. They were still recovering from the dinner party the night before. Most Saturdays were relatively quiet unless there was a home football game and then they were at Zable Football Stadium to watch the W&M Tribe play. The football season was over, classes had ended and exams were in the process and as long as they stayed away from the historic district their lives were quiet.

Todd walked into the dining room in just his briefs. Erick drew a breath. He was always in wonder when he saw Todd naked, or nearly naked. He thought him the most handsome man he had ever met. Todd thought the same of Erick. Erick smiled, looked at Todd and told him he needed a kiss. By the time the kiss had ended the men were on the floor in the dining room making love. Their heavy breathing turned into soft whimpers of endearments as they felt fulfilled. They felt blessed that they had found each other.

Erick had almost fallen asleep when Todd jumped up.

"Up off the floor, old man. We need to get ready for lunch because we have a very busy afternoon."

"I was grading papers. You distracted me so it will take a few minutes longer to finish. My students are chomping at the bit for their grades. I can't tell them having the most remarkable sex with the most beautiful man in the world is the excuse I have for not finishing."

They kissed once more before Todd said he was going to take a shower.....alone.....unless someone wanted to join him. Erick grinned and said the students could wait for their grades. Todd smiled knowing that he had the magic touch with his partner. After getting dressed they drove to Merchant Square where they luckily found a parking space. The area was busy with Christmas shoppers. They met Tayloe and Eron and the four of them ate a wonderful meal at The Blue Talon. It was pricey for a Saturday lunch but Todd decided to splurge and pick up the check for all. Afterwards, they crossed the intersection of Jamestown and Richmond Roads and walked up to the Wren Chapel at the college. The Chapel was still open to the public for the day. The chapel was one of the oldest buildings on the campus and had been designed by Christopher Wren and constructed in 1695. Erick was concerned that it was too Christian but after looking inside he felt it was the perfect place. He made sure that everything would be in place for the commitment ceremony later in the day. He had promised Yonatan that he would do this. Poor Yonatan was a nervous wreck. After looking over the chapel, the couples split and went their separate ways. Eron and Tayloe were like little boys as they set out to explore more of the historic district. They said they also wanted to make sure that Jeremiah's clothes were going to be ready for the ceremony.

Just after the sun had set, people starting arriving for the service. Erick and Todd had arrived earlier to make sure the Chapel was ready. They had agreed to be ushers and waited for people to appear. Erick saw four men walking up the sidewalk with a Chuppah. He then realized it was three men and a woman. Ayal was carrying poles and Zeke had the Chuppah in his arms. Martine, a co-worker of Matan's from the museum, had given friends squares of fabric and told them to write, draw or paint on the square what Yonatan and Matan meant in their lives. Martine had then sewn them together to make the Chuppah and after the commitment ceremony she would then take the Chuppah and make a quilt for their bed. They all wanted to make sure they knew where to stand and that the poles would fit in the space. Lester was carrying a handsaw in case the poles needed to be lowered. He laughed saying that he was a good Boy Scout and was always prepared. Todd snickered because he had given Yonatan height information at least ten times. The three men were wearing tuxedos and all had on kippahs. Martine had decided she would wear the same as did Todd and Erick. Todd had started wearing a kippah at home and said it now felt normal for him to have it on. After everyone was comfortable with what they had to do, they sat and chatted among themselves.

Slowly, the chapel began to fill with people. Some were wearing kippahs and some were not. Dr. Antonucci arrived and asked where he was to stand for the ceremony. Erick explained the layout for him and asked if he was comfortable.

"Not really. I am a good Roman Catholic but I have read about Jewish weddings and I think we will be okay. There are a few differences but we will do this and nobody will know if I screw up."

"We will," said Zeke, "but we won't tell." Everyone laughed. Ayal handed Dr. Antonucci a kippah to wear.

"You may be Roman Catholic but tonight you are Jewish."

The candles were lit in all of the windows as the bulbs in the chandelier were dimmed.

Music started and everyone realized they needed to settle in and be prepared for beautiful sounds from the historic English chamber organ. Andrew Finkelstein was playing the organ and people anticipated hearing his expertise at the keyboard. He was a bit of a show off and enjoyed grabbing people's attention by his selections. He did not believe in quiet sedate music before a wedding. He thought of it as a ballgame and was winding the crowd up for the first pitch. Then a young man who was a friend of Pate and Timmy's stepped forward and started singing. Matthew was handsome with a leonine mass of blond hair, a deep tan and a bullish build. As soon as he opened his mouth people were swooning. He sang like an angel. Finkelstein pulled his theatrics back and was the perfect accompanist.

A man dressed all in black appeared at the chapel door where Erick and Todd were standing. He nodded to them and asked if everything was ready. Erick said they were ready for Yonatan and Matan to arrive. The man looked at those gathered, spoke into a transmitter and then a car pulled to the curb. Yonatan and Matan got out of the car followed by Matan's parents. Two security guards escorted them to the door and handed them off to the man dressed in black. Andrew Finkelstein was given the cue and he started playing Handel's "Arrival of the Queen of Sheba." The windows were rattling when he finished. Matan grinned from ear to ear at the sheer brilliance of the music.

The four tried to walk up the aisle side by side. Matan started giggling which led to laughter on Yonatan's part. The aisle wasn't wide enough. As they approached the dais the Chuppah had been raised and was waiting for them. Dr. Antonucci was leading the service which was a combination of Jewish and Christian traditions. Todd was tearful as he watched the two men circle each other seven

times. He thought of the Paso Doble. It also was like a weaving together of who they were as a couple. Yonatan could not help himself and would kiss Matan each time he circled him. Matan laughed and then started doing the same. It was filled with love and many couples in the congregation started holding hands. Todd was quietly sniffing wondering whether he and Erick would ever be able to have a ceremony. Erick put his arm across Todd's shoulder to steady him. After the seventh turn Yonatan and Matan hugged each other and stepped under the Chuppah. Dr. Antonucci continued the service and both Yonatan and Matan affirmed their love for each other and they exchanged rings. Then they sat with the Jenners on either side of the altar.

Dr. Antonucci read sacred scripture and then a large man stood from his seat and said that he had been asked to read poems that were special to Yonatan and Matan. Mr. Fish read the Whitman poem, "We Two Boys Together Clinging," that Matan had given to Yonatan on their first trip to Paris. He then read the Cavafy poem, "Ithaka." His voice quivered a little while reading the poem about seeking life's adventures. Everyone sat in silence when he finished. Yonatan had known that Mr. Fish's theatrical training would be well served in reading the poems.

Erick walked up the aisle and stepped onto the dais. He announced that Yonatan had written the Ketubah, a contract of their relationship, that he, Erick, had been commanded to read to the congregation. He said that Matan had agreed to all the terms of the agreement. Erick started reading and people were listening to Yonatan's wish to always be with Matan as he felt it was the will of the Creator of the Universe. Matan had promised the same. Many people were nodding in agreement. There were several more sentences about their mutual love and respect for the other. Yonatan then included promises to their unborn children and children's children. He was setting forth financial trusts for future generations. Herbert was smiling and grabbed Judy's hand.

Erick caught his breath. He had seen several drafts of the document but there was new information included that he had not seen. He wanted to make sure he was reading everything correctly. Erick announced the formation of the Herbert and Judith Jenner Foundation with a gift of \$10 million dollars to assist young LGBT families in Israel. Matan Jenner-Ward was the sole trustee and decision maker about how those funds were to be used. Herbert and Judy gasped in delight when they heard this. Members of the LGBT group at W&M were so awed by the bequest that they stood, applauded and cheered. They didn't know if it was proper but they didn't care. Everyone in the congregation was smiling.

Erick then announced that a Jenner-Ward Foundation would award LGBT research grants for law students studying international laws impacting LGBT families. He named Max Lambert and Ayal Blacyal as the trustees. The foundation would also fund services to needy LGBT youth in Hampton Roads. It was obvious that neither Max nor Ayal knew about this gift. They were pleased. Again, the LGBT group stood and applauded. This time there were many tears as couples hugged and kissed.

A gift of \$1 million was being made to Camp Falls because it was the camp where Yonatan and Matan had met and fallen in love. The Boy Scouts who were in attendance whooped and hollered. Mr. Fish led the cheers. Everyone laughed with them and their enthusiasm. They were rather boisterous. They felt like they were in competition with the LGBT group for cheering and wanted to not only match their enthusiasm but to better it.

Finally, there was a gift from Yonatan to Matan of all of his worldly goods, his heart, and his soul. Matan grabbed Yonatan and kissed him in front of everyone. People in the congregation had tears in their eyes.

Erick then asked Yonatan, Matan and Todd to come forward and the four men signed the document in front of everyone.

“So it is written. So let it be.” Erick held up the beautiful document for all to see. Yonatan had found a calligrapher who memorialized the document on sheepskin in beautiful script and painted symbols of gold, red, blue, yellow, green and black around the border. It was to be framed and hung in their home. People stood and applauded.

Dr. Antonucci started saying the seven blessings. He had worked diligently on how to pronounce the words in Hebrew and members of the congregation would nod and smile when he stumbled on some of the words. They were forgiving because he was trying so hard to pronounce everything correctly. At one point he looked panicked and Abraham Jenner stood and together they read the blessings. The blessings began with an understanding that the Creator was reflected in everything in life and concluded with the awareness that the Divine was celebrated in Yonatan and Matan’s commitment of love. Ayal put two glasses on the floor and both men stomped them.

Cries of “Mazel Tov” filled the chapel. Again, everyone stood and were full throated in their good wishes.

All of a sudden, in a surprise to everyone in the Chapel, Lester called out, “Scouts, attention. Salute.” They all saluted and then started snapping their fingers and whistling the Colonel Bogey March. Most people did not know what the scouts were up to, but Yonatan and Matan saluted them with tears running down their faces. It didn’t matter that Yonatan and Matan were taking a break from scouting, these fellows considered them part of their lives and wanted to honor them.

Andrew Finkelstein then played the Charles-Marie Widor Toccata from the 5th Symphony for the recessional. People stood in awe at his gifted playing and the festival beauty of the music. Matan and Yonatan stopped inside the chapel doors to hear the entire piece. There was even more cheering when it finished with the entire building shivering from the echoes of the last notes. It has taxed the chamber organ but Andrew had done a remarkable job in adapting it. It had been a joyous ceremony.

Todd and Erick were the last to leave the Chapel before heading to the Williamsburg Lodge. Tayloe and Eron said they would save them seats. The dinner was already underway so Todd and Erick were thankful to their brothers. Todd would not let loose of Erick’s hand. Tim, Black and Jeremiah were in the other seats. Jeremiah looked amazingly handsome in his new clothes.

“I need to eat, darling.” Erick looked into Todd’s eyes.

“When did you start using the word darling? You are starting to sound southern like me.” Todd grinned at his partner. After kissing, they loosened their hands so they could eat the excellent meal that had been served. Thankfully, the complex had a kosher kitchen to prepare the meals as many of the attendees were Jewish.

Todd joined Erick in a slow dance and then Erick danced them out of the room, across the foyer and outside the building.

“We need to go home. It has been a long day. We still need to celebrate the fourteenth day of Advent.” They drove to the apartment in silence. Again, Todd held Erick’s hand and did not want to let go.

“Unless you are going to crawl over the console you need to let me loose so that we can get out of the car and into the house.” Erick chuckled as he looked at Todd. He saw a man in love. Completely in love.

They walked in and went directly to the dining room. They sat and then Todd said a prayer before lighting two purple candles. He asked Erick to read the scripture for the day. The two men never looked at the scripture until it was time for the reading. There was no preparation, no pre-knowledge of what to say or how to react. They were both hearing the Advent reading for the first time that night. Erick finished the reading from the Gospel of Luke and shook his head.

“They gave more than two shirts tonight. They gave us more than just food. They gave of their wealth, talent, and heart. It was so freely shared and they did not make a big deal of it. I didn’t know about that part of the contract. They decided between the two of them and in their own way announced it to those they loved. I was going to say no hoopla, no big news announcement, no shouting from the roof tops but I think there was hoopla and shouting from the rooftops tonight. But most important, it was so freely and lovingly given.”

Todd said the wedding was the embodiment of the reading. He looked at Erick and said, “Whatever I own is yours. Whatever food we have is for both of us. I give you my all.” He asked Erick to sing the prayer for them to finish. Erick stood and moved around to Todd. Todd stood also and was wrapped in Erick’s arms as he sang. They would share everything they had between each other and then they would give to those in need.

Suggested Music:

“Arrival of the Queen of Sheba”

Composer: George Frederick Handel

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ey_8VSD7fgc&list=RDeY_8VSD7fgc&start_radio=1

“Toccata from 5th Symphony”

Composer: Charles-Marie Widor

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mI34p5232c>

Sunday, December 15
Gaudete Sunday
The Light of Joy

*Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us;
and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins,
let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us.*

Episcopal Book of Common Prayer

“I have everything ready for when we return home.”

“What is happening? Return home from where?”

Todd got a pillow and hit Erick across the head. Luckily, he was sleeping on his stomach and the pillow hit the back of his head.

“Get up. Today is Stir Up Sunday.” Todd was pulling the covers back and exposed the back side of his lover.

“And what trouble are you stirring up today?”

“Ha, good one my boyfriend. Today we are stirring up a plum pudding.”

“Do you even know how to make a plum pudding?”

“Nope, so it will take both of us to make this happen.”

Erick gave Todd a pointed look that spoke volumes without him saying a word. Erick was getting used to the wonderful mystery of living with Todd. Todd was so willing to step into the unknown. In many ways, Todd enjoyed taking on new tasks and he could be fearless. Todd was so trusting of Erick and their life together. Erick had made their lives easy because he was caring and flexible to Todd’s whims. Todd was constantly working to create memories of their life together. Erick’s family was wary of creating memories afraid they would be ripped away. He took a deep breath every time that Todd talked about the memories they were creating that they would one day share with their children. They were so different yet they fit together so well.

“Okay, my lover man. Does the wedding last night count for Sabbath so we don’t have to go to church this morning?”

Todd acted like he was horrified at the mere thought.

“Today is Rose Sunday. Also known as Gaudete Sunday. Also known as Stir-Up Sunday. We have to be there for the lighting of the Joy candle.”

“Why three names? Couldn’t the church fathers make up their minds?” Erick got an evil grin on his face. “Of course, I somehow knew it was different than every other day in Advent. Each day is special in its own way and we cannot ignore any of them.”

Todd looked at Erick and gave him the stink eye. “You are now being sarcastic on Sunday. Do you know what God does to you when you are sarcastic on Sunday?”

“No, I am sure there is some Christian proverb about it. Bring it on. Let me have it.”

Todd stood there for a moment and then started smiling. “Actually, I have no idea. Let’s get ready. I have pink bowties for us to wear today. We need to match the vestments.”

Erick rolled his eyes before he rolled out of bed.

When they arrived at Bruton Parish they were surprised to find Tayloe and Eron standing by the door waiting for them. They were wearing pink bow ties. Several people commented on the fact that all four men were wearing pink bow ties. They smiled in return. Todd beamed when the rose candle was lit in the Advent wreath. The Reynold’s boys were so tickled about the plethora of pink bow ties they couldn’t stop giggling all through the service. All it would take was for one of the boys to flick his bow tie and they would start giggling again. They were acting like pre-adolescent boys and were having a great time. Erick smiled and thought, ‘so much for a meaningful service’. However, he knew that deep down that this was important to Todd and if it was important to Todd then it was for him also.

Lunch was a simple salad at the apartment. They had decided they had eaten too much at the feast the night before. Yonatan and Matan had spent a lot of money to entertain everyone in first class style. Based on what Yonatan had said about his father-in-law, there would be words about his spend thrift manner. Matan said he was only getting hitched once in his life and it was worth it. Yonatan had told Erick that Matan was in charge of planning their commitment ceremony and whatever Matan wanted, he got. He said he would rather have a fight with Herbert than a fight with Matan. That made sense to Erick.

After lunch, Eron said he needed to get back to Washington and Tayloe said he was having dinner with his parents that night and needed to leave so he could take a nap before dinner. They left after hugs and kisses.

The salad plates were put in the dishwasher and Todd started getting out ingredients and more ingredients and then even more ingredients.

“I thought you said this was a plum pudding. Plums and pudding. That is simple. What is all of this for?”

“Well, it actually isn’t quite a plum pudding or should I say it is an enhanced plum pudding.”

“Okay, where are the plums?”

“Well, I don’t like plums so I use other things.”

Erick gave Todd a bemused look and thought it was useless to go down that pathway.

“I will be the sous chef. Tell me what you need for me to do.”

Todd gave Erick the task of chopping a variety of dried fruits, fresh fruits and nuts. After Erick had finished Todd gave him a bottle of scotch and told him to liberally drown the fruit.

“I don’t want one raisin left alive. Drown those fruits. Nooooo, you are not supposed to be drinking the Plum Pudding Scotch. Put that bottle down.” Erick gave a huge smile as Todd took the liquor bottle out of his hands and put the cap back on.

“Now stir the fruit and liquor. Remember this is Stir-Up Sunday.”

Todd was sifting the flour while directing Erick’s work at the same time and a fine sheen of flour now covered several surfaces. Erick laughed at Todd because he had flour down the front of his shirt and on his arms. Erick also noticed that five different bowls contained different parts of the cake.

“Now we come to the most important part of preparation. All of this has to be stirred together in a very specific order.... only I can’t remember the order.”

Erick laughed at what he thought was silliness.

“It has to be folded together in a certain way or the cake won’t rise properly. Hmm, let me try to remember.”

Todd stood by the large mixing bowl filled with the drowned fruit and then gave Erick specific instructions for adding the other ingredients while he stirred.

“I bet there is a Stir-Up Sunday song. If I knew it, we could sing while we are doing this.”

Erick again thought Todd was bollocks but decided to play along with his partner.

Finally, the batter was in the pan and Erick said they needed to clean the kitchen and take a shower. They did and then went directly to their bed. Erick found he could stir Todd in a particular way and the man was like putty in his hands. They were in the height of lovemaking when the timer chimed on the oven.

“Five more minutes. Five more minutes. Oh yes, oh my sweet man, yes.” They made good use of the five minutes. They jumped from the bed and ran into the kitchen expecting to see smoke roiling from the oven. Instead, they opened the door and Todd decided it needed to cook for ten more minutes. They hopped in the shower again and quickly removed all signs of their love making.

The pudding came out of the oven and Todd declared it was beautiful and needed to sit in the pan for another hour before they took it out. It smelled heavenly and redolent of chocolate. Erick was trying to smell the Scotch.

It was soon dinnertime and again they ate sparingly. Todd then started the process of un-panning the pudding, plating it, soaking it with Scotch and then wrapping it until Christmas Eve.

It had been a fun filled day and they were tired from their busy weekend. Todd was about to say they needed to rest for classes the next day when he realized that his classes were over for the semester.

“After a couple more exams we’re on vacation. Two weeks without classes. This is incredible.”

They sat in the living room talking about the possibilities of day trips. They avoided talking about Eron and Tayloe because neither knew what to say and didn’t want to stir up any trouble.

Suggested Music:

“Lo He Comes with Clouds Descending”

King’s College Choir

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYf4W5Fy_2w

Monday, December 16
The Light of Joy

Like as a hart desireth the waterbrooks,

So longeth my soul after thee, O God.

My soul is athirst for God,

Yea, even for the living God.

When shall I come to appear before the presence of God?

My tears have been my meat day and night,

While they daily say unto me, "where is now thy God?"

Psalm 42: 1-3

Todd was the first one up. He and Erick were exhausted from the weekend festivities. The coffee was brewing and Todd was preparing batter for waffles. He loved banana chocolate chip waffles with maple syrup. Of course, he had to be careful so that he didn't go into a diabetic coma from the sugar overload. Todd felt a kiss on his neck. He had been so intent on making the batter he hadn't noticed the feet padding across the kitchen floor.

Todd turned and was in Erick's arms. Erick laid his head on Todd's shoulder and just held on. Finally, Todd felt something growing down below. He chuckled.

"I need you in our bed. I need you, Todd. Now."

"I am making waffles." Erick put his hand across Todd's mouth to hush him.

"Me or waffles? Which is more important in your life?"

That was an easy answer for Todd. He grabbed Erick's hand and led him to the bedroom. The bedclothes were a wreck but actually looked fairly neat compared to how they would look later in the morning.

Erick was truly in need. Todd was lying on his back, with a sweat covered chest when he finally heard a sigh of contentment from Erick. He then felt Erick turn over and plant his body half on top of him. Erick's arm reached out and pulled him in close.

"Hold me. I need for you to hold me. I am in need."

Todd had never heard that plaintive tone in Erick's voice before. Todd turned on his side toward Erick and pulled him in close. He didn't use his mouth to speak, but rather let his body do the talking; he comforted his partner. Finally, he felt Erick's heart beat slow and his breath become shallow. Erick was asleep. They lay that way for an hour when Todd woke again. Todd was moving his body when Erick was startled awake.

“No. I need you. Stay with me. Please don’t leave me. Todd, don’t leave me.”

Todd was stunned.

Erick closed his eyes and fell asleep again. Todd pulled Erick in close, wrapped him in his arms and felt him returning to a deep sleep. At times he would whimper and his body would subtly shake. If Todd had not been so attuned, he would not have noticed it. Erick would then move in closer and pulled Todd’s arms tighter across his chest. Their breathing synced and they lived in the land of nod.

Todd woke and knew that it was afternoon. He urgently needed to pee but didn’t want to waken Erick. He was quietly moving when Erick’s eyes opened. He blinked a couple of times and then a smile spread across his face. He pulled Todd’s arms across his chest, released them and then jumped from the bed. He ran to the bathroom and by the time he reached the toilet his underwear was opened and he was letting loose a torrent. Todd walked up beside him and added to the flood waters.

Erick looked at Todd, leaned in and kissed him on the lips.

“Good morning, lover.”

“Good afternoon, Herr Docktor Professor.”

“Is it really afternoon?”

“Yes, it is 2:30 pm.”

“Why did you let me sleep so late?”

Todd just laughed at Erick’s question.

Erick looked confused. “What is so funny?”

“You pulled me back to bed this morning and we both fell asleep. I guess we were really tired.”

“Well, this beast is hungry. Let’s shower and go out for lunch.”

Todd was confused at Erick’s behavior. It was like he didn’t remember what had happened that morning. They got in the shower and they washed each other’s bodies as they talked about snippets of what had happened over the weekend.

“When did the guys say they were leaving for Brussels?” Erick’s mind was still foggy and he didn’t want to search his memory bank for the answer.

“Yonatan told me they will leave tomorrow. Matan’s father wanted to go to the law firm today and Dr. Jenner was going by the hospital.”

“Can we go to one of the waffle houses out on Route 60? I am in the mood for waffles. I don’t know why, they aren’t something I eat on a regular basis.”

“They won’t keep you regular, that is why.”

Erick gave him a loopy grin and said that was true.

They went to the bedroom and Erick seemed surprised at the state of the bedcovers.

“Maybe we should throw these in the washer while we are gone. It looks like two wildebeests had a tussle in here.”

They each grabbed corners of the fitted sheet and pulled it loose. Todd told Erick to put everything in the washer while he cleaned up a couple of things in the kitchen.

They were dressed in chinos and sweaters and leather bomber jackets when they left the apartment. Todd said he was driving. They got in the car and Todd drove directly to the most popular of the waffle houses. He knew they would have missed the lunch crowd. In fact, the waitress was surprised when Erick said they would probably drink an entire pot of coffee. First, Erick said he wanted a large glass of water. He quickly dispensed with that and asked for a second glass.

“I didn’t realize how dehydrated I was. I am really out of it.”

“Honey, are you okay? You have been out of it most of the day.”

“Really? We just got up a few minutes ago. I slept for a long time last night.”

Todd ordered banana chocolate chip waffles. Erick ordered pancakes, eggs over easy, and fresh fruit. He then asked for another glass of water. He would reach over and take a bite of Todd’s waffle. Todd could only smile when he did that. When Erick took the last bite, he let out a small burp, smiled and said the beast was ready to take on the world. But first, he needed to pee. Erick grinned as he leaned over to kiss Todd before he headed to the men’s room.

They left the restaurant and Todd drove to Market Square for Christmas looking. He still had some things to purchase but he had no idea where to get what he needed. The area was packed on a Monday afternoon which surprised both fellows. Todd said he needed to go to Beecroft and Bull to pick up a couple of presents. Erick said he had an errand to run – alone. They agreed to meet shortly as it was fast approaching dusk.

They stood at the foot of the Duke of Gloucester Street in the colonial area. Erick grabbed Todd’s hand and said it would be nice to walk around and look at the decorations. They had done that several times already but neither tired of the sight. Erick seemed so dependent on Todd for steadiness and direction. He was certainly better than that morning but he was still slightly off kilter.

“How are you feeling? How is your leg?” Todd put his hand on Erick’s forehead like he was checking for a fever.

Erick eyes brightened. “I am feeling better, thanks. The leg is no problem since you drug me every day. I don’t know what happened. I guess I needed water. I felt so dry and empty. My brain and body seemed other-worldly. In fact, I am thirsty for water again. I guess that I didn’t pay attention to my water intake over the weekend. Plus, we drank a lot of liquor.”

They walked in silence for a few minutes before Erick stopped and looked at Todd.

“I felt like my soul was empty and only you could fill it. There were so many people and so many things going on. I have never thought of myself as either an extrovert or an introvert but I wanted to scream at people to go away and to just leave us alone. I need for you to fill my soul with your being. You are the only one who can make me whole again. Does that make sense?”

Todd could only nod his head. He held Erick's hand even harder. He and Erick spent so much time alone and this weekend was the first time that he realized how much of an introvert Erick actually was. Todd had felt exhilarated the entire time. Another layer of the onion of knowing each other had been peeled back.

The fellows went back to the apartment. Todd lit the Advent candles, they read the scripture assigned for the day, had a brief exchange of views and then Erick said he needed filling again. He gave Todd a rude smile and an eyebrow wag.

Suggested Music:

“Like as a Hart”

Herbert Howells, Composer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yn6dcqrV6WA>

Tuesday, December 17
The Light of Joy

By day the Lord directs his love,

At night his song is with me –

A prayer to the God of my life.

Psalms 42:8

It was a busy morning in the Jenner-Ward household. The first leg of their flight was not until mid-afternoon and Judy was trying to stay on Paris time during this brief trip. She was fixing breakfast when Yonatan and Matan came wandering into the kitchen. In deference to their houseguests, they were wearing pajamas. Normally, they would have been wearing tighty-whities or nothing at all. They loved living in an all male household.

Judy has scrounged through the refrigerator and said they needed to eat up the food or it would go bad before the boys returned from Paris. The counter top was filled with various and sundry foods. She said she would also be the short order cook to prepare their eggs.

“I want an egg casserole, thanks mama.” Matan smirked as he said it. Judy looked at Matan and said he was not too old for a spanking if he was going to act like a child. Yonatan volunteered to give him the spanking. That drew a laugh from Green.

While they ate, Green briefed them on their itinerary for the day and security plans while they were in Europe. There was a new security person joining them for the trip: Pink. Her primary responsibility would be when they were with the surrogate mother in Israel. After spending the night at the apartment in Paris, they would all fly to Tel Aviv to meet the surrogate mother. They would then fly back to Paris where Matan and Yonatan would take the train to Brussels. They said they wanted to learn about the countryside that they couldn't clearly make out from 30,000 feet. Green reviewed specific timelines they would follow. Before flying back to Virginia, Yonatan and Matan would return to Paris for a final overnight with the Jenners. The boys hoped that they would get some time in Brussels to relax and enjoy themselves. It was beginning to look like another trip that had a jam-packed agenda. They even had a meeting with the Chief Rabbi of Paris. Yonatan was ready to put his foot down and say it was their honeymoon.

Matan pulled Yonatan back to their bedroom for another time of love making before they left for the airport. Matan had taken the notion of honeymoon very seriously and had kept Yonatan in bed for hours on end. They kept a champagne bottle nearby in a bucket of ice. When they weren't making love, they recounted each and everything they could remember about the ceremony and the reception afterwards. They knew they were probably forgetting quite a bit. The reception had been quite a revelation. One would mention someone's name and off they would go again on another story of their special day. Matan told Yonatan they needed to spend part of their time in Brussels writing down their memories. He was afraid that over time they would forget these important details. They decided to also write thank you notes and ask that people write their memories of the ceremony and reception to mail them back. They both wanted to always remember everything about the weekend. That was impossible but courageous on their parts.

It was their first-time meeting Lester's partner, David. They would not have envisioned them as partners. Lester was their intrepid Boy Scout friend, also known as, Shiloh. He was so handsome in a swimmer kind of way. His buff body, perennial suntan, and curly blond hair was offset by a broken nose that almost gave the impression of a Picasso painting. His partner, David, was 45 years old. He was a banker and quite handsome. He had a dad body; he definitely wasn't a swimmer. It was evident that both men were madly in love. Lester had been a little reticent introducing them because he had led Yonatan and Matan to believe his partner was also a college student. David was effusive in his praise of Yonatan and Matan; he said they would have to get together when they returned to the country after their honeymoon.

Neither Yonatan nor Matan could say exactly what the Chuppah had looked like. They had been distracted by so many other things during the service. They knew that Martine had sent out squares of fabric to people and asked them to draw, paint or print messages. She had done a wonderful job putting them together and was going to quilt the entire thing. Martine had worn a tuxedo for the ceremony as she held one of the posts. She had a full square body. She stood all of 5'4" and topped that with a flat top haircut. Many of the people at the ceremony didn't realize that Martine was female. Her girlfriend, Genevieve, was a lip stick lesbian. When Martine and Genevieve took to the dance floor people moved out of the way. They could have competed in a national dance contest and probably won. Yonatan and Matan sat back and watched in awe. They were the first to jump up to shout and cheer when they finished one of their dances.

Max Lambert had seen their college friend, Lee Humbert, and was completely gob smacked. Lee was a political science major and a veteran. He was older than most of the undergraduate students and acted like an older brother to many of the guys in the LGBT group. He hoped to get accepted into law school. Gino was helping him prepare for the LSAT. Lee's back was ramrod straight and he still exercised daily to maintain his admirable physique. Max and Lee would made eyes at each other and then each would look away. Slowly, they kept moving closer to each other. Finally, when Max went up to the bar to get another glass of champagne, he found Lee was in line in front of him. They didn't speak. Lee asked the bartender for a drink and then turned and handed Max a glass of champagne. He smiled, spoke to Max in French, and asked if he would like to find a place where they could talk. Max could only nod his head. Max thought Lee looked like Hans.

In preparing for the weekend, Mr. Cohen had suggested to Black and Green they should identify extra security for the event so that Black could spend most of the time with Tim and their new ward, Jeremiah. Mr. Cohen knew of Black's initial injury and the recent re-injury. He wanted Black to heal completely because he was so good at his job. Even though not working, Black could not turn off his well-trained mind. He was constantly checking on things. Green stopped by their table several times and quietly spoke to Black. He was telling him to wind it back and enjoy the time with his new family and that everything was under control. Black would be good for about five minutes and then his security scan would start again. Tim finally got him on the dance floor for a slow dance. Tim had moves that distracted Black so that he actually enjoyed himself. Tim was smiling and enjoying this special time with his partner. Their new son was enjoying watching all of the same and opposite sex couples on the dance floor. Jeremiah had never experienced such a loving group of people who all got along. His only regret was that he was alone; he was thinking of the cute waiter from the restaurant. He felt a great desire to be dancing cheek to cheek with that fine-looking boy. He knew that since he was now living with Tim the chances to find a boyfriend were exponentially higher. That made him smile and when Tim and Black came up and asked him to join them on the dance floor, he didn't object to being seen dancing with such old dudes.

Everything was going very well except that Matan was missing and Yonatan was looking for him. Matan had started off going table to table thanking people for attending. People were mesmerized that on his special day that Matan would take the time to speak with them. The conversations were not about the ceremony but about their lives. He would hold their hands, look in

their eyes, and have a meaningful conversation. Now he was missing. Yonatan was advancing to full panic mode. He realized his breathing had accelerated and his heart was pounding. He was moving quickly about the room. He couldn't help himself. Green picked up on Yonatan's movement and scurried across the room to be with him. He was trying not to attract attention but he knew Yonatan was moments away from having an event. Green also knew it would probably be a major one.

"I can't find him. Where is Matan?" Green heard the panic in Yonatan's voice. Green grabbed Yonatan's elbow and guided him to a large public area outside of the banquet room. There they saw Matan hanging onto a huge black man, laughing and hugging him. Both Yonatan and Green were astounded.

"Yonatan, oh my God, you won't believe it." Matan was giggling. "His name is...his name is..." Matan could not get the words out.

The line-backer sized man smiled and stuck out his hand to Yonatan. "Hi, my name is Yellow." Both Yonatan and Matan were like giggling adolescent boys. They fell into each other's arms laughing and giggling. For Yonatan, the panic attack had completely stopped.

"Stop, you are going to make me piss my pants." Matan couldn't help himself and then ran to the men's room which was where he had first encountered Yellow. Yellow stood back and couldn't quite make out what was so hilarious. Green was grinning. Yonatan was chasing Matan into the men's room. Shortly after meeting Yellow and finishing his tour of the people who were at their party, Matan announced he was tired and needed to go home.

Yonatan had Green notify Lester. Lester had arranged that everyone would form an avenue of people for Yonatan and Matan to walk through. Lester thought if they only had swords drawn to crown the avenue it would have been ideal. The band kicked off playing, "Your Love Keeps Lifting Me Higher." Yonatan loved that Jackie Wilson song and he and Matan were holding hands as they danced through the line of people as they left the Williamsburg Lodge. They were smiling the entire time they danced out of the building. They had practiced their dance steps for the departure the same way they had practiced for their first dance: "Be Young, Be Foolish, Be Happy". Yonatan loved Beach Music and had hired a band to play their favorite music. A limousine was waiting to take them home. Pink, another new security guard opened the back door of the car and Yonatan made a grand gesture to let Matan know he was to enter first. The back window was lowered and both guys were hanging out waving at people as the car pulled out of the drive. Just at that moment fireworks were ignited for the grand send off. The party continued until late in the night.

Now it was Tuesday morning and the fellows were packed and ready to board a plane.

Judy said she had one more thing to take care of before leaving. She had arranged for Jeremiah to see a doctor to follow up on the care she had provided. Jeremiah had spent a lot of time on the dance floor with Tim and Black and the wounds on his feet were a mess. Even when Tim and Black stopped dancing, Jeremiah stayed on the floor and would dance solo or with other people. He was in heaven. He felt like a free bird for once in his life. On Sunday morning, he could barely walk. Judy knew better than to scold him. She patiently tended to and rewrapped the wounds and she then gave him a stern warning to stay off his feet. Matan showed him all of the gay books that he had purchased from Tim's bookstore and Jeremiah laid on the sofa reading and only getting up to go to the bathroom or go to bed. He had even insisted he was too sick to come to the table and asked that a tray of food be brought to him. He never put down the books he was reading. Matan would smile and remember his own voracious reading of the gay canon.

Late that Tuesday afternoon, Jeremiah waited for Tim to pick him up to take him to the doctor. It was decided that after the medical appointment, Jeremiah would move into Tim's house while Black was in Paris and Brussels. Black had been told to stay home but he insisted he was up for the trip. He didn't want to be seen as expendable.

"Jeremiah, you are to call me if there are any problems. We will be at the airport waiting for our plane but I can make some calls before flying to Paris. I am serious. The doctors are good and I want to make sure you are going to be alright."

"Yes, ma'am. I promise. I will call you if there is any problem." Jeremiah leapt from the sofa and hugged Dr. Jenner. He had tears in his eyes as he kissed her goodbye. Matan came up to hug him goodbye and slipped an envelope into his trouser pocket. Yonatan gave him a hug also and slipped an envelope into his other trouser pocket.

There was scurrying as everyone traveling to Paris packed the vehicles and were driven to the airport. The house felt empty. Jeremiah sat on the sofa and removed the envelopes from his pockets. Inside the envelope from Matan was a note welcoming him to their "family" and saying that he would always be their brother. There were also ten \$100 bills. Jeremiah gasped. He had never seen that much money before. His trembling hands then opened the envelope from Yonatan. He found a note that was an IOU. The IOU was redeemable for a trip to Brussels during the summer so that he could spend some time in Europe. Jeremiah had never felt so loved yet so alone in his life.

When Tim arrived, he found a sniveling mess of a boy. Jeremiah hugged him and did not want to let him go. Jeremiah handed him the notes and the money.

"This will pay you for taking care of me. I know it isn't enough but it is all I have."

Tim took the money and then stuffed it back into Jeremiah's pocket.

"It is yours. You will need it."

After Tim helped Jeremiah cleanup for the appointment they headed to Norfolk. The doctor concurred with Dr. Jenner's assessment about Jeremiah's feet and told him to stay off of them until the swelling disappeared. He commended Dr. Jenner for her good care and then prescribed another broad-spectrum antibiotic for the wound infection. Jeremiah had a follow-up appointment for the following week. When Jeremiah tried to pay for the doctor's appointment, he was told it was all taken care of. He knew that he was a total mess when his eyes welled with tears again. He saw himself as a tough street kid and here he was crying on a regular basis. He was struggling to accept this level of kindness. He had not experienced kindness and love in his life.

It was sunset when they finally got back to the car. Tim had put Jeremiah in a wheel chair and rolled him to the connected garage. Jeremiah looked at Tim with a hopeful look on his face and asked if they could eat at the same restaurant where they had gone the prior week. Tim laughed and asked if the money was burning a hole in his pocket. Jeremiah assured him that was not the case.

They were seated and the waiter from the prior visit came to their table. Jeremiah glowed. The waiter asked Jeremiah if he was okay since his feet were wrapped in bandages and he had on surgical stockings. "I am great. It is nothing. Well, it is just a little problem. I really like you." The last sentence slipped out before Jeremiah could stop himself. The waiter, Bobby, finally processed what he had heard and grinned. "I like you too."

It was as if Tim was no longer present. For the rest of the meal, Jeremiah was tracking every move that Bobby made. It was a slow night at the restaurant and Bobby spent a lot of time at their table. When he brought the check, Jeremiah pulled out a \$100 bill and put it on the tray. Bobby's eyes grew large and he swallowed.

"I'll be right back with your change."

Jeremiah was conferring with Tim about how much tip he should leave. He also asked if Tim had a piece of paper and an ink pen because he wanted to give Bobby his telephone number. Tim was prepared to go to the hostess stand to get those when Bobby returned to the table. On top was a card that had a telephone number.

"I would like to go out with you. I have Saturday night off if your dad will let you go." He turned to Tim, "I promise I am a good guy and I want to take Jeremiah to the movies. I promise I am a nice person." He had a charming, appealing look.

Tim smiled and said that he and Jeremiah would talk later and that Jeremiah would call him. Jeremiah was incredulous that Tim was taking this so calmly. He had been prepared to say yes and now Bobby had thrown the decision into Tim's hands. Bobby walked off to take care of another table. Jeremiah was crestfallen thinking that Tim would not let him go.

"Jeremiah, it is okay. I am going to say yes, but maybe you shouldn't look so eager. Besides we have to talk about the fact that you are still underage. Keep him hanging for a couple of days and then you can call him and ask him which movie and tell him he has to have you home by 11 pm."

Jeremiah wanted to jump for joy but he also thought Tim was mean by setting such an early time for him to be home. Jeremiah was being the typical teenager. Tim helped Jeremiah stand and then watched as his young charge went up to Bobby, kissed him on the mouth, and told him that he couldn't wait to see him again. Tim stood by the door and just shook his head. Love was all around.

Suggested Music:

"Your Love Keeps Lifting Me Higher"

Performer: Jackie Wilson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzDVaKRApcg>

Wednesday, December 18
The Light of Joy

These are the things you are to do:

Speak the truth to each other,

and render true and sound judgment in your courts;

do not plot evil against each other,

and do not love to swear falsely.

Jeremiah 1:16-17

Erick knew that he had made a huge mistake. On Monday he had planned to write the questions for the last exam but had ended up in bed most of the day. There were too many things going on the prior week and weekend for him to be fully prepared. He gave each class a different set of exam questions even though it might be the same course number. He knew about sharing exam questions among students especially since exams had started the week before. He hated being cynical but he knew that with enough money and ingenuity students could find out anything they wanted. He had seen that the day before when he handed out a fill-in-the-blank exam when students were expecting a multiple-choice test like he had used the previous Thursday. The looks he got were murderous. He inwardly smiled.

Today was even worse. He heard several students use the f-bomb when he stood at the black board and wrote a simple statement: "Describe the philosophical search for truth during the Enlightenment Period." Of course, he was going to be punished in the end because he would have to read each paper. He told the students that their responses had to be between 1,500 and 2,000 words. Hands flew up across the classroom. Many students thought it was a trick. He saw a few students who brightened and actually smiled when he wrote the statement on the board. Those were the ones who knew the material inside out and wanted to show their prowess at assimilating knowledge into a meaningful essay. Nash was nodding his head and smiling. He immediately starting writing in his blue book.

Erick had actually smiled when he wrote the exam statement the day before. He had the "brilliant" idea while he was sitting in a class where students were trying to fill in the blanks of the complex word puzzles that were a mixture of sentences and quotations. Erick's years of doing crossword puzzles had trained him well for writing the exam. Many of the blanks needed clever thinking to lead to the correct response. Erick had never thought of himself as clever in conversations; it was when he sat down to write that this talent presented itself. He heard lots of huffing and puffing. Some students actually threw their papers on his desk as they were leaving. Apparently, not many students in that class appreciated his wit and cleverness. He was already thinking of the grading curve that might be needed on that iteration of the exam.

Now today, he had another unhappy group of students. He didn't fret about the final student evaluations for his course. The department chairman had already told him that his contract for next year was being prepared. He also knew that the department chair would appreciate the extra work that Erick had put on himself during the exam and grading period. Many of the professors gave a multiple-choice test and used bubble sheets for the students to complete. Grading was a simple

matter of putting a punch form on top and marking the incorrect answers and then doing some simple arithmetic. Not Dr. Emmanuelson!

That morning Todd had been frothing at the mouth as he headed to his final exam. Erick wondered how it was that Todd was so brilliant yet was so uncertain of his intellect. Todd had an “A” in every course. Perhaps it was this dogged pursuit of excellence that made him such a stellar student. He never assumed anything.

They each finished exams that morning. They met in the student cafeteria for lunch. Todd was all smiles and knew that he had aced the exam. He recognized that he would over study and then wind himself into a knot of uncertainty but it paid off in the end. Todd was already sitting at the table when Erick arrived. Bowls of soup and a large Farmer’s salad were on the table. There was also a basket of hot Italian bread. Todd was feeling so good he had also bought a large slice of chocolate cake with peanut butter frosting for them to share for dessert.

Erick slid into his seat and grinned at Todd.

“Were they ready to string you up?”

Erick laughed.

“Let’s say they were caught by surprise. Especially those who had purchased exam questions.” They both laughed remembering when they had done that very thing.

Nash walked up to the table with a tray of food and asked if he could join them.

“Of course, do you have any more exams?”

“Nope, your doosey of an exam was the last. I am heading home this afternoon. Please think of me over the holidays. I have decided to tell my parents the day before I return. I have a scholarship so I don’t have to worry about a place to live or tuition for school for the next semester.”

“Dr. Emmanuelson?”

Erick looked up and saw an attractive young woman.

“Yes?”

“I am Jan Chamblee. I am in one of your freshman classes. I know you have a lot of students and wouldn’t know me.”

Erick knew exactly who she was.

“I know your face, name and grades this semester. It has been my pleasure to teach someone so eager to learn.”

Jan’s smile spread across her face.

“I just wanted to say I enjoyed your class very much. Your exam question was great but my answer may be a little off-track. I added some additional information we did not cover in class but I felt it was important to better explain my thoughts.”

“Outside resources are always welcome in my course. Most students only want to read the book and then quote to me what some another college professor has written. What additional resources did you bring?”

“I brought African wisdom and knowledge. It was from the pre-Enlightenment Period but informed what some of those great philosophers were thinking. I did a graph on a sheet of paper that outlined the transfer of knowledge over time. I have bibliographies if you need to verify my sources.”

Erick sat for a moment wondering where these philosophers came from in Africa.

“So, you are a freshman, and you know the critical thinkers in Africa from times before the Enlightenment and you were able to trace the transfer of this knowledge over time?”

“Yes sir.”

“Have you eaten? If you would like, get something, bring it back and join us, please. I am interested in learning more.”

Jan was all smiles as she dropped her books in a chair and headed to the salad bar. When she returned, she found Erick and Todd in a deep discussion. She saw Todd make emphatic statements to Erick and then grab his hand. She shyly sat down not wanting to disturb them. Nash was at the table and she knew he was a football player who was in her history class.

“I would like for you to meet my partner, Todd Reynolds. He is a senior math major. Also, I am not sure if you know Nash Gillette. He was also in your history section.”

They nodded their heads at each other and said it was pleasure to be introduced. Todd was preparing himself for a boring conversation between three history nerds.

“So, tell me about truth in Africa philosophy.”

Jan gave a hearty laugh and told Dr. Emmanuelson that was a course in and of itself.

Erick laughed at his overbroad request. Todd became interested in her intelligent response.

“Okay, I assume there was more than one pathway for this knowledge to be transferred from Africa to Europe and did this knowledge follow the traditional trade routes?”

The four then spent an hour talking about knowledge transfer in general and the philosophy of truth specifically. She had correctly assumed that Erick was Jewish and talked about the impact of the Jews in Egyptian exile on the culture of learning and knowledge transfer into the land currently known as the Middle East. All four were hungering for more knowledge when they realized the afternoon was slipping by. Todd had joined in the conversation and talked about the transfer of mathematical knowledge from Arabia to the continent.

“I need to leave. My granny will be worried. She knows that today is my last day for this semester and is planning a celebratory dinner.”

“The holidays are going to be very busy for us but please stop by my office when you return next semester because I think we have many things to learn and share with each other.”

Jan got up from her seat. She leaned over to Dr. Emmanuelson and said, “Not only are you kind and smart but you have great taste in men.”

Todd jumped up and hugged her. He then kissed her cheek. “Remind me to tell you how I fell into his arms the first time we met.” Todd gave her a wicked grin and she returned it in kind. Nash pulled her in for a hug and said it felt like she was a sister. He then asked if he could talk to her in private. She nodded but gave him a wary look. Jan had just met this big man and didn’t know what he wanted to ask that was so private. They got up from the table and moved to a quiet corner of the cafeteria.

“Jan, I know that you don’t know me but I feel that somehow we are connected. There is a huge athletic dinner and dance coming up and I was planning to go alone. I am required to attend. Would you consider being my date? I think we would have fun.”

Jan looked at him pondering the question. “Okay, so let’s get something out on the table. Are you straight or gay? I am only asking because you seem to be so comfortable with Dr. Emmanuelson and Todd. You might just be an enlightened white straight man and if you are, I say hallelujah for that. Also, I am focused on school and taking care of my granny right now.” She could see Nash’s eyes were wide and scared. “Also, I don’t know if I have anything special enough to wear when I am on a date with a football hero like you.” She smiled and grabbed Nash’s hand.

“I am gay.” His voice faltered. He hadn’t said that enough to get used to it. She grinned and hugged him.

“I am proud to have you as my date and as my gay brother. You are a good man, Nash Gillette.” Nash shared the information about the dinner and told her that he would pick her up. She kissed Nash on the cheek before walking back to pick up her things and head out. Nash was right behind her and gave her one last kiss before she left.

Nash then kissed Erick and Todd on the mouth and told them that he loved them. There was much hooting from the “football table” and Nash hollered that they were just jealous that he had three people to kiss and that it was only lunch time. The football players laughed and told him to have a good holiday.

Erick felt that the entire semester of teaching had been worth it to have that very discussion and the burgeoning friendships. Erick and Todd held hands as they left the cafeteria and went by Erick’s office to pick up some papers before heading home. They were in a loving, caring mood.

“Just think, we are finished with the semester. Well, I am anyway. You have to read 30 awful papers. I hope you learned your lesson about essay exam questions.”

“Twenty-eight potentially mediocre papers. I will save Jan and Nash’s papers for last. Hopefully some other papers will be as good. I can always hope.”

They arrived at the apartment and put on gym shorts and tee shirts. After lighting a fire, they grabbed a quilt and cuddled on the floor. They enjoyed talking and teasing each other about their habits. The comments led to laughter which led to rolling around and hugging. They knew each other so well after only a few weeks and the honesty of who they were individually and collectively led them to understand that they brought out the best in each other.

Suggested Music:

Jeremiah Symphony

Composer: Leonard Bernstein

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XZUhHAftgI>

Thursday, December 19
The Light of Joy

*When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers,
I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body,
and I will establish his kingdom.*

2 Samuel 7:12

“I heard from Yonatan and Matan.”

“Wha deed the hav to say?” Todd’s language was garbled as he brushed his teeth.

“They were in Brussels. They arrived in Paris, then traveled to Tel Aviv and are now in Brussels. It must be nice to have money to travel the world.”

“No jealousy. It is unbecoming.”

“I know. But wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could spend next summer in Europe. We should look into fellowships. I would love to spend some time doing research in Austria. My dad’s family was from there. If you could get some short-term position there, we could use that as a base and travel throughout eastern Europe.”

“I don’t know where I would get a fellowship. I am graduating in May. Who knows what I am going to do next summer? I sure don’t. We need to be focused on next fall - suppose I get accepted at the University of Nebraska.”

Erick stopped drying himself.

“What do you mean the University of Nebraska?” Todd could hear the upset in Erick’s voice.

“You never know.”

“Todd. Look at me. I need to know so that I can try to get a job there. I didn’t know you were applying to Nebraska.” Erick then noticed the twinkle in Todd’s eyes. He was being played.

Two could play the game. “I think we could live in New Kent County – maybe with Gino. That way I could continue to teach here and you could go to school in Richmond.”

“Nairobi?”

“Nope. Norfolk?”

“Not in your life. New Cairo?”

“As opposed to Old Cairo? Newport News?”

“Ewww. I would not live there. How about Naples as in Italy?”

“Hmmm, we could live off your trust fund.”

“Nope. How about Nanking?”

“Not going to live in China. We need to think about colleges in Nirvirginia.”

“Where the hell is Nirvirginia?”

“You started it by using a school starting with a ‘N’. So let’s say N-Virginia.”

“Okay. But I need to finish getting those applications submitted.”

“When are the deadlines?”

“Deadlines are for amateurs. I am sending application packages that will blow folks away. Hopefully, someone will take the bait and if they don’t, I will have to look further afield.”

“Further afield means that we can both commute to our respective colleges. I am serious.”

“We haven’t discussed this before. We will make this work, Erick. Remember, no pain no gain.”

Erick nodded his head. Of course, he and Todd had been together less than two months. Why should he have expected that they would be planning for the next year? They fit together so well he had made assumptions. He put on his underwear and went to the living room. He was slumped in a chair when Todd walked into the room.

“Look at me, Erick.” Erick slowly lifted his head and saw the love in Todd’s eyes. “I don’t plan to leave you but I also can’t just let go of my education and career aspirations. We aren’t even two months into our relationship. You may get tired of me and want someone else. You may not be able to tolerate my crazy behaviors when I get stressed out. You will probably find someone younger and Jewish who will be easier to live with and is of the same faith. You are so perfect to me but I am just this silly undergraduate school boy from Virginia. You are so far above me. I am trying to be realistic.”

Erick stood and looked directly at Todd.

“You are my shining star, an ever-fixed mark in my life. I want you in my life forever. There is nothing in you that is not perfect. You definitely are not silly. I will travel to Nanking or wherever. Please don’t make it Nebraska or North Dakota though. I don’t want to deal with a winter on the upper plains. But I will if I have to.” Erick smiled and Todd returned his gaze with a wide grin. “I swear today that I will follow you to the ends of the earth if you will have me. We are meant to be together. This isn’t some school fling. This is forever for me, Todd.

Todd walked up to Erick and held him in his arms.

“As long as we both shall live. My love for you is forever.” Todd kissed Erick’s eye lids. He found that he, too, was emotional and Erick kissed his closed eyes.

“I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

“How the hell did we get on this topic today?”

They stood with their foreheads touching and then they both started nodding.

“Let’s get the fuck out of this apartment. I am thinking we need to go to a place that starts with a ‘N’. This apartment has bad juju today. We need to see the ocean.”

Erick laughed and asked if they were going to see the Norwegian Lady Statue N-Virginia Beach?

Erick laughed as they got into the Honda. He needed a little bit of control in his life because even though they had been joking it was a very serious discussion that they needed to have. Todd asked where they were going and Erick would only tell him they were going to the ocean. Erick really didn’t know the area very well but he knew the general direction they were going. He drove southeast. Luckily, the roads were well marked as they headed to Nags Head. When they reached the toll booth on the Chesapeake Expressway, Erick opened his wallet and gulped. He had no cash. Todd grinned and handed the toll collector a \$20. Erick reminded himself that if he was going to run-away, he needed to take money.

When they crossed the Wright Memorial Bridge, they could smell the salt air of the ocean. They took the beach road and could see where the waves had washed away some of the dunes. It was Erick’s first time at Nags Head. Todd had been there a few times. They stopped for gas and Erick asked about a place for lunch. It was the middle of December and many places were boarded up for the winter. They stopped at a shack that had a sign in front.

“Do you reckon these are ‘Lord of the Ring’ fans since it is called Gandalf’s?”

“Duh. To be so smart sometimes you are kinda dumb. Come on Mr. Tolkien, let’s get some Ent-draught and Lembas.” Todd was grinning and his sunny disposition was contagious.

They grabbed a booth and realized nobody else was in the restaurant. It was late for lunch but too early for dinner.

Just as their soup and sandwiches arrived, Pate and Timmy walked in. They did a double take looking at Erick and Todd.

“Oh my gosh, what brings you down here? Why didn’t you call? Can we join you?”

They were all drinking mugs of coffee as the restaurant wasn’t well insulated and they were sitting by a window. Erick could feel the breeze as the curtains flapped and he told them it made him think of ‘Old Cape Cod’.

“Do you know that song?” Erick looked at Todd.

They all laughed as Todd started singing. His light tenor voice was perfect. The waitress came up and started harmonizing with him. Everyone was laughing and cheerful when they finished.

“I am Nan from Nantucket so I know all of those old songs including the dirty ones that rhyme with Nantucket.” Erick guffawed. They decided she was one of their favorite waitresses.

“Come by the house. Are you spending the night? You must spend the night. We have all of these bedrooms. We’ll have a seafood feast for dinner.”

“We didn’t bring any clothes.”

“No worry, we will find something for you to wear. We’ll build a fire tonight and sit in the living room and get to know each other better.”

It was an offer they couldn’t refuse. Timmy was going to ride back to the house with them while Pate went to the office to finish some work. Pate said that business was really slow the last two weeks of December and he only had a skeleton staff covering the office so it wouldn’t take very long.

Erick was driving north on the beach road when Timmy asked him to pull into the parking lot of an art gallery. They went in and Timmy went up to the counter and spoke to a woman. She handed him an envelope. He was smiling.

“Let me show you the gallery.” Timmy led them through the rooms showing the works of different artists. “This is some of my art.”

Todd looked at it and then at Timmy and then at the art work again.

“Wow. That is incredible. Your style reminds me of an artist whose work I have seen in Northern Virginia. A woman. I can’t think of her name.”

“Felicia Preston?”

“Yes, that’s her name. How do you know her?”

“Because I have studied under her. She was here this summer for a show. Wait until you see her painting that Pate bought. You will be able to pick it out immediately.”

Erick and Todd became more and more impressed with Timmy each time they saw him. He was a quiet, introverted person who was obviously well educated and talented but came across as a man child. Erick and Todd thought he was a lot like Matan; a creature of a different universe or planet that had been put here for some unexplained purpose.

When they pulled into the drive Pate was getting out of his Jeep.

“Let’s walk on the beach. The ocean is beautiful today.” Pate quickly walked them through the living room, onto the deck and then down the steps to the beach. Erick stood in awe. He removed his shoes because he said that he needed sand between his toes. Todd did the same and then Timmy and Pate followed.

“Okay, we will all have pneumonia tomorrow.” They laughed and started walking.

“It is so different than the northern beaches. This is incredible. The hard-packed sand made walking easy as they stayed at the water’s edge.” Todd threw his arm across Erick’s shoulder and they walked along bouncing hips. Timmy and Pate were matching their walking style. They laughed when small waves washed across their feet. Todd would yelp and jump out of the water. He declared it arctic in temperature. When they returned to the house, Pate grabbed the water hose for them to rinse their feet. Todd again said it was frigid water while Erick said it felt warm. He knew from freezing cold water.

Pate brought in firewood and soon there was a nice fire in the living room fireplace. Timmy fixed drinks and canapes. They immediately recognized the art work over the fireplace and Todd was doing a close range inspection of the techniques used. Just as it started to get dark, Timmy plugged in the lights for the Christmas Tree. It was huge and fully decorated. Todd was ecstatic and grabbed

Erick. Todd recognized the music playing and started to sing along. Everyone was in a wonderful mood.

Erick helped Timmy get out crockery and silverware for the table. Pate had made himself busy in the kitchen. Todd wandered into the den and exclaimed about the library of books. Everything in the house seemed to be curated. It looked ready to be photographed for a magazine spread. Todd figured that Timmy's artist eye had decided where everything was placed. He didn't know that Pate and Timmy together had decorated the house. Todd realized that he and Erick lived in a beautiful apartment but this was a step above. This was "fine" living.

By the time they sat down to eat, they each were ready to dig into the food. Pate had broiled an assortment of seafood, had baked potatoes, salad and Cole slaw. Erick was slowing down when Todd reached over with his fork and snagged the last scallop. They smiled at each other and then Erick leaned over and kissed Todd on the cheek. They both said it at the same time:

"I will love you always."

It was a tender moment for them.

Pate brought out a pear clafoutis with fresh whipped cream. The French Press coffee pot was quickly emptied and Pate started another pot.

"How do you eat like this and stay so thin and healthy?"

"We exercise daily. We have recently joined the YMCA so we can use the pool. The ocean is too cold in the winter. We also walk five miles on the beach each day no matter the weather. When we have a nor'easter it can be tough going. Sometimes I am afraid that Timmy is going to blow away. He is persistent though and never gives up. In fact, sometimes he is the one to motivate me. All he has to say is what I am not going to get if I don't walk. Man, I would walk ten miles for that." He smiled broadly at Timmy.

"We just started swimming at the school gymnasium. When the swim team is not using the pool, we can swim. I have Erick turning into a merman. He is quite good to have never been formally trained. We enjoy swimming but also just playing the water. Erick almost died the first day I gave him a speedo to wear but he has gotten used to it. In fact, he looks damn good in it. We also swim with one of Erick's students. The guy is a football player and is huge but he is great in the water. Sometimes it feels like an ocean liner going by because he displaces so much water. It is something to see all of that man in his little speedo."

They all laughed and relaxed while sipping a B&B.

Timmy told them it was Advent meditation time. Todd was all smiles.

They went into the living room and Timmy told them that after sharing the meditation at their home in Williamsburg, he went out the next day and bought a wreath and candles.

Timmy asked Todd to do the reading. When Todd finished Pate said it didn't apply to them because they weren't going to have any offspring.

"Well, Erick and I are going to have lots of children so it is nice that God will raise them up after we are gone."

“We are?”

“Yes, lover of mine. I want a house full of kids.”

Erick face was hardly wide enough to contain his grin.

Todd then talked about his love of children and that he always knew that he would have kids. He also knew that he would have to adopt them because he said he wasn't sticking his thing into some woman. He then said that since Erick was apparently barren given the number of times they had tried and failed to make a baby that they should start the adoption process soon. Erick moved down the sofa and sat between Todd's outstretched legs. He took Todd's arms and pulled them around his torso. He leaned back into his lover.

“This is why I love this man so much. We are the same. We are meant to be together.”

Timmy looked at Pate and said that he must be barren also given the number of times that Pate's big thing had been knocking at his door and he hadn't produced a child yet. He suggested that they should also look at adopting. Pate had a look of complete surprise on his face like the idea had never crossed his mind.

“I came from such a FUBAR family I didn't think I should raise children.”

“You are the kindest, most giving, and moral man I know. You would be a great dad.”

The conversation ended as the fellows sat looking at the brightly lit tree and the dying embers in the fireplace. The hour was getting late.

“Should we try one more time to make babies before we try to adopt?”

Timmy smiled and said they should try for the rest of their lives.

Todd and Erick were shown to the guest room. They, too, tried to make babies all night not caring if it was successful because their love making was like a healing balm. They fell asleep in each other's arms; all of the drama from early in the day had been washed away.

Suggested Music:

“There is a Balm in Gilead”

Performers: Jessye Norman and Kathleen Battle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HI1UufOrIgg>

Friday, December 20
The Light of Joy

Therefore, you are great, O Lord God.

For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you,

according to all that we have heard with our ears.

2 Samuel 7:18-22

“I have something to ask you?”

“It is before breakfast, I have not had coffee, and you are already asking me questions?”

Erick smiled, slipped from the bed and was on his knees.

“Will you marry me, Todd Reynolds? I love you and like Ruth and Naomi, I will follow you anywhere. Even to Nebraska. You are the only man for me.”

Todd was lying in bed when Erick asked him the question. He was stunned by the question. He then slid from the bed and was on his knees beside Erick. He turned and said a simple yes.

They were both startled by the unexpected ease with which it happened. No big dinner at the Williamsburg Inn, no party where one would ask the other in front of friends and relatives, no planned trip where the question was popped. It was in the guest bedroom of people they had recently met and after a night of making love.

They hugged each other and both started laughing and crying at the same time.

“I am supposed to have a ring to give you. I don’t. I will give you my heart. We will find rings. I looked the other day but didn’t like anything that I saw.”

“We both know that we are in love and plan to have a commitment ceremony. That is what is important. We have made a covenant with each other.”

Erick let out a huge sigh.

“It is settled. We are getting married.”

Todd started singing, “I’m getting married in the morning.” Erick put his hand over Todd’s mouth to hush him. They were both laughing as they rolled around on the floor.

The more it was said the more it sank into their inner being about the commitment they had just made. They both knew it was right.

They took a shower and then put on their clothes from the day before. It didn't matter to them. They went to the kitchen and found Timmy and Pate drinking coffee. Timmy gave them an intense look and then started smiling.

"Okay, I only have one question. Who asked whom?"

Erick and Todd blushed.

Pate was slow on the uptake but as soon as his brain engaged, he reached out and hugged them.

"This is great. Did you really do that while you were here?"

Erick and Todd both nodded their heads.

"Well, this calls for a celebratory breakfast." Pate reached into the refrigerator and started removing food to cook. Timmy plugged in the lights of the Christmas tree to add to the celebration.

Erick and Todd found themselves kissing for no reason other than they loved each other. They couldn't believe that it had happened.

Pate and Timmy had a million questions. Erick and Todd had very few answers. It was all too fresh.

"Well, it is right that since you got engaged at our home that you are welcome to come spend your honeymoon by the ocean. You can have our house for two weeks next summer."

"Where will we be?"

"I have no idea, Timmy, but we will figure that out."

"That is why I love you so much. This goodness just flows from you. Yes, you can take me on vacation while these two gents enjoy sun, surf and sex."

By mid-morning, Erick and Todd were ready to leave but they wanted to walk the beach before heading home. Pate and Timmy agreed to take them on a five mile walk. The beach boys were very intentional walkers. This was no mere stroll on the sand. Erick and Todd were winded when they returned to the house. After hugs and kisses and a promise to get together over the holidays the Honda pulled out of the drive and headed north. They rode along each reflecting on what had happened that morning. They turned to look at each other and then would burst out laughing.

"How do we tell folks? Timmy and Pate agreed to keep it quiet until we make a public announcement."

"I don't know. How do we do this? Should I ask your parents for your hand in marriage? I know there are protocols for this sort of thing in the south. Actually, I would like to ask your parent's permission to marry you. It makes it more real. Let's invite them to dinner tonight. We will call them as soon as we get home."

“Maybe we should wait until after Christmas. I don’t want Christmas Day turned into this big hoo-haw because of our engagement. We do best when we have a plan, so let’s go home and write this out. What do you think?”

“Good idea, Batman.”

“Where the hell did that come from?”

They both laughed because Todd didn’t know the appropriate Batman response.

The rest of the drive was filled with laughter as they floated ideas about their ceremony. They arrived home thinking about the prior 24 hours and how their lives had changed so significantly. They wandered around the apartment not knowing what to do. Late afternoon, Todd made a tray of canapes, poured glasses of wine, and got a notebook that he was now calling the wedding book to start their planning. Time went by quickly as they jotted notes and ideas. They decided to talk with Matan since he and Yonatan had pulled off such a spectacular wedding though both knew they didn’t have the dollars to match what their friends had done. At least they could get some ideas that might be useful. They agreed to call Erick’s parents that night with the news because they wanted them present when it was announced to the world. They would need to purchase plane tickets.

Todd lit the Advent candles and Erick read the lesson. They both looked at each other and started laughing.

“What do you make of that reading?”

“I am like Pate last night. It doesn’t apply.”

The both pondered the reading. Finally, Erick spoke.

“I think it does. Todd, there is no one else like you. There are no other men for me except you. I worship you. You are of God and you are my God. With my eyes and ears and all of my senses you are the one for me.”

They blew out the candle and went to worship each other.

Suggested Music:

“Light and Gold”

Composer: Eric Whitaker

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0j2JRcC6wBs>

Saturday, December 21
Winter Solstice
The Light of Joy

*And now, O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true,
and you have promised this good thing to your servant;
now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant,
so that it may continue forever before you;
for you, O Lord God, have spoken,
and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever.*

2nd Samuel 7:28-29

Erick and Todd were slow to awaken. Erick was wrapped around Todd in bed and enjoying Todd's chest as a pillow for his sore head. He had drunk too much the night before. Finally, Erick realized Todd was fidgeting which meant he needed to take his morning piss. Erick readied himself before tickling Todd's sides, grabbed Todd's dick, and then jumped out of bed and before running to the bathroom. Erick was laughing so hard it was difficult for him to accurately aim at the bowl. Todd was right behind him and was spraying before he was fully in the bathroom.

"You know, sometimes you are the biggest child in the world. You are a jerk-wad and you are going to clean the bathroom floor or you don't get breakfast."

Erick smiled and then leaned over and kissed Todd. Todd simply sighed at the onslaught of that tongue. He turned and pulled Erick into a tight hug.

"Let's take a shower first. I think you need some help to get clean."

They lathered each other and then smashed their bodies together. When the water turned cool, they quickly stepped out of the shower and toweled each other dry. They both dropped their towels as Erick would use those to clean the floor. After shaving and brushing their teeth, they realized they weren't very hungry so they put on their sweat pants, brought in firewood for the day and cuddled on the sofa. Todd put on a pot of left-over stew which they would eat later for lunch. Erick awoke when he felt something punching him in the butt. Then he felt his sweats being lowered. It was sweet gentle loving making on a Saturday morning. They then fell asleep with Erick wrapped in Todd's arms. It was a safe place for each of them and they felt blessed to have each other. They ate lunch and decided to take a trip later in the afternoon to Norfolk for dinner and to see a movie.

Across the river, Tim had awoken early to make breakfast. Jeremiah was still sleeping. Tim realized that his sleep pattern was very different than Jeremiah's. When he got up at 2 a.m. for a nighttime piss he saw Jeremiah in the living room on the computer. The boy was wide awake. Tim grumbled that it was the middle of the night and for Jeremiah to turn off the computer and go to bed. Now, he sat at the kitchen table and was eating alone. He realized he knew nothing about raising a teenage boy. Hopefully, Black would be more helpful.

Tim had acted on impulse when he filed the foster care paperwork for Jeremiah. He saw a young gay boy who was in danger and had nowhere to turn. He acknowledged he would probably be a horrible social worker because he didn't understand boundaries. He thought, however, that between he and Black they could manage.

Around 11 a.m., Jeremiah came wandering into the living room. He had on a pair of pajama bottoms that were tented in the front. Jeremiah blushed as he pushed his erection down. He looked at Tim and blushed.

"Hi dad."

"Good morning Jer."

Jeremiah gave him a strange look. "Is that what you are going to call me?"

"Well, I could call you Prophet, or Jerry, or Jeremiah, or whatever you want to be called. What did the kids in school call you?"

"Queer. They called me fag or queer." Jeremiah turned and ran to his bedroom and slammed the door.

Well, that didn't go well, thought Tim. What an understatement. He was just trying to be cool but then had the realization he would never be a cool guy to Jeremiah. He was a dad, an old dude, a relic who had taken pity on him. Cool guys would be older teenagers with a car, some money, a tanned lean body, a brilliant smile. Someone like Bobby.

Just as Tim was feeling his worst the telephone rang. When he picked it up, he realized it was an international call. After making sure that Black was okay, they had a good conversation and Tim was able to tell him about the mistake that morning and that Jeremiah had a date that night. Tim was upfront and said he wasn't very good at being a parent and felt like he had made a mistake. Black talked him down and gave him a few pointers on parenting unruly teenagers.

Tim fixed lunch and then knocked on Jeremiah's door. There was no answer. He knocked again and heard a feeble reply. Tim opened the door and saw Jeremiah curled in a fetal position on the bed. He walked over and sat on the edge of the bed. He reached out and touched Jeremiah's shoulder.

"Can we talk about it?"

Jeremiah turned over and Tim saw the tears.

"I made lunch and I would like for us to eat together. Wash your face, come into the kitchen, and we'll talk."

Jeremiah continued to lie in the bed.

With a bit of directiveness in his voice, Tim said, "Now. Get up now."

Jeremiah was startled by this new tone of voice and jumped out of bed.

When he appeared at the table, he looked at the food and turned his nose up.

"Eat. Now."

Jeremiah took the first bite of the sandwich and then started smiling. He finished everything that Tim had prepared and then stretched out in his chair. His butt was on the edge of the seat and his legs were straight out. His back was straight and his head was thrown back so he was looking at the ceiling. He was a tall drink of water when he did that.

“First off, I apologize. I should not have called you by that name. I will call you Jeremiah from now on unless you give me another name you want me to use.”

Jeremiah now was sitting up in the chair, feet flat on the floor.

“Second, I hate that you are called names in school. There are a couple of ways of dealing with it. You can skulk away and be ashamed or you can own it.”

“What do you mean own it?”

“Are you gay?”

Jeremiah rolled his eyes.

“Don’t roll your eyes at me. Comprende?”

A chastised Jeremiah said he understood.

“Take those derogatory names and turn them into proud labels to wear. When they call you a fag, don’t hunker down and be ashamed. A faggot was a piece of wood that was used when they burned gays at the stake. Use that as a teachable moment and tell them the meaning of the word and that you are as strong as an oak tree. An oak tree they cannot take down or burn. A fag is a British cigarette but you are on your own in figuring out what to say about that. Only make it decent and nothing about putting something long and round in your mouth.”

Jeremiah snickered and then gave Tim a lot of inquisitiveness.

“Tell me more.”

“Let’s get a dictionary, the thesaurus and turn on the computer. We can spend some time looking up word origins and meanings. Straight guys hate nothing worse than a witty comeback. They are generally too stupid to think of them.”

Tim and Jeremiah spent most of the afternoon doing their research, laughing, writing down witty rejoinders, and bonding as father and son. Bonding was the most important thing.

“I need to take a shower and get ready. Bobby is picking me up at 6:30.”

“Jeremiah, I don’t want to put a damper on things but let’s talk before Bobby gets here.”

Jeremiah stopped and looked at Tim. He had no idea where the conversation was going and he was scared.

“Let’s sit at the kitchen table. When I was growing up the important conversations were held at the kitchen table.”

Jeremiah shuffled into the kitchen. His feet were much better to the point that he could do the teenage shuffle when he had to do something he didn't like.

"You and Bobby have talked every night this week. Tell me where you are going and what you are going to do."

"Well, we are going to get something to eat. Then we're going to the movies."

"What restaurant? Which movie?"

"Mmmm, we haven't decided. I want him to decide since he is older."

"Anything else?"

"Well, Bobby said we might be able to get into a gay bar."

Tim's blood ran cold. He was afraid that was perhaps on the agenda.

"You know you are too young to get into a bar – gay or otherwise."

Jeremiah looked down at the tabletop and nodded his head.

"And you if you are picked up by the police, you will be taken out of my custody and taken to juvenile detention."

Jeremiah's head popped up. "No way."

"Yes, way."

"Bobby said it would be really easy and that he had a fake ID I could use."

"Hmmm, you may not like what I am going to say, but I want to talk with Bobby when he get's here. I need to be clear with him about limits."

Jeremiah nodded his head.

"Talk to me about sex."

Jeremiah's mouth flew open.

"I...I...I...."

"You are not to have sex. Do I make myself clear? How old is Bobby?"

"He is 18."

"Okay, if the two of you have sex, it is rape because you are underage. It is a statutory aspect of the law and he will be charged with rape and you will be sent to juvenile detention."

"Life isn't fair."

"We can both agree on that for purposes of this discussion but the law it still is."

“So what are you going to say to Bobby? Please don’t embarrass me. Please.”

“I will do my best not to embarrass you but I will be clear with him about my expectations of his behavior.”

“It was more fun living on the street.”

“No it wasn’t and you know it. You just want some of that good looking boy and can’t stand it when I say not yet. Notice, I didn’t say no, I just said not yet.”

“Can I go now?”

“Yes, on one condition. Bring me all of the condoms you have in your wallet, bedside table or in your room.”

Jeremiah’s mouth flew open.

“I don’t.....I.....okay, I will bring them to you. Are you going to use them? They cost a lot of money.”

Jeremiah went to his bedroom and brought back a variety of condoms. Tim wasn’t quite sure what to say so that Jeremiah wouldn’t be offended.

“Well, you have a variety. Different colors, different sizes. It seems that you are prepared for any contingency.”

Jeremiah blushed. He head was faced down at the floor though his eyes were looking up at Tim.

“I wasn’t sure so I decided to buy different ones. I was embarrassed at the drug store when the guy behind the counter just smirked at me. It wasn’t like I could try them on in the store. Also, I don’t know what size Bobby is.”

Jeremiah felt like he could drop through the floor.

“Well, the important thing is that you are prepared. But, promise me that you are not going to use them yet.”

“Why not?”

“Well, you are underage for a couple of more weeks. Also, I don’t know how much you know about sex. You should be educated.”

“I can’t talk to you about sex!”

“Why not?”

“Because you are like my dad. Plus, you are like really old. I have heard that when you get old you can’t even get it up.”

Tim sat back in the chair and chuckled. Jeremiah’s bravado was easily countered.

“Jeremiah, you are young and have so much to learn. Your education starts now.” At first, Jeremiah sat in horror as Tim talked through sex education 101 with him. When they reached gay sex education 101 Jeremiah found he had lots of questions. Tim did not shy away from answering the questions. He needed Jeremiah to know that he was open to discussing anything. The more open he was, the more Jeremiah asked.

“Finally, I need to tell you that your body is a temple. Treat it as such. Whoever worships your body should be worthy to enter the holy gates.”

Jeremiah burst out laughing and then quickly blushed.

Tim just sat and looked at him.

“Okay, pops tell me more. How do I know if he is worthy to enter my holy gate? You know, I might want to enter his holy gate also.” Jeremiah smirked.

They spent the rest of the time talking about self-esteem, being able to say no, honoring yourself while being in a relationship and how to determine whether a man was worthy of your love.

“Well, I didn’t know we were going to talk about all of this today. I would have stayed in bed.” Jeremiah smiled as he walked over to Tim and kissed him on the cheek. “Thanks, dad. I may have some more questions after my date tonight. Is that okay?”

“Of course, please come to me to talk about anything. Black and I are here for you.”

Jeremiah realized he was going to be late and ran to shower. The condoms were left on the kitchen table.

Jeremiah was dressed and ready to go when he heard a horn blow.

“Bobby is outside so I am leaving. I will be home by 11. I promise.”

“Hold up, young man. Go out and tell Bobby and to come inside.”

Jeremiah was aghast.

“Do it. Have I said anything wrong to you this afternoon?”

Jeremiah went to the door and waved for Bobby to come inside. He hoped that Bobby would come to the door and not drive off. Bobby came in and Jeremiah kissed him on the mouth.

Tim welcomed Bobby to the house and asked what they were planning to do that evening. Bobby started giving a facile answer and Tim stopped him and asked for specifics. That is when Bobby looked down and saw the array of condoms on the coffee table. Tim had moved them to the living room while Jeremiah was showering. Bobby stumbled in his answer. Jeremiah blushed. Tim spoke up and said he was conducting a sex education course and was just reviewing the variety of condoms available.

“Bobby, I am Jeremiah’s guardian. If he gets into any trouble he will be removed from my house and sent to Juvenile Detention. I do not want that. My partner, Black, and I care too much for Jeremiah for that to happen. Might I make a suggestion?”

Bobby nodded his head.

Tim then mentioned several restaurants that would fit their budget. He suggested a couple of movies. He then said if they wanted to come back to the house after the movies, he would make ice cream sundaes. Bobby said that sounded like a great idea.

“Great, I look forward to seeing you right after the movies. No parking on dark lanes, no going to gay bars, no getting into any kind of trouble. Agreed?”

Both boys nodded their heads and then Bobby grabbed Jeremiah’s hand and out the door they went.

Tim went into the kitchen to fix himself some dinner. He knew that he wouldn’t enjoy the evening while waiting for Jeremiah to get home.

The phone rang at 8:30. It was Jeremiah and he was crying. He could barely talk he was crying so hard. Tim then heard another voice on the telephone. It was Todd Reynolds. Todd told Tim that they were at the Emergency Department and that Jeremiah was fine. Bobby had been assaulted at the movie theater. Todd and Erick happened to also be at the theater in Norfolk and accompanied the boys to the Emergency Department.

While waiting in line for pop-corn and Cokes, a young man walked up to Bobby and started cursing at him. Bobby moved in front of Jeremiah when the fellow became more belligerent. Without warning, the fellow’s arm shot straight forward and connected with Bobby’s right orbit. Bobby went down. Jeremiah was standing in shock when Todd and Erick appeared. Todd grabbed the assailant while Erick dropped to his knees to assist Bobby. The manager called the police.

Todd and Erick recognized Jeremiah from the commitment ceremony. Todd continued to hold the fellow while a doctor who was at the theater took over care of Bobby. Erick then held Jeremiah who was somewhat hysterical. Erick reminded Jeremiah who he and Todd were which relaxed him somewhat. The police arrived and arrested Toby Vann who had assaulted Bobby. The physician who was attending Bobby said he needed to go to the hospital and an ambulance was called. Todd and Erick gave Jeremiah a ride to the hospital and stayed with him while waiting for Tim to appear. Todd was unclear about what legal ramifications might ensue so he called Tayloe and left a voice mail.

Todd decided it was a good thing they were staying with Jeremiah because the police had many questions and they knew that Jeremiah was still a minor. Tim arrived and Jeremiah ran across the waiting room directly into his arms. The earlier shock gave way to a tsunami of tears. Tim wrapped Jeremiah in his arms and did not release him until the tremors and tears stopped. With a final shudder, Jeremiah said, “Thanks, dad. You are the best.” Jeremiah then took Tim’s hand and would not let it loose.

The police discovered that the assailant had a history of assaults. The last victim being one Matan Jenner. The police said he was being booked for assault and wouldn’t be a threat to either of them. Finally, the Emergency Room doctor came out and asked for Jeremiah. Bobby was being admitted for observation and had asked if Jeremiah could stay with him. Bobby told the doctor he had no family in the area and was afraid to be alone in the hospital. The doctor looked Jeremiah up and down and asked how old he was.

“I am sixteen.”

“Are you sure?”

Tim spoke up and said that Jeremiah was sixteen and wouldn't tell a lie.

The doctor blushed and said he just had to make sure that Jeremiah was of age.

Tim put his arm over Jeremiah's shoulder and said he was a good son and would be a great comfort to Bobby. Jeremiah dropped his head on Tim's shoulder and hugged him.

Tim, Jeremiah, Todd and Erick went up to Bobby's room. They all told him good night. Tim said he would be back in the morning with fresh clothes for Jeremiah. He kissed Jeremiah and told him he loved him.

As they were leaving, Tim said he thought he should call the case worker to give her an update.

"I suggest you wait until Tayloe calls you. I left him a voice mail and he is good about checking that. Don't invite trouble when there may be no reason."

Suggested Music:

"You Raise Me Up"

Performer: Josh Groban

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJxrX42WcjQ>

Sunday, December 22
The First Night of Chanukah
Fourth Sunday of Advent, The Light of Peace

The earth was unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep.

God said, "Let there be light;" and there was light.

God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness.

God called the light day and the darkness he called night.

Genesis 1:2-5

Todd and Erick reveled lying in bed. Tim had called and said that Bobby was being released from the hospital on Monday and would stay at his house until school started again in January. College was out for the semester and Bobby had been staying in a cheap motel room while he worked through the holidays. Tim said he didn't know if he was inviting the fox into the hen house but Bobby needed ongoing observation and had nowhere else to go. He had spoken to both boys about not having sex until Jeremiah was of age but he felt it went in one ear and out the other. They were all but pawing at each other all of the time. Tim sighed and said he couldn't wait for Black to return home from Brussels. Apparently, everything was going well in Europe and the trip to Israel went off without any problems though he alluded to a major surprise. Black said he felt superfluous with Green, Yellow and Pink also there. He wanted to come back early but he also wanted to maintain his primacy in providing security for Matan and Yonatan.

"By the way, Yonatan and Matan said to give you big hugs for taking care of Jeremiah and Bobby at the theater. They already think of Jeremiah as a younger brother. Matan is especially concerned for him."

Todd and Erick thanked Tim for the call and turned their attention back to each other. Both fellows were lying on their backs and smiles consumed their faces. It was bliss. They only had one thing to do outside of the apartment for the day and that was to go to church. Erick pondered for a brief second whether he wanted to stay home but realized that he and Todd were both enjoying the Sunday services in Advent. He weighed that against hanging around in just their briefs, enjoying the Sunday paper, consuming a pot of coffee and eating sufganiyot. He loved the jelly filled donuts that were traditional to eat during Chanukah and they had spent Saturday afternoon making a supply. It was a day early but he didn't care, especially when the jelly filling ended up on their bodies and they had spent time licking it off of each other. They may have been somewhat liberal with the smearing of the jelly on each other but it was worth it. Erick said he wanted to use raspberry jam this year. His mother was the traditionalist and always used strawberry jam but he wanted to really celebrate with his boyfriend, now fiancé.

The fellows finished drinking their morning coffee and eating their donuts. They licked the powdered sugar from the other's fingers.

"If we keep doing this we will not get to church this morning." Erick had a lascivious grin on his face. "I could lick you all day long. Of course, if we eat sufganiyot every day during Chanukah there will be more of you to lick. We will cook some more this afternoon for the first night of Chanukah and then NO more. It is a good thing we are swimming."

Todd said they would only eat one per day. They both knew he was fibbing.

Todd grabbed Erick's erection and pulled him to the shower. They left a trail of powdered sugar through the apartment. Todd wanted to go to church because they would sing, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" which was one of his favorite hymns. Since the 17th of December, Erick had heard Todd humming the O Antiphon hymn around the house. It wasn't quite like a broken record but the tune was now implanted in Erick's brain forever.

When they were in the shower, Todd started singing, "O come, O come, O come." Erick was startled by the sacrilege but then started laughing when he saw the grin on Todd's face and felt the power building in his loins. Todd dropped to his knees and the first jet of cream hit his face. No more was wasted as his mouth found its target. Erick leaned over him when he finished. Todd stood and shared the cream.

"Perhaps I have found a new filling for the sufganiyot." Todd laughed.

"Maybe. There are many different fillings used now however I am a traditional kind of guy and prefer jam. I don't think I have ever seen cum filled sufganiyot for sell though." They both laughed at the absurdity of it all.

They finished dressing after Todd's needs had been met. Todd wondered if having sex before going to church in the morning was sinful. Erick however gave thanks for the gifts of their bodies and that they so freely shared with one another. The church was full and they found seats on the back row. They were in a jolly mood as they shook the rector's hand and walked into the cold winter weather. The skies were grey and heavy with moisture.

"Do you think it will snow?" Todd looked like an excited child.

"I hope not."

"What do you mean? Snow is wonderful."

"You've never lived in New England where you get sick of snow. The first snow may be wonderful but by the time you have four to five months of snow it loses its appeal."

"We are making latkes tonight and it would be wonderful for it to be snowing."

"As long as we don't have to watch that Charlie Brown Christmas movie, I will be fine."

Todd looked like someone had hit him with a wet towel. He had his traditions. It was obvious there was going to be give and take by having a Jewish husband.

By mid-afternoon it had started to snow. Todd ran outside and twirled around trying to catch snow on his tongue. Erick laughed at him like he was a lunatic but then joined in the fun. They were the youngest people in the apartment community and they saw people standing at their windows watching them. All of the people were smiling at their antics and most gave a wave.

They went back inside and Todd made them mugs of hot chocolate.

"We must hurry and fry the latkes." Erick showed Todd the best way to cook the potato cakes. Hands were slapped as each would reach out to taste them when they came out of the hot oil. They were placed on a rack in the warm oven until they were ready to eat.

Todd had placed a Chanukiah in the front window. He wanted Erick to know that the holidays were for both of them. Erick had tried to explain that Chanukah was not like Christmas but it was all lost on Todd. He was like a child. Erick smiled and indulged his boyfriend. The sun was setting and Erick was preparing everything for the first night of Chanukah.

There was a knock on the door. The guys looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders. They didn't want company to interrupt their evening of lighting the first Chanukah candle and then lighting the fourth Advent candle.

Todd was surprised when he opened the door and found Tayloe and Eron standing there.

“Good, I was afraid we would be late. I drove like a madman from Norfolk General Hospital to get here in time. Luckily, I know how to drive in the snow as opposed to a certain other person in the room.” Eron looked at Tayloe and laughed.

Eron grabbed his brother and kissed him on both cheeks. He then kissed Todd. Tayloe kissed Erick on both cheeks and then kissed Todd on the top of the head, like he had always done.

The fellows shucked their coats and they gathered in the living room. Tayloe gave them an update on Bobby and that he would call Jeremiah's case worker in the morning in an attempt to forestall any problems. Bobby was being released on Monday and in the meantime, Jeremiah had planted himself in the hospital room and would not go anywhere. They had met with Tim when he was bringing lunch back for Jeremiah. From a legal viewpoint, both Tayloe and Eron thought everything was okay.

Todd and Erick gave a sigh of relief and said it was time to celebrate. Todd had moved furniture from in front of the window so they could easily get to the Chanukiah. He quietly lit the Advent candles in the dining room without making a fuss before he went into the living room. He turned off all of the lights in the apartment. They all looked out at the falling snow. It was magical. Todd leaned into Erick and kissed him. This felt perfect.

This was Chanukah time and Todd decided it would take precedence over Advent for the next two days.

Erick and Eron moved to take center place in front of the window.

Eron led off by offering a blessing for the Chanukah candles.

Blessed are You, Eternal One Our God, Universal Presence, Who sanctifies us with paths of holiness and give us this path of kindling the light of Chanukah.

Erick then lit the shamash or servant candle in the middle. Then Eron said another prayer.

Blessed are You, Eternal One Our God, Universal Presence, Who worked miracles for our ancestors in ancient days at this time.

Both boys took the shamash in their hands and lit one candle for the first night of Chanukah and returned the shamash to its central elevated place in the Chanukiah. Then Erick said a prayer.

Blessed are You, Eternal One Our God, Universal Presence, Who keeps us in Life always, “Who supports the unfolding of our uniqueness, and Who brings us to this very moment for blessing.

They finished and Erick and Eron sat in silence looking at the candles. When they turned to Todd and Tayloe they were smiling but didn't say anything. The only lights in the house were from the candles in the front window and the dining room.

Finally, Todd couldn't stand it anymore. "Please tell me this is not like that Peggy Lee song, 'Is That All There Is?'"

Both Erick and Eron burst out laughing.

"No baby, we are just getting started."

Erick led them through a reading from the Book of Numbers and said that they would focus on the word 'peace' for the first night of Chanukah. Tayloe's stomach growled and Todd laughingly said that they needed to focus on feeding the beast if there was going to be any peace in the house.

The latkes and sufganiyot were brought from the kitchen and placed on the cocktail table in the living room. Todd also grabbed bowls filled with sour cream and fried apples. They were feeding each other. Todd had purchased a white zinfandel declaring it the appropriate wine with latkes. He was full of it, but he enjoyed the pretention. The guys were eating and talking about the scripture reading and also the word peace. Actually, they were talking over each other and enjoying both the hilarity and the intellectual competition. The platters emptied very quickly. Todd looked at his brother and said he hoped that would satisfy him until he got home. Tayloe laughed and said he knew where McDonald's was before getting on the Interstate.

"Next, next, next. Okay, calm down guys." Erick was in charge and trying to control the unruly mob. "Next, we are going to do a short play. I only have two copies of the script so we will have to share. It is about why we celebrate Chanukah and the importance of oil." They gathered near the window to try to read the script with lighting from the two candles. They did not want to turn on electric lights. The play had been written for teenagers and contained a great deal of juvenile humor (which seemed appropriate given their hilarity); it even had the appearance of Seymour the Pig. They were laughing at the silliness of the play while respecting its important message.

"Sometimes you have to find the humor to make a point. So that we have more humor, Erick and I are going to teach you The Dreidel Song."

Erick brought out the dreidel and explained its meaning. They all got on the floor and started spinning the dreidel while singing. All of a sudden gold coins appeared and were awarded. Erick said they were called *gelt*. The boys scrambled to get as much *gelt* as they could. Todd realized they were being uproarious and needed to quieten down. He then went to the bedroom and returned with gifts. Erick pulled up the skirt of the sofa and laughed when he removed packages.

"I have to find innovative places to hide presents because somebody in this house is a real snoop." Todd grinned and said he hadn't thought to look under the sofa.

Eron reached in his coat pocket and pulled out three long slender boxes. Tayloe smiled and fetched tiny envelopes from the pocket of his top coat.

"We were going to surprise you today. Eron called and invited me into his plot and said I needed to bring a present for each person. Sorry, if they don't measure up."

Eron leaned over and said it was not Christmas where everyone was measuring the worth of the presents and making sure that Santa gave them everything on the list. He said it was just a fun thing to do to add to the celebratory nature of Chanukah.

Todd had handed out presents he had originally bought for Erick. Erick handed out three he had bought for Todd. They would go shopping again the next day to refill their supply of presents.

“Look, the candle is about to burn out. Let’s open the presents really quick.”

They tore through the wrapping papers. Todd had given everyone wildly colored socks. He thought they would be fun with the grey or black suits that Erick wore every day. They would certainly enliven their monochromatic wardrobe. Erick bought Todd a pair of colored silk knotted cuff links. Todd caught his breath because they were beautiful. Erick gave Eron and Tayloe the same thing in different colors.

They opened the gifts from Eron and said it was exactly what they needed.

“I know these are probably out of style, but we all do a lot of writing and it is worth it to have nice ink pens.” Eron had their names engraved on the barrels. It was evident that he had been planning for this visit.

Finally, Tayloe handed out envelopes. Inside were invitations to a cooking class at the kitchen store in Cary Town.

“The four of us are going to have our own private cooking class. We get to eat all of the food at the end of class. I pity the poor instructor.”

Just as they finished, they heard a spitting sound and the candles had burnt out. Perfect timing.

Eron said he was spending the night with Tayloe in Richmond and would catch the train to Newport the next day. Todd and Erick looked at each other but didn’t say a word.

The brothers kissed and hugged then Tayloe grabbed Eron’s hand and they departed. They stood in the snow talking and then Tayloe took Eron’s gloved hand, brought it to his lips and kissed it. Todd and Erick stood at the window watching. Eron got in the driver’s seat to take them to Richmond because a light snow was still falling. To Todd, it felt exactly like Christmas. To Erick, it felt like he was back home in New England. They glowed in their love for each other. They extinguished the candles in the dining room and headed to bed. The first day of Chanukah had started and it was good.

Suggested music:

“Chanukah, O Chanukah!”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxH0xF84h_0

Monday, December 23
Second Night of Chanukkah
The Light of Peace

And YHWH appeared to him by the terebinth tree of Mamre,

while he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day.

So, he lifted his eyes and looked, and saw three men standing opposite him.

And when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them,

and bowed himself to the ground, and said,

“YHWH, if I have now found favor in Your eyes, please not pass Your servant by.

Genesis 18: 1-3

Nash awoke and was disoriented as to where he was. He looked around the bedroom and saw the suit he had worn the night before casually tossed over a chair. The room was warm and the bedclothes had been pushed to the foot of the bed. He smiled when he looked down his body and saw his familiar friend. He wondered if he would always awaken with an erection. He then heard voices and decided that there were other things more important than taking care of that need. There was a knock at the bedroom door.

“Nash, breakfast is in five minutes.”

“Okay, I’ll be right there.”

Nash went into the attached bathroom to brush his teeth and comb his hair. He then opened his suitcase and got out his pajama bottoms. Of course, Erick and Todd had seen him in much less when they swam together but he was feeling modest in their home. This was not the gym and he didn’t want to appear forward and presumptuous. When he opened the bedroom door and walked into the dining room he found the guys in just their briefs. He laughed and shucked his pajama bottoms.

“I don’t want to be overdressed.”

Todd caught his breath. There was no doubt that the man was beautiful. The light blond hair, the bluest of eyes, the chiseled cheek bones and jutting chin easily took your breath away. Then there was the body.....Todd knew not to stare. Erick was indifferent because his mate was the perfect specimen for him and while he appreciated the beauty of men he was not dazzled the same as Todd.

Erick said the morning grace and they hoed into the food. Their normal, simple breakfast had been replaced with a variety of foods. There was no Cream of Wheat. Both Erick and Todd were eating donuts and told Nash he had to eat one also. The guys explained that during Chanukah they would eat sufganiyot. Nash loved them and ate several. Todd then told him about different fillings even suggesting that he and Erick had come up with the ultimate in fillings.

Nash blushed and looked down. He was a lot more naïve than Todd had assumed. Todd didn't think himself jaded but he was a senior whereas Nash was just finishing the first semester of his freshman year. Nash had a lot to learn about the ways of the world. Erick quickly changed the subject and asked about the dinner and dance the night before.

“Well, let me say again how grateful I am that I could stay here. It was a loooonnng day. I went to church with my family and then drove to Norfolk to pick up Jan then back to Williamsburg Lodge for the dinner and dance, then back to Norfolk to take Jan home and then back to Williamsburg.”

“Jan's grandmother was very kind. She was surprised to see a white boy show up at their apartment. Once she got over that, she had me sit and we had a nice conversation. She was charming but had some tough questions for me. She wanted to know about my family. Then she asked me about meeting Jan, asking her out to the dance, and why I was dating a black girl.”

Erick and Todd looked at each other without saying anything.

“I explained that I saw Jan as a woman and hadn't thought about race. I told her about both of us being history majors and the discussion we had at lunch. When I told her that I thought of Jan as a sister she gave me a strange look. She was definitely assessing me as to whether I would be a suitable husband. Jan sat there without saying a word. I told Mrs. Chamblee that I wasn't thinking of marriage yet because I was committed to getting my doctorate in history. That made her smile and she said I sounded like Jan. Finally, she told us to have a good time. She actually hugged me when we left. I mean, she is this tiny little woman and yet she reached up, pulled me down, and put her arms around my neck when she hugged me. She then said I was good people.”

Todd recognized that saying and smiled.

“We got to the dinner and I think everyone was surprised that I was there with Jan. I had not brought a date to any of the athletic social functions since I started school. The fact that Jan and I were a mixed-race couple seemed to upset a few folks and we stayed away from them. We ate dinner and then danced. Man, that girl can dance. She even knows the Carolina Shag. We tore up the floor.”

Nash was grinning from ear to ear.

“Finally, I told her it had been a long day for me and I needed to take her home. We chatted all the way back to Norfolk. I have never had such an easy conversation with a woman. She really is terrific. We agreed to go out again. She knows I am gay and she is determined to pursue her life goals and doesn't want to get caught up with some man who will try to put his life needs ahead of hers. I am sort of the perfect guy for her. We get along and have a good time but there is no pretext of something romantic happening. I am concerned though because she is anxious about having enough money to finish her degree. She is so smart but she and her grandmother live on the edge. Somehow it doesn't seem fair.”

Nash seemed at ease and said it was like he was making a new family. He reached out and grabbed Erick and Todd's hands.

“I'm sorry that I woke you when I got here so late last night. I hadn't planned to be out so late.”

“Not to worry. We should have given you a key to the apartment. You are welcome to use this as a refuge when you are in town and need a place to stay.”

They started gathering the dishes and taking them to the kitchen. Erick was cleaning everything since Todd had cooked. Todd observed Nash.

“Did you bring your swimsuit? I thought we should go swimming this morning.”

Nash looked crestfallen.

“No, I didn’t think to bring it.”

“That’s alright. We will swim in our skivvies or perhaps we won’t wear anything at all.” Todd was grinning as he said that.

The three guys got into the Honda and headed to the campus. Nash had a key to the gym and they threaded their way through the building to the changing room. There was no one else around. They could hear echoes of their conversation.

“Okay, on the count of three everyone strip down. We are doing this the natural way.”

All three were comfortable with their bodies and quickly discarded their clothes. They jumped into the shower barely washing away the cooties before they ran across the deck and into the pool. They vigorously swam laps and then pulled themselves onto the lip of the pool.

“Let’s play water volleyball.” Nash went into a storage room and pulled out a ball.

They couldn’t figure out how to play volleyball with three people so they played a game of tag. They would throw the ball trying to hit each other. It hurt when the wet ball smacked against skin. Nash had the most hits, Erick the least. Todd was so joyous at the camaraderie that he stopped keeping score. When they were too exhausted to continue, they fell back onto the deck and let their bodies unwind from the intense workout.

Todd rolled onto Erick and lay there. His chest was no longer heaving and he was content just lying across his lover. Nash turned on his side and watched the two of them holding each other. There was nothing sexual about their actions but Nash sprouted an erection. He decided it was okay and to not be ashamed. He then noticed that Erick and Todd were in the same state of arousal.

Todd leaned into Erick and kissed him on the lips. He then hopped up and pulled Erick to his feet. Nash followed suit. Three erections led the men to the shower. Nash compared sizes and was proud that he was the leader, by a good amount. Nash was hoping that either Todd or Erick would invite him into their sphere but they simply washed each other and turned off the water.

“Lunch. My body is saying it is lunch time.” Erick grinned and told Nash that Todd had a built-in clock for meal times. They headed to the diner and ate soup and salads. Todd was very specific about the low-cal dressing for the salads and told the waitress they wanted no bread or crackers.

“No need to undo the good work we put in this morning.”

After lunch they went back to the apartment. It was obvious to Erick and Todd that Nash did not want to leave. They said it was nap time and they went to their respective bedrooms to sleep. When they awoke the afternoon shadows were long. Erick was putting candles in the Chanukkah. This experience was new to Nash. After the candles were lit, he enjoyed the theological exploration over the scripture and over the word acceptance. Erick explained they were following a Chanukah guide which suggested exploring the meaning of a different word for each of the eight days. There was a

rich discussion about the idea of acceptance: acceptance of self, of others, of God. Todd then fixed them a small dinner and lit the Advent candles. Again, they spent time in reflection and discussion. For Nash, this extended time exploring religious texts from different traditions was new and yet exciting. After the candles were extinguished, Nash said he needed to leave.

Erick and Todd said it was getting late and it was okay for Nash to spend the night. He told them it had been the most wonderful day of his life but he must return home. His parents were expecting him.

“You have shown me an honorable way of living. I want to find a man and share what the two of you have. I don’t think that is asking too much. Hopefully, you will allow me to continue to be a part of your lives. It is as if I have two new brothers who are filled with love and acceptance. That is so rare in this world.”

Suggested music:

“Sure On This Shining Night”

Performers: Minnesota Choral Arts

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyH9epNNx4g>

Tuesday, December 24
Christmas Eve
Third Night of Chanukah

There once was a man who stood before God, his heart breaking from the pain and injustice in the world. "Dear God" he cried out, "look at all the suffering and anguish in your world! Why don't you send help?"

God replied, "I did. I sent you."

Rabbi David Wolpe

Erick and Todd were eating lunch at The Trellis in Market Square. The restaurant was jam packed with people who were enjoying the last day before Christmas. Todd especially loved it for the chocolate desserts. The owner, Marcel Desaulniers, had written that wonderful cookbook "Death by Chocolate." Todd couldn't think of a better way to die.

"Let's review the list one more time." The guys put their heads together and reviewed what they would have for Christmas Eve dinner and food to prepare for the next day at the Reynold's home.

"You know, my dad is out shopping. He always leaves home on Christmas Eve morning to go shopping for the day. After he finishes shopping, he goes to the Country Club for lunch and then an afternoon of playing poker. He arrives back at the house in time for dinner. He always comes in with bags of wrapped presents. When we were little there were also telegrams from Santa to let us know he was on his way. That was the neatest thing to get a telegram from Santa."

Erick indulged Todd's memories of his childhood Christmas. The closer they got to the actual day the more vivid the memories had become. Erick wondered if Todd could truly have a Jewish husband. Especially on days like Christmas Eve. Todd was actually bouncing on the bed that morning telling Erick to get up because they had so much to do. Todd laid out the plan for the day as if he were a 10 year old boy. Erick fretted. How could a Jewish and Christian couple get through the holiday in one piece. It resolved itself however when Erick looked in Todd's eyes and saw nothing but love. Each time he looked into those blue eyes he would fall down the well of love.

"What should I get your mother? She is the difficult one to buy for."

"Anything blingy. She loves some bling. The best jewelry store is next door."

"I don't think I can compete with your father. After all, I am on faculty salary not a stock broker's."

Unbeknown to Todd, Erick had a florist deliver flowers to Mrs. Reynolds that day. He thought it might brighten her day and lead to an easier time when they were together. The next day would be his first time meeting the formidable Mrs. Reynolds.

“A scarf. She loves scarves.”

They left the restaurant and even Erick got into the Christmas spirit with the musicians on the street corners, the Colonial District workers in costumes and the ever-present ringing of the bell from the Salvation Army. He wouldn't contribute to them because they were anti-gay but the ringing of the bell made him think of the holidays.

Growing up in Newport, he experienced similar celebrations. Some of the big homes put up lavish displays not only in the homes but on the grounds. It was a tradition to drive up Belmont Avenue to look at the lights. They were so wonderful and festive for Eron and him to see. They said they wanted Santa Claus to come visit them and they wanted to put up a Christmas tree. It was a fight with their parents for many years but they finally grew out of it one day when they were down at the waterfront on Christmas Eve. Some drunken men saw them and said, “Who let the kikes out today? They killed Jesus. We should kill them like they killed our Savior.” Both boys ran home as hard as they could. Neither wanted to see the Christmas lights on Belmont Avenue again. Their parents knew something had happened but didn't ask particulars. Both boys were home safe and neither wanted to go outside on Christmas Day. They played Scrabble all day while sitting in front of the blazing fire. After they grew tired of the game, they sat together in quietness and read. Eron had sat on the sofa with Erick in his arms. They would trade off reading from an Isaac Beshevis Singer story. Erick was the first to fall asleep and then Eron nodded off. Their parents grew quite emotional seeing them lying on the sofa asleep. Mrs. Emmanuelson got a quilt and covered her two boys. The boys celebrated Chanukah that night and didn't equate it with Christmas ever again.

Erick shook his head trying to rid himself of those memories. Certainly, things had changed over the years and he no longer feared for his safety at Christmas.

Once they were back home, Todd started to put together a meal for Christmas Eve. Normally, his family had eaten the Seven Fish Meal like the Italians. He had no idea where that tradition started since none of them were Italian. He had asked Erick about the menu and both were enthusiastic at the idea.

“Can we really fix a seven seafood meal without including shellfish?” Todd asked when making the grocery list.

“Well, you know. Those dietary laws are so old and they were written in a time when food would not keep and the pigs could give you trichinosis. Shellfish wouldn't hold up in the desert heat either. I am sure there were lots of cases of food poisoning. Many Jews still observe those rules and our family somewhat followed them but we grew up by the shore with lots of fishing boats. On special occasions we would have shellfish. We were too poor to eat shellfish every day.”

Todd told Erick he would cook the meal and to stay clear of the kitchen. Erick spent the afternoon reading and watching television. There wasn't much to watch so he ended up falling asleep on the

sofa. He was there when Todd walked in with a glass of Riesling. It was near dark outside when Todd had put a Bach cantata on the stereo.

“Let me wash my face and hands before we eat.” Erick scooted to the bathroom where he gave things a slap and a half. He splashed water on his face which helped to awaken him. He returned to the living room where Todd had placed a platter with sliced and toasted bagels. It was accompanied by smoked salmon dip. Erick took a bite and his eyes bugged out with pleasure.

“This is sooooo good. I want more.”

“No more because we have seven courses to eat.”

“Please daddy.” Erick made puppy dog eyes and Todd laughed.

“No son, no more tonight or Santa Claus won’t come.” Oops, Todd realized that he should not have said that. Instead of being offended, Erick said that he had been a good boy. In fact, he said he had been a very good boy. He was willing to offer Todd proof of how good he could be. They both laughed and the moment passed.

“Into the dining room for the next course.” They took a moment to pause, said a prayer and lit the four Advent Candles. Todd then lit the Christ Candle in the middle. “It is not yet sunset but I am going to say it is Christmas so I am lighting this.” Erick smiled thinking that Todd was thinking of the timing of the Jewish day.

Beautiful green salads with small pieces of fried catfish were at each place setting. Erick noticed that instead of sitting across from each other, Todd had arranged for them to sit side by side. They were petite salads and again Erick asked for more. “May I just have more of that dressing. More please, sir.”

“This is not Charles Dickens either. This is not porridge.”

The plates were whisked away and Todd returned with a plate that held four fried codfish balls. He set it down on the table in front of his chair. Erick gave him a quizzical look. Todd then took a codfish, dipped it in horseradish sauce, and then lifted it to Erick’s mouth for him to take a bite. The sauce was hotter than Erick was expecting. He laughed and put his hand over his mouth.

“Wow, that has some fire in it.” He then grabbed his glass of wine and took a big gulp.

Todd sat waiting. Erick picked up a fish ball, dipped it in the sauce and fed it to Todd. He then licked his fingers with his eyes never leaving Todd’s.

There were two codfish balls for each of them.

“What did you put in the sauce?”

“Wasabi. I like both my sauce and my men hot.” They both laughed.

Erick could smell the next dish before it arrived at the table. It was one of his favorites that he seldom ate. The bowl of pasta with white clam sauce was set down in front of him. He used his hands to bring the smell up to his nose. The motion made him think of his mother lighting the Shabbat candles. He immediately was homesick thinking that his parents and Eron were in Newport and he was in Williamsburg. He somehow forgot about them after he took the first bite.

“Is it rude for me to lick my plate?”

“Yes, my love, it is. Even when it is just the two of us. Maybe when we eat in the kitchen you can lick the bowl but not tonight.”

“I want you to cook every night from now on. We will both be big as houses but we’ll be happy.”

Todd laughed and said they could trade off on the cooking. Erick stood and refilled their wine and water glasses. He was enjoying this leisurely meal. They were not in a hurry and the smells emanating from the kitchen let him know that this meal was very special to his lover. He had spent all afternoon preparing it for the two of them.

Todd brought soup plates to the table with Cioppino. He then brought in a loaf of hot Italian bread and garlic butter.

“The bread is great to sop up the sauce. The Cioppino was filled with a variety of seafood. Each mouthful was followed by a sigh of contentment from each of them. Todd had been right that they used the bread to sop up the sauce. Both plates were clean.

“Oh my gosh, I am full. I didn’t know that was going to be so filling.”

“And only two more courses to go. Go sit in the living room and get things ready for us to light the Chanukkah while I clean the table.”

Erick went into the living room and put new candles in the Chanukkah. He found the reading for the day and was finishing as Todd walked in with two goblets filled with limoncello gelato.

“Here, this will help clean our palates for the dessert course.”

Erick took a bite and knew it was the perfect thing. All of a sudden, his appetite had returned. He leaned over and kissed Todd and told him it had been a wonderful meal. They put the glasses on the cocktail table, leaned back into the sofa and sighed.

“Do you want dessert before or after we light the Chanukkah?”

“Why don’t you bring the dessert and coffee in and then we will eat it while looking at the candles.”

“Perfect. Brilliant idea, lover.” Todd leaned over and kissed Erick again. Neither wanted to stop.

Todd returned with stacked rainbow sponge cake and cups of coffee for each of them.

The two men knelt in front of the living room window where the Chanukkah was placed. Erick said prayers, and then took the servant candle and then starting at the right lit three candles. They enjoyed the candlelight for a minute before returning to the sofa. Erick then read the scriptures for the day. They pondered the meaning in their lives and shared their feelings of love and support for each other. They also focused on the concept of repairing the world and how they in their own individual actions could help repair the fractions between and among people. They both agreed that the love started at home and they should always be in accord with each other no matter how hard that was.

Todd sliced his rainbow sponge with the edge of his fork and fed the piece to Erick.

Just then the doorbell rang. Todd opened the door to a group of carolers. They seemed somewhat taken aback seeing two handsome young men. They thought only old people lived in the apartments. They didn't miss a beat and started singing. Erick came up behind Todd and wrapped him in his arms while they listened to the music. After the carolers finished, a boy asked Todd and Erick if they were Jewish. Erick said yes. He hadn't formulated the language to explain they were an interfaith couple.

"That is really cool. Can we see your Menorah?"

Todd told them they were welcome, and twelve teenagers entered their apartment. Erick was explaining the difference between a Menorah and Chanukkah while Todd disappeared. When Erick finished, Todd asked them to come into the dining room where he had placed twelve servings of their rainbow sponge cake on the table. Todd then explained the Advent wreath. He said they had lit the Christ candle because it was already Christmas Day according to Jewish rules about days starting at sunset. Todd explained that he was Christian and Erick was Jewish and they were learning to observe both holidays as a couple. The kids were fascinated, finished their cake and left the apartment. As Todd and Erick were walking back to the sofa, they heard the doorbell ring again. It was the kids. They started singing, "We Wish You a Merry Christmas." The boy who had asked about the Menorah said that next year they would learn a Chanukah song for them to sing. Todd and Erick were filled with joy that they were so readily accepted as both gay and interfaith.

They sat on the sofa and Erick said it was time for gifts. This was a nightly occurrence in Chanukah that Todd loved. They each went to their secret hiding places to retrieve the gifts. They sat back on the sofa looking at each other.

Todd handed Erick a wrapped box. It was from Beecroft and Bull. Erick slowly opened the box and found a bowtie in blue, gold and white.

"It is a Chanukah bowtie for you to wear tomorrow. My family dresses for Christmas Day."

Erick grinned and said Todd's mother would probably use it to string him up. Erick then handed Todd a present. It, too, was wrapped in holiday paper from Beecroft and Bull. It was a red, green and white Christmas bowtie.

They both fell onto the other laughing. That led to kissing, which led to snuggling which led to Todd jumping up saying they needed to get ready for Christmas Eve Mass. Erick just looked at Todd.

“What? It is Christmas Eve and the choir does a concert for an hour before the service. We need to get ready so we can get our pew.”

Erick knew that what he had to say wasn't going to be well received.

“I said yes to Advent services. Todd this is Christmas Eve. Jews don't celebrate Christmas. I can't go. In fact, in many cities in Europe it is dangerous for Jews to be out on Christmas Eve.” The two men were staring at each other.

Todd looked like someone had slapped him. He had assumed because Erick went to the Advent services that he would naturally go to Christmas Eve service with him.

“I don't think I have ever gone to Christmas Eve service alone. I don't.....” Todd was crying, went to the bedroom and closed the door. He never closed the bedroom door.

Erick went to the living room and sat on the sofa. The Chanukah candles were starting to burn down so he put them out so they didn't catch anything on fire. He then went to the dining room and extinguished the Advent candles. He realized the Bach Cantata had finished and there was absolute silence in the apartment. He was frozen and didn't know what to do.

He was about to fall asleep when he heard the bedroom door open. Todd looked at him and said he was going to take a shower and then get ready for Midnight Mass. There was no happiness on his face whereas he was all smiles earlier in the evening. The bathroom door closed and Erick swallowed hard and knew what he had to do. He had never felt so wretched and miserable in his life. He quickly got up from the sofa and went into the bedroom. He closed the door. There was only one solution. He thought of his parents and brother at home in Newport. He also thought of Todd feeling all alone and abandoned. He was practically nauseous.

He finished what he knew he had to do and was waiting in the living room when Todd went directly from the bathroom into the bedroom. Again, he closed the door. Erick stood and waited. He was nervous about what he had to say.

Todd stood in amazement when he saw Erick standing in the living room in his suit wearing the bowtie that Todd had just given him. He also had on his kippah.

“I am going because I love you. I love you. We will eventually figure this out. I am going as a Jew and will wear my kippah throughout the service.” He didn't ask but made a claim to his faith on one of the holiest days in the Christian calendar.

Todd rushed to Erick and cradled him in his arms. “I love you, too. We will figure this out because we have a lifetime together.” He picked up the bowtie that Erick had given him. He took off the one he was wearing and asked Erick to tie the Christmas bowtie for him. When Erick finished, they looked at each other. They didn't know whether to kiss or smile or do whatever so they just looked into each other's eyes and saw love. That answered all of the questions each of them had.

Todd grabbed Erick's hand. “Give me one minute. Don't leave. I will be right back.”

When Todd came back into the living room, he was wearing the kippah that had been a gift from Erick on the first night of Chanukah.

“We go together. I love you. Thank you for loving me enough for us to work through this.”

They barely got to their pew before the church filled with people who were there to hear the choir. They received questioning looks from many people who knew them as the handsome, gay couple who always sat in the same pew. On Christmas Eve, they were revealing one more bit of information about themselves.

Suggested music:

“Tomorrow is My Dancing Day”

Gerald Near, Composer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VTkJSIXXzU>

Wednesday, December 25
Fourth Night of Chanukah
Christmas Day

*“But to you who fear My name,
the light of righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings.
And you shall go out and leap for joy like calves from the stall.”*

Malachi 4:2

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace for those he favors.

Luke 2:14

*On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me a partridge in a pear tree.
from “The Twelve Days of Christmas.” The partridge represents Jesus, the Christ.*

The alarm went off at 4:30 in the morning. Erick reached out and slapped the alarm. The clock fell off the bedside table.

“Bugger it.”

He heard a snickering under the blanket.

Erick slid down and pulled the body close to his. Just a few hours earlier the two men had experienced some of their most intense loving making since they first met at Halloween. They had heard the rumors about make-up sex and had now experienced its power. They were sated at that time but now there were new needs presenting themselves. Erick started kissing down Todd’s backbone. Todd was giggling and squirming the entire time. Just as Erick reached the promised land the alarm went off again. He was the one to chuckle this time.

“No manna from heaven today, my lover. We need to get up, shower, have breakfast, pack the car and get to your parent’s house in Richmond. He slapped Todd’s butt.

“You forgot that we need to get dressed. Are you going to meet my parents naked?”

“That is an idea. I can show them that I am really Jewish.”

“I am not Jewish and I am circumcised.”

“I know. What a shame. I would enjoy some infidel cock sometimes.”

Todd popped straight up in bed. Erick could sense that Todd's eyes were ablaze but the light was not on so he couldn't be sure.

"I can't believe you said that. Did you really say that?"

Erick was smiling from ear to ear.

"Okay, shiksa queen, get up."

Todd jumped on top of Erick and held him down. "I will show you a shiksa queen." Todd fell onto Erick's chest. Then he pushed his body up and starting kissing his boyfriend. He grabbed him and rolled him across the bed.

"I give up, I give up. This is not the Six Day war. Oy-veh. You goy boys are always having to prove yourself. I guess it is because what you lack in penis size you try to make up in brute strength."

That's all Todd needed to hear before he decided that his boyfriend needed to be shown both the length of his penis and his brute strength. Todd reached into the table drawer and removed the lubricant. He slathered himself and pushed Erick's knees up to his chest. He was in ecstasy when he crossed the Red Sea and entered the Promised Land.

Mouth found mouth. Hand found hand. Their bodies worked in perfect rhythm. They reached their destination at the same time. Todd was sure that they were waking the neighbors. A deep chuckle emanated from each of them.

"I think you reached Jerusalem." Erick was enjoying the fullness.

"I think the saying is 'Next Year in Jerusalem.'"

"You arrived early but just at the perfect time. I love you so much. Merry Christmas, my Christian boyfriend."

"Happy Chanukah, my Jewish boyfriend."

They gave each other one last kiss before they crawled out of bed. They couldn't be late for breakfast at Todd's parents.

Erick went to the kitchen to turn on the coffee maker. Todd went to the bathroom to warm up the water for their shower. A sense of tenderness and shyness overcame them while they showered. They laid their heads on each other's shoulders. Todd thought they would look like those pictures of swans that would wrap their necks around each other. He was so in love that it almost made him want to shout out with joy. Todd felt the kiss on his neck. He moaned in deep appreciation. They stood on the mat and dried each other. Erick stood behind Todd while they cleaned their teeth and shaved. Erick's manhood was safely harbored in Todd's trench. Erick's eyes started welling with tears. Todd noticed and turned his body and held his lover.

"What is wrong?"

"I love you so much. I didn't know that love could be like this. I thank the Creator of the Universe for sending us both to the dance that night. You are my life, my everything."

Todd pulled his body back and nodded his head. He was too choked up to talk. They looked at each other and then kissed. They laid their heads on each other's shoulders and didn't want to move. Finally, Erick could sense his internal clock beeping again.

"Okay, lover boy we are officially thirty minutes behind schedule."

"Oh my God, I need to put the cinnamon rolls in the oven. The oven has to preheat. We are going to be late and my mother will kill us."

"The oven is preheating. First, clothes and then cooking. Nope. Clothes, coffee and then cooking."

They walked into the bedroom and turned on the overhead light. Both burst out laughing at the explosion of bedclothes all over the room. They put on briefs. Todd had picked out red for himself and blue for Erick. They went to the kitchen and Erick poured them coffee.

"We need to plan our work. You work the kitchen and I will do the rest of the house. Clean sheets are needed on that bed. I will pack the car. Clothes should be easy. We can make this happen. I do require breakfast though. You wore my ass out. Both literally and figuratively. If you see me hobbling around today it will be because I was screwed by a big brute Christian Crusader."

"Ha, I bet you won't talk about me having a little penis again.....or maybe you will." They both smiled knowing that Erick had set it up so that Todd fucked him. They had made love when they got home from church and again when they awoke. This was an all-out bout of lovemaking.

The pan of cinnamon rolls was on the counter ready to be baked. A breakfast casserole was in the oven for Erick and Todd to eat before they left town. Even though there would be breakfast in Richmond it wouldn't start until mid-morning. The boys knew they couldn't wait that long.

The bedroom was put back together in short order. Erick then set about cleaning the living room. They had arrived home late, had a glass of wine and some canapes in the living room before going to bed. Usually the house was in order before they went to bed but earlier in the night, they were so needy for each other they left things where they were. Erick took glasses and plates to the kitchen and put them in the dishwasher. He stayed clear of Todd who was busy cooking.

"That is not allowed."

"What, my love. What is not allowed?"

"You come into my kitchen and are sneaking out without giving me a kiss. That is not allowed."

"Erick walked up behind Todd and ground his hips as he kissed the back of Todd's neck."

"One on the mouth and we are good."

Erick fulfilled the order.

"The Spode Christmas China is in the bottom of the buffet. We will eat on that this morning."

Erick knew it would be a day filled with Christmas so they might as well start with Christmas breakfast. When Erick opened the door he saw a set of dishes with a Chanukkiah. It was blue and white china and the Chanukkiah was in gold. He felt Todd approach him from behind and then his arms wrapped him.

“Surprise. I was at the Mall this week and saw these dishes. I counted on the fact that you never went into the buffet. A blessed Chanukah morning to you.”

Erick set the table with the dishes and then lit the candles on the table. Todd had prepared fresh fruit, juice, an egg casserole and a fresh pot of coffee for their breakfast.

“Do you think we will always be this happy?”

“Yes. Todd, you are the man for me. Your consideration of my needs is amazing. I have never seen Chanukah dishes but you thought of me when you saw them. Our love will carry us through.”

They finished breakfast and cleared the dining room. Todd said the Christ Candle needed to remain on the table for the 12 Days of Christmas. Todd said they would sort everything on Boxing Day. That was another new day that Erick had to learn. What in the world was Boxing Day?

After ensuring that all of the presents and the freshly baked cinnamon rolls were in the car, they departed Williamsburg heading west on I-64. Erick was trying not to ask a million questions about Todd’s family. He really was trying but wasn’t actually succeeding. Todd made all of his responses humorous which relieved the tension of bringing a boyfriend home for the holiday.

Erick was driving and Todd was the navigator when they exited the interstate and drove through Richmond toward Windsor Farms. Todd said they had to ride down Monument Avenue. Most of the houses were decorated and they had all of their Christmas lights blazing even though it was a sunny bright cold day.

They pulled in front of the house and Erick let out a low whistle. “Remind me again how rich you are.”

Todd laughed and said they were not rich compared to some people in Richmond. Erick didn’t believe it. They got out of the car, each with his arms full of presents to be put under the tree in the den. Todd said he would go back for the cinnamon rolls. Todd’s mother met them at the side door.

“Oh my goodness, look at all of the presents. It looks like Santa Claus has come. Right this way.” She led them to the den where it was Christmas central. There were brightly wrapped packages everywhere. Still, the tasteful décor shone through. As soon as the packages were put near the tree, Erick and Todd heard Mr. Reynolds walk into the room and greet them.

Todd’s mother came up and gave him a kiss on the cheek. She looked at Erick and said they hadn’t been formally introduced yet but asked if she could kiss him on the cheek also. Erick glowed and said he would like that. Todd’s father walked up to Erick and shook his hand.

“Welcome. We are so glad the two of you are here today. What time did you get up this morning to get here so early?”

Mrs. Reynolds then told them coffee was in the breakfast room and looked at Todd and asked if he remembered to bring the cinnamon rolls. He smiled and said he would get them. The four of them sat in the breakfast room and Mrs. Reynolds looked at the flowers and then thanked Erick for his lovely gesture of sending them.

“You know, most people don’t show that consideration. They think I am wonder woman and can decorate everything myself. To have someone send flowers on Christmas Eve means one less thing for me to do, so I thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

Just as Todd was wondering about his brother, Tayloe walked in. He was still in his pajamas and was scratching his hairy navel. He walked over and kissed Todd on the top of the head and then did the same to Erick. Erick blushed. Tayloe looked like he had been out all night drinking.

“Did big brother have a rough night? You look a little hung over?”

“I was invited to parties after Christmas Eve Mass. They went on for quite some time. I am not used to drinking like I did in college.”

“Well, you found your way to our house to spend the night and for that we are grateful. It is nice to have my two boys back at home today.” Mr. Reynolds smiled. “And it is nice to have you join us today, Erick. I promise it is going to be full out southern Christmas so if you need to escape sometime during the day, Todd’s room can be your place of refuge.”

“Thank you, sir. I come from a small family so sometimes I do get overwhelmed. Todd and I did Advent services everyday so I think I am prepared.”

“Ahh, Todd loves his Advent services but those are junior varsity compared to the Reynold’s family Christmas gathering. Do you play football?”

Erick said that he was quarterback on his high school team.

“I hope you brought clothes for a game this afternoon. We wouldn’t want you to mess up your fine clothes today; especially your bowtie. That is not regulation football gear.”

Todd laughed and said he had some clothes in his room and was sure they would find something to wear.

“Are there going to be enough people here for a football team?”

“Oh no, but the Price family will meet us at the field at 2 pm. It is an annual event between our two families. We play with ever how many people we have.”

Tayloe looked at Erick and said he didn’t know what he was getting into. He then, in a little quieter voice, asked after Eron.

“I spoke to the family yesterday and Eron was out playing soccer. He is in Newport until the New Year.”

Tayloe nodded his head.

Mr. Reynolds looked at Tayloe and told him to get dressed. Todd offered to assist his mother cleaning up the breakfast room and to finalize the luncheon plans. Mr. Reynolds asked Erick to join him in the den. At that point, Erick needed a kiss from Todd but didn’t dare ask in front of his parents.

“Would you like a drink?”

“No thank you, it is early for me to start drinking.”

“I wish I could say the same. On Christmas, we start drinking early and stop late in the evening. You will learn over time.”

Mr. Reynolds sat down with a crystal tumbler filled with amber liquid. The men looked at each other.

“If Todd had brought a girl home, my wife would be inveigling answers from her in the kitchen. Since Todd brought a boy home it is my job to find out about you.” Mr. Reynolds smiled.

“What would you like to know?”

“Everything. It seems that our son is besotted.”

“If I may say so. I am besotted with your son.”

Mr. Reynolds smiled.

“Well, I am from Newport, Rhode Island. I went to Yale. I have a doctorate in history and this is my first year on faculty at William and Mary. I am Phi Beta Kappa. I am not a member of any fraternities or secret societies. Those are still Christian and wealthy. I am neither. I have a twin brother, Eron who is an attorney in Washington, D.C. He works for the U.S. Eastern District Courts. He went to Harvard. After going to school together for all of those years and being constantly referred to by the wrong name, we decided to go to different colleges. My father is an accountant and my mother a librarian. We have no other family as they were all killed during World War II. I don’t know family history as my parents find it too painful to talk about. Since coming to the United States, my parents have lived in the same house and I suppose will die there. They love Newport and have made many friends there.”

Erick finished and the men sat in silence for a few minutes.

“What brought you to William and Mary?”

“My dissertation advisor turned out to be a somewhat difficult person. He was incredibly brilliant and was equally difficult. I thought I could overcome his difficult personality by showing him my dedication and skills. I was wrong. Lesson learned. A leopard does not change its spots. Anyway, I had been hesitant to seek employment until my dissertation was approved because that was the type of thing that would have enraged my advisor. He would have called me presumptuous. I finished my dissertation this spring and was graduated in May. I used a scattershot approach by sending my curriculum vitae to schools whose history departments I respected. That would have been in June. The first to respond was William and Mary. I came down for interviews and was hired. I signed a contract the end of July. I moved to Williamsburg two weeks later. I knew nothing of the town so I rented a studio apartment that was on a month to month lease. So that is how I ended up in Williamsburg.”

“I see. It seems that you have had to overcome a lot of adversity in your life.”

“I didn’t see things as adversities but as the challenges we were presented in life. I have never felt picked on or discriminated against. My parents told Eron and me that we were in the United States and we could be anything we wanted to be. I have found that to be true. I feel truly privileged.”

This was not the response Mr. Reynolds expected. There was no chip on Erick’s shoulder. There was no brooding sense of being discriminated against. This was a cheerful, happy young man.

“So, how exactly did you meet my son?”

Erick swallowed hard and looked at Mr. Reynolds. He wasn't sure what Todd had told them so he followed his core belief: tell the truth.

"I moved here and didn't know anyone. For the first time in my life I was overwhelmed with loneliness. I decided to go to a Halloween dance. It was a costume dance so I borrowed a colonial costume from the history department. That is not very original because we are in the colonial capital. I am not creative in being able to think of outrageous costumes and that sort of thing. I am a very practical person. Anyway, I got to the dance and when I walked in this guy literally fell into my arms. He was falling and I caught him. That was Todd. I found out later that a fellow named Matan Jenner-Ward actually pushed him my way. Well, Todd and I started dating and we knew we were made for each other. I don't know how to explain it other than we know. I have found my mate for life. I love your son with every fiber of my being."

"You know Matan Jenner-Ward?"

"Yes sir. Todd and I were ushers/best men/witnesses at the commitment ceremony he had with Yonatan just a couple of weeks ago. They have turned out to be very good friends to us. We socialize with them on a regular basis."

"I see." Mr. Reynolds had a look of consternation on his face. "Are you seeing them over the holidays?"

"Possibly, sir. They have a home in Brussels and flew there after their commitment ceremony. I think they are due back on December 31st or sometime before school starts for the spring semester. We tentatively have New Year's plans with them though that is dependent on their return date.

"I see."

"Is there something wrong, Mr. Reynolds?"

"No, on the contrary. This is a strange question perhaps, but do you know the extent of their wealth?"

"I was raised to not talk about other people's money. My father is an accountant and he never talked about what his clients had in the way of money. I know that Yonatan and Matan have a lot of money but I have no idea how much. They don't talk about it and neither do we. In fact, a funny thing happened the week before their ceremony. They were taking us out to dinner as a thank you for our help and when it came time to pay, Yonatan realized that he had forgotten to bring a credit card and between them they had ten dollars in their wallets. They both found it hysterically funny. We didn't understand why they thought it was so funny. I paid for dinner and the next day a man who works for them showed up at the apartment with an envelope of cash to pay me for the dinner. He apologized on their behalf."

"The truly rich are different than you and me."

"The thing is, they say that neither of them was raised with a lot of money. Yonatan grew up on a farm in Southampton County. Matan grew up in Suffolk. I think the wealth is a fairly recent thing. They both say they have no idea how much money they have."

"I dare say. My firm has been asked to do certain financial transactions for them. I didn't know of them and was surprised at the amount of money we were dealing with. From talking to their lawyer,

Mr. Cohen, this is just a portion of their wealth that is in the United States. It is surprising that someone in Virginia would have that amount of wealth and my firm wouldn't know them."

"I wouldn't know. I just know that they are two of the best friends that Todd and I could have."

"Enough of that. Has Todd told you about our family?"

Erick smiled. "He is like a living history book. Every time I touch something in the apartment, he tells me the family history. I am afraid if I break something it will be like that person has died all over again." At that point both men were laughing.

"Let's go see if Marjorie has anything for us to do. Dollars to donuts she does."

Erick felt like he had passed a test. Somehow knowing Yonatan and Matan had been the linchpin for acceptance but he didn't know why.

Soon the house was filled with people. Most gave the fish eye when Todd introduced Erick as his boyfriend. When it was time to open presents, Mr. Reynolds said he was Santa and would hand out each present. There were lots of oohs and ahhs. The last presents were for Todd's immediate family. When Mrs. Reynolds opened the box from her husband she beamed. Todd could see that it was jewelry from Swartzchild's which wasn't unusual. Inside was a charm for the bracelet she was wearing. The charm was a Mogen David and a Cross that were intertwined. There was a diamond at each point of the star and rubies were at the four posts of the cross. Todd gasped, let out an involuntary bark of a laugh and grabbed Erick.

Mr. Reynolds was pleased that not only had he surprised his wife but also his son.

"This is in honor of your relationship. Now make sure that she gets to wear that the rest of her life. Next, I want to give her charms when you start having children."

Erick could only nod his head. He knew that if he tried to speak his voice would fail him. Mr. Reynolds had a pair of pliers and attached the charm while the bracelet was still on Mrs. Reynold's wrist.

"I wouldn't want it to get misplaced with all of this paper. It is too precious."

The dining room table was loaded with food. Erick was surprised when Mr. Reynolds asked him to bless the table and the food. Erick tried to not feel co-opted that he was asked to bless a Christmas meal and chose a basic prayer for meals. He chose to think of it as an honor.

Blessed are You, Eternal one our God, Universal Presence, through Whose Word everything came to be. We thank you for this food today and every more. Amen.

Mrs. Reynolds went up to Erick and Todd to quietly speak with them while others were filling their plates.

"Erick, we do not keep a kosher kitchen. In fact, I don't know what a kosher kitchen is but I made sure there were certain foods that have no pork and no shell fish. I have been reading but the food rules are somewhat confusing to me." She quietly pointed out the foods that she had prepared especially for her son's partner. Erick was humbled that she had made the effort.

“Eat up, everyone, because we have a football game coming up and you will need your energy. We have a new quarterback this year who will help us win.”

Erick blushed and hoped that he was up to the praise that had been bestowed upon him.

“Dessert will be served after the game. You must win because I had the bakery make a victory cake.” Erick was feeling overwhelmed by Mrs. Reynold’s hospitality.

Todd and Erick went upstairs and sorted through clothes until Erick found something to wear.

“I need cleats. I cannot quarterback in these loafers.”

Let’s go check out Tayloe’s room. I bet there are some cleats in there. Sure enough they found old uniforms including three pairs of cleats. Everything was a little snug but the guys wore them anyway.

When they got to the field at St. Christopher’s there were people walking their dogs. They gladly gave way to the two teams playing on the field. They went into the bleachers to watch the game. Everyone in the neighborhood knew of this old time family rivalry. Mr. Reynolds and Mr. Price were in the center of the field for the coin toss, then shook hands and walked to the sidelines. One of the high school football coaches was there as referee. Erick felt the pressure that these folks treated everything too seriously. This was not a simple pick-up football game.

They were only playing two quarters. The sun would be down before they could play a full game. At the end of the first quarter the game was tied at 14 all. The players were having to play both offense and defense because there weren’t enough players to mount two teams of players. The Price team had a hot shot high school quarterback who was fresh off the season. Erick felt they were doomed. It was deep in the second half when he felt the ball in his hands and saw that Tayloe was in an open position. He threw the ball, Tayloe jumped in the air to catch it and then ran into the end zone. After a successful field goal the score was 21-14. There were two minutes left in the game. Mr. Reynolds came on the field to tell the team to stall as much as possible and to show a strong defense. The Reynolds team kicked the ball and the Price player was running directly toward Todd when he stumbled over his own feet and the ball flew into Todd’s hands. Todd ran. Everyone just stopped and watched the young man as he tore into the end zone. There was a roar of amazement. After a successful field goal and the Reynold’s team felt like they had the game sewn up. Perhaps they were too confident and when the Price team scored, they were brought back to earth.

“Okay, we want one more touchdown. I am afraid we are going to have to do this the hard way: play by play, yard by yard. Let’s get to the first yard line and then we will keep moving down the field.” Erick was in full quarter back mode and his team was following his directions; that is what they were supposed to do. With seconds left on the clock and a play in motion, Erick realized that there was an opening in the line and the end zone was in sight. He took advantage and as the Price team realized what was happening they moved to the center and pig piled Erick. It was only when the last player was pulled off of him did the referee declare it a touchdown. Erick was a hero.

Mr. Reynolds could not have been prouder on his sons and his son’s boyfriend. Sissies? Ha! That was damned fine football playing. This was better than college ball and that was saying something. They returned to the house and the boys said they needed to shower. All three ran up the stairs.

“Let’s do it like we used to.” Tayloe was throwing down a challenge to Todd.

“I’m not sure big brother.”

“Come on, let’s do it, chicken shit. Barq, barq, barq.” He was trying to make the sound of a chicken or so he thought.

Erick didn’t know what was going on. He looked back and forth between the two.

“Okay, last one in is a rotten egg.”

They started stripping and Erick realized they were going to take a shower together. When the boys had been in high school, Mr. Reynolds had a large shower built on the second floor that would hold 4-5 people.

Erick noticed that Tayloe kept looking at his cock. Finally, Erick stood in the middle of the shower, pushed his shoulders back, put his hands on his hips and thrust his cock forward. Todd noticed that Erick was doing that for Tayloe’s benefit.

“How big does that thing get?”

“Why, do you want some?” Erick smirked.

Tayloe blushed. “No, I know that you are Eron are twins. Are you twins in all respects?”

“Nope, he is bigger than me.”

Tayloe smiled.

“Only by one tenth of one tenth of an inch. I swear he was cheating when he measured us.”

Erick laughed and then scrubbed Todd’s back. Their hair was still wet when they entered the dining room. Everyone cheered the heroes from the football game. Sure enough, there was a large sheet cake in the middle of the table. Erick was asked to cut the first slice. He was declared the Most Valuable Player and Mr. Reynolds handed him a trophy. Erick realized this was some serious stuff with this family. The Price family said they were ready for the next year when they would win. Erick loved the competitiveness but also the camaraderie.

After dessert, people started leaving. They all wanted to tell Erick good bye and they looked forward to a repeat game next Christmas. Whatever they thought of him earlier in the day had been replaced with a new found respect.

Marjorie had started setting plates at the breakfast room table. “We will have a light supper in there. Leave the dining room. I will clean it later.” Todd helped bring bowls of food to the table. Marjorie was the last to enter and she was fumbling with some things in her hands. It was a Chanukkah and candles.

“I don’t know how to do this. I went to one of the art galleries in Carytown and they told me what to buy. I hope I did okay. Erick, can you help me please?”

Erick gently took the Chanukkah and set it in the window sill. Marjorie had bought a box of candles and Erick took out what was needed. He took the shamash and lit the other candles as he recited the prayers. There was silence in the room. He turned and said that Chanukah was a time for celebration and everyone looked so serious.

“Today in Chanukah we are focusing on The Golden Rule – do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Everyone joined in the discussion about treating others fairly. Robert used the time to talk about the guiding precepts of his investment firm and that the Golden Rule was a principal that was part of their charter. That led to conversations about ethical investments in their family trusts. Robert said that he would review the investments with the boys and perhaps they should move some money around. Marjorie coughed and everyone turned and looked at her.

“Are you okay, my dear?” Robert had a look of concern on his face.

“Not really. Is this going to be a boy’s club from now on? Please remember that while I am a woman that I majored in finance in college. Robert, we met in a finance class. While you are all smart, I actually had a better grade than you. Don’t exclude me. I want to make sure that you consider women led businesses in family investments.”

There were four sheepish looking men in the room.

To break the tension, Robert said he had presents for everyone. He left the room but quickly returned with wrapped packages.

“Erick, our son, we are learning what it means to be an interfaith family. Please teach us and we promise we will learn. I read that in Chanukah you give presents each day. I bought presents for everyone hoping that we would get through the day without us having offended you to the point that you and Todd would have left.”

Mr. Reynolds handed out packages to everyone as they started eating. For Erick, this had been the most remarkable day. He had never imagined that anything like this would have ever happened in his life.

Marjorie opened her present and was surprised to find another charm. It was a heart. On one side was engraved Todd’s birthday and on the other was Erick’s birthday.

“I can’t tell you how hard it was for me to find out your birth date. I hope I got it right.” He had.

When Todd opened his gift, he found a gold chain with a Cross and Mogen David. It did not have any precious jewels. Erick was given the same present. They took them and put them on each other.

Taylor was given a gold chain with a cross. Taylor had a sly grin on his face when he handed presents to everyone. He was prepared this time.

Erick and Todd had also come prepared and handed out presents. Then Erick stared at Todd intensely and the others noticed and stopped talking. Todd then slowly nodded his head and grinned. Erick stood while holding Todd’s hand.

“Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds. Taylor. I am here tonight to tell you that I love Todd with all of my heart and soul. I would like to marry him and he has said he would like to marry me. Tonight, I would like to ask your permission for us to get married. I promise that my entire life will be devoted to making him happy and loved.”

Marjorie was the first to jump up and hug the two men. She was crying and saying, “yes, yes, yes.” Robert was smiling and slapping them on their backs and saying it was good thing. Erick and Todd looked at Taylor who was saying nothing.

“Taylor, I would like to marry your brother. I love him. Do I have your permission? I know how close the two of you are and we desire your approval.”

Taylor stepped forward and hugged Todd. He looked at Erick as tears streamed down this face. “Yes, I give my approval but if you hurt my brother in any way, I will come find you and after I finish with you, I will turn over whatever is left of you for the courts to handle.”

Erick realized that Taylor was completely serious with his response. It was not said in jest. There was no humor.

“You have my word, Taylor.”

Taylor reached out and pulled Erick into a hug. “You lucky bastard. He is the most precious thing in the world to me. He will no longer be mine, but yours. Take care of him.”

Mr. Reynolds pulled a bottle of champagne from the refrigerator and they toasted the two men. Taylor even offered a toast. He realized that he was so upset because Todd had always forewarned him about any major events in his life but not this time. He knew that from now on it would be Erick he would turn to. He was thrilled for Todd but also heartbroken that his relationship with his brother had changed.

Todd and Erick made ready to leave. It had been a long day. Erick packed the car while Todd went upstairs to talk to Taylor. Taylor had become too distressed to stay with the family.

“Erick, I am so thrilled for you and Todd. You made the day wonderful for me and for everyone. You are a gift to our family. Please take care of our son.” Marjorie gave Erick a strong hug.

Robert extended his hand and then pulled Erick into a hug. “May I call you son?”

Erick nodded.

“It was wonderful having the two of you here today. Of course, I was thinking the best was when you led us to victory against the Prices. Little did I know it was going to get better after that. Take care of our son and I hope he takes care of you. Let us know if either of you need anything.”

Todd appeared about that time. He was upset after talking with Taylor but put on a good face. Todd thought that Taylor was on overload from the holidays which led to the highly emotional scene they had upstairs. Taylor was happy for his little brother but also bereft beyond his imagining.

Robert and Marjorie gave them a last kiss and a blessing for traveling mercies.

“The two of you have a few days off and we expect to see you here before you go back to class.”

Marjorie stood in the drive waving as they backed out and then headed down the street. Robert stood behind her and pulled her into a tight embrace. Taylor stood at his bedroom window and watched as the car tail lights disappear when it turned a corner. He knew his life had turned a corner and he had a decision to make.

Suggested Music:

“Mary Did You Know?”

Performer: Clay Aiken

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07SQgt-Jmws>

Thursday, December 26
Boxing Day
5th Night of Chanukah
2nd Day of Christmas

*Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant,
and to his supplications, and cause Your face to shine upon
Your sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake.*

Psalms 43:3

On the second day of Christmas, my true love gave to me two turtle doves.

from "The Twelve Days of Christmas." The two turtle doves represent the Old and New Testaments.

The alarm went off at 4:30 a.m. Erick had forgotten to reset the clock after getting up early for Christmas Day. He turned it off, rolled over and snuggled close to Todd and went back to sleep. They awoke at 7 a.m. They were refreshed after such a busy Christmas Day.

They kissed each other, then had frowns on their faces from their morning breath. "Ooh, we ate too much spicy food yesterday." They laughed and went to the bathroom to clean their teeth. This time Todd stood behind Erick and held him with one hand while he cleaned his teeth with the other. Erick was bent over the counter top when he felt Todd's need pressing into him. He smiled and said they had all day to make love.

"Well, it is Boxing Day and since we are giving the servants the day off, I will fix breakfast."

"Very good, my Lord. I will set the table but first I need a large mug of coffee and some Ibuprofen. The football hero is hurting this morning."

"Food first or you will be puking all over the kitchen."

Erick thought he knew better and popped 800 mg. In less than five minutes he was running to the bathroom where he hugged the toilet. He wandered back into the kitchen and Todd looked at him and smiled.

"Told ya. But when do you ever listen to your boyfriend?"

"Argh, I don't which is worse: the pain, the puking or your knowing everything attitude?" Erick grinned at the last part of his statement.

"Sit in the dining room and food will be coming in a minute."

Todd had put together a platter of leftovers from his mother along with fresh scrambled eggs and bagels. He grabbed the cream cheese from the refrigerator.

“Now, let’s try this again. Some food and then I suggest 200 mg. of Ibuprofen. You are such an overachiever.”

The telephone rang and Todd got up to answer it. It was a voice he was not expecting.

“Erick, your dad is on the phone.” Erick gave him a quizzical look and then smiled that his father was calling.

“Hi dad. What’s going on?” His smile quickly turned into a frown and then into fright.

“We will be there as soon as we can. Tell him I love him. Please tell him I love him. I will call when I figure out transportation.”

Erick turned and Todd knew it was bad news. Very bad news.

“Sit down and tell me what is going on.”

“It is Eron. He wasn’t feeling well yesterday. During the night he became very sick and my father called 911. They took him to the local hospital. They have now flown him to Boston. My parents are home packing and then driving to Boston. We need to pack and go.”

Todd’s mind immediately went to the practicality of putting things away and packing for their trip. Only he didn’t know how long they would be gone. It sounded serious but once they got to Boston, they would know exactly what was wrong and he would be okay.

“We do best when we have a plan. Erick, look at me, love. Help me make a plan.” Erick was standing and then Todd saw him slump to the floor in tears. Todd went down on his knees and embraced his partner. “We need to be strong for Eron and your parents. Erick look at me.” Erick looked up and Todd could see the fear in his eyes. “We need to be strong for your parents and for Eron. We have to do this together. Are you able to help me?” Erick nodded his head.

They sat down to make plans. Erick said he would make the flight reservations. Todd starting putting all of the food away. He also went to the bedroom to start sorting through clothes and packing suitcases. He heard Erick’s voice become shrill on the telephone.

“He is dying, I need two seats on a flight to Boston today. Please. I know it is a day after Christmas but surely you can fit us on the flight. My brother is dying.”

There was silence and then he heard Erick call someone a bitch. That wasn’t going well.

“Erick, let me try to get reservations. May I try?” Erick handed Todd the telephone. There were no airline seats available. Todd knew that it would be a nightmare to drive to Boston and with Erick driving they might not make it. He called Amtrak.

“Yes, the Lee Hall Station. We will be there. Do you have us booked on the Acela from Washington to Boston? Excellent. Here is the credit card number.”

“The train? The fucking train? We won’t get there before he is dead. My poor brother.” Erick slumped again. Todd realized that he would never be able to count on Erick during emergencies. But he wasn’t going to worry about that.

“We are picking up the train here at Lee Hall Station. We can leave the car at the station. In D.C. we will switch to the Acela which will get us to Boston. By the time you count driving to the airport, going through security and probable delays in Philadelphia we will get there at the same time. Erick, I love you and I know you can do this.”

Erick just nodded.

Todd had one more telephone call to make.

“Erick, I need for you to take a shower while I take care of something.”

As soon as Todd heard the water running, he called his parents and explained the situation. After talking briefly with his father, he heard his mother’s voice. “What train are you on? It doesn’t matter. I will call Amtrak. Todd, tell Erick we love him and will do whatever the two of you need. Take care, son.”

They arrived at the Lee Hall Station and Todd took care of the transactions. Luckily, he had cash left from his Christmas shopping. He hoped that he would be able to cash a check somewhere in Boston. He could have his father put more money into his account, if needed. His father would know what to do. They found a train car without too many people. Todd got Erick settled and shortly after that they got to Richmond. There was always a tedious trip to go through Acca Yards because many of the tracks had been there since the late 1800s. They pulled up to the Staples Mill Road Station and Todd looked out the window and saw his parents. Todd told Erick he would be back and walked to the front of the car where the steps had been lowered for passengers to get on. His father was standing there with an envelope he handed to Todd.

“Put that in your pocket. Don’t lose it. You will need it.”

His mother handed him a basket. Todd realized it was filled with food stuffs for them to eat. His mother also handed him a small envelope. “There are sleeping pills in this envelope. Erick may need them. It sounds like he is having a difficult time. As soon as Tayloe gets out of a mediation session today we will let him know.” They both kissed him and told him to call as soon as they knew something.

After leaving Richmond, Todd realized they really hadn’t eaten breakfast before the telephone call. It was past lunch time. He made Erick eat something and then forced a sleeping pill on him.

“We will need to be alert when we get there. Sleeping on the train will be good for you.”

Erick swallowed the pill, kissed Todd, took his hand and shortly was asleep. Todd was wide awake. He had a porter help him when they switched trains at Union Station in Washington. Todd was very generous with the tip. His father had given him an envelope of cash money. In the envelope was also a note to let Todd know if he needed more money to call and he would have it put into his account. While Erick was awake Todd fed him some dinner from the food basket. Erick said he was feeling better but wasn’t sure how things would be in Boston. After passing Providence, Todd woke Erick and told him they needed to freshen up before arriving at South Station. They took turns using the small bathroom on the train. When they reached the station, Erick was back to his energetic self and was chomping at the bit to get off the train. Todd had everything planned.

“We will take a taxi to the hospital. I have made a reservation for a car tomorrow. We are both too tired to try to navigate Boston tonight.”

Todd found a taxi and told the driver to take them to Tufts Medical Center. The boys were both well dressed and the driver thought there was a less of a chance of getting stiffed on the fare. It was after midnight when they walked into the patient area. Erick dropped his suitcase and ran across the room and hugged a couple. Todd knew they were Erick’s parents. Todd organized their belongings and walked over.

Erick made an introduction and Todd shook their hands. They seemed very reserved with him. After such an effusive welcome for Erick from his parents he was trying to make sense of this very reserved couple. Erick’s parents were attempting to tell him about Eron’s problems but Erick was impatient and kept pushing for more information. In a moment of exasperation, Erick walked to the nurse’s station and asked if he could speak with a doctor. The nurse’s mouth fell open and she didn’t know what to say. She had just seen this same patient who was in a coma yet he was standing before her in a sports jacket. Erick realized the confusion and told the nurse that it was his twin brother in the bed. She blinked a couple of times and then let out a big breath of air.

“You scared me for a second. I didn’t know what to think. Let me page the doctor who is following him. Have a seat and he will be here in a few minutes. He is with another patient right now.”

Erick noticed all of the Christmas decorations that were placed everywhere. He pulled out his kippah and put it on his head. Todd did the same. The Emmanuelsons were surprised that Todd would have a kippah.

“Erick and I did not have a chance to celebrate Chanukah tonight. Could we do that now? There are no candles to light but we can pretend there are.”

Just at that moment, a doctor walked up. He heard what Todd had said.

“I have a Chanukkiah in my office if you would like to go there. I never had a chance to celebrate either.”

After instructing the nurse to put their suitcases in a safe place, Dr. Hirsch led them through a set of doors and they were in an office space. He opened his office door and they saw the Chanukkiah sitting in the window.

“If you look directly across, there is Eron’s room.”

Erick grabbed Todd’s hand in a mighty grip. “We are praying for Eron.”

All five of them said prayers in a combination of English and Hebrew for Eron. They focused on the word compassion. They thought of the kindness and compassion of the doctor who was providing care to Eron. Dr. Hirsch focused on the kindness and compassion of the nurses he worked with. He knew they were the backbone of the medical care system and without them he could not do his job. The candles were dying down when Dr. Hirsch said they should go see Eron. It was way past visiting hours but Dr. Hirsch led them down the quiet hallway. He whispered to them and said it would be a short visit and then he would sit with them and give an update. When they arrived at Eron’s room they saw three nurses attending him. The doctor asked the family to stay in the hallway for a minute while he checked to see what was going on.

“Apparently prayers work. Your Eron scared the nurses because all of the monitoring levels changed a few minutes ago. Instead of coding, this is the reverse. He is awake. Let the nurses finish and then we will go in.”

One by one, the nurses left and all three did a double take when they saw Erick. Finally, Erick giggled and Todd knew that another hurdle had been jumped.

When they entered the room, Eron was lying awake. He had a loopy grin on his face as he said that there were two of each of them. He didn't know that he had been unconscious. He only knew he had been feeling bad and laid down to take a nap. He wanted to know where he was.

Dr. Hirsch introduced himself and said they would only be there a few minutes. “I will send nurses back in to look after you. We will see you tomorrow.”

“I need to talk to my brother.” They all left including Todd after he got Erick seated. They went to the waiting room where Dr. Hirsch gave them an update. He looked at Todd and asked if he could remember everything to tell Erick.

“Yes, but he will still want to talk to you. I am just a mathematician and he doesn't put much stock in us folks.” Todd laughed after he said that.

“I put a lot of faith in people like you. Without your knowledge we wouldn't have most of this expensive equipment we use to treat patients like Eron.”

Erick came out and, as predicted, wanted to hear from Dr. Hirsch exactly what was going on. After getting an update, Erick said they needed to find a hotel to spend the night. Luckily, Mr. Emmanuelson had made reservations at a hotel down the road and had checked them in for the night. He handed Erick a room key. After finding two taxis they were delivered to the hotel. They kissed good night including Todd this time and went to their rooms.

Todd took charge as soon as they entered the room. He never thought of himself as a caregiver but he was living into the role. After they took showers and cleaned their teeth, Todd handed Erick a sleeping pill.

“I don't want it.”

“Yes, you do.”

At that point Todd put the pill on the end of his tongue so that when he kissed Erick good night he could push it into his mouth. Erick smiled and took his medicine. Todd crawled into bed and spooned his boyfriend. Neither of them moved during the night as angels watched over them and Eron.

“Hymn of the Cherubim”

Peter Illich Tchaikovsky

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPIK5HwFxcw>

Friday, December 27
6th Night of Chanukah
3rd Day of Christmas

“The Lord is my light and my help, whom shall I fear?”

Psalm 27:1

On the third day of Christmas, my true love gave to me three French hens.

*from “The Twelve Days of Christmas, the three French hens represent
faith, hope and love.*

When the phone rang in the morning, Erick was startled and crawled across Todd to get to it.

“Yes, right. In thirty minutes. We can do that.” Erick put the phone back in the receiver. “Wake up, Todd.”

When Erick turned he saw that Todd was lying back, with his hands behind his head and a grin on his face.

“I didn’t know you were awake.”

“All of a sudden I had this beast crawling all over me. Of course, I woke up. I like the beast who was crawling on me.” Todd pulled Erick down on top of him and they hugged and kissed.

“Thirty minutes until we have to be in the restaurant downstairs. My parents are meeting us for breakfast.” The guys were only ten minutes late.

Todd and Erick were famished and ate a hearty breakfast. Erick’s parents ate much less. The worry was written all over their faces.

“So, this is the plan. The three of you will take a taxi to the hospital. I am taking a taxi to the airport where I have a car reserved. We will have it as long as we are here. I will come directly to the hospital after I get the car and figure out how to drive in Boston traffic.”

It was mid-morning when Todd arrived back at the hospital. Eron was doing remarkably better though he had some deficits. His speech was slightly slurred, he had double vision and the fingers on his right hand did not want to function properly.

When they met with Dr. Hirsh, Erick quizzed him on the deficits.

“If those are the only deficits, Eron should consider himself lucky. It was touch and go for a while. I wasn’t sure he was going to make it.”

They all looked at Dr. Hirsh with a questioning gaze.

“Eron had a brain bleed. If he had not gotten to the hospital and then flown to Boston he would probably have died at home in his bed.”

Erick’s parents grabbed each other’s hands. Todd was sitting in amazement.

“Do you know how he did this?”

Mr. Emmanuelson pondered for a minute and then said, “The only thing he did was go play soccer with some guys. When he came home, he said they were a rough group and things got rather physical.”

Dr. Hirsh just looked at them. He didn’t need to say it. He did say, however, “I think Eron will have a complete recovery. He will need outpatient rehabilitation but I want to keep him for the next four to five days until we are absolutely sure there will be no further bleeding.”

They sat and thought about what Dr. Hirsh had said before Erick’s stomach started growling. Erick’s mother laughed and said he was the same as always. There was more laughter as they headed to the hospital cafeteria. When they were finishing dessert, Todd looked up and saw Tayloe walking into the cafeteria and looking around. He looked awful. He ran over to Todd, hugged him and lifted him off his feet. Then he started crying.

“How is he? Mom called me last night. I threw some clothes in a suitcase and started driving. There were no airplane seats. I stopped at a rest area on the Massachusetts Turnpike sometime during the night. When I woke this morning, I continued driving until I got here. Can I see him?”

“Tayloe, this is Mr. and Mrs. Emmanuelson.” Tayloe pulled himself together and remembered his manners. Todd suggested that he needed a shower and a nap before seeing Eron. “You don’t look your best, brother, and you don’t want to scare him. I don’t remember seeing you this disheveled in a long time.”

It was decided that Todd would take Tayloe to the hotel for a shower and nap. They would come back to the hospital at dinner time and then Todd and Tayloe could visit with Eron until bedtime. When they arrived at the room, Tayloe stripped and went into the shower. Todd put on a pair of pajama bottoms and laid on the bed. Tayloe came out in a pair of briefs and crawled on the bed.

“I need to get a room.”

“Nope, you can sleep here with us. It is a king size bed and it will hold all three of us.”

Tayloe was too tired to argue. Todd pulled him into a body hug and Tayloe fell asleep. Todd lay awake again wondering how he had become the caregiver in the family. Finally, he fell into a much needed nap. As he was waking, he reached around and felt a hard member. At first, he thought it was Erick then remembered that he was sleeping with his brother. His hard on was pushed into Tayloe’s butt. He was thankful they were both wearing clothes.

“Mmm, yeah, Eron keep doing that. It feels so good.”

Todd was wide awake at that point. What did Tayloe just say? Did he think he was in bed with Eron?

Todd slid out of bed and went to the bathroom where he took a shower. When he went back into the bedroom, Tayloe was lying on the bed with a confused look on his face.

“Did you just feel my dick?”

Todd flushed bright red. “Yeah, I was half asleep and thought you were Erick.”

Tayloe blushed. “It felt good. How big is that dick you were trying to jam in my butt?”

“I was not trying to jam it into your butt.”

“It felt like it was ready to take charge of some ass, if you ask me.”

“Well, I wasn’t asking you.”

They then looked at each other and started laughing.

“Take another shower and clean that skanky body so we can go to the hospital.”

Tayloe laughed, stretched his arms above and head and gave a big yawn. Then he did as his little brother instructed.

They arrived at the hospital and found Erick and his parents. They decided to go to a restaurant for dinner. They were already tired of hospital food. Tayloe was back to normal trying to direct what food should be ordered. Erick and Todd laughed at his behavior. Todd drove his brother to the hospital and warned him about Eron’s deficits and all of the equipment that he had hooked up to his body.

They walked in the room and a nurse was finishing feeding Eron his supper. His hands were not coordinated enough to cut the chicken and a young blond headed nurse had volunteered to help him.

Eron’s personality changed when Tayloe walked in. Eron was exuberant and said, “I get two of you. Doublemint Twins.” Then he thought about Tayloe’s presence and asked why he was there.

“I heard that you had a little boo-boo and I wanted kiss it and make it better.”

Eron just looked at Tayloe. He then slowly reached out his hand. Tayloe stepped forward, took it, and kissed it. The light in Eron’s eyes turned on. Todd instinctively understood that Eron was on the road to recovery and it was time for him to read some magazines in the waiting room.

Tayloe found Todd sleeping when the nurse finally kicked him out of Eron’s room. Todd looked really uncomfortable curled up in the chair.

“Come on, sweet brother. Let’s go back to the hotel so you can be with your partner.”

Tayloe drove them back to the hotel. When they entered the room, Erick was asleep and the bathroom light provided a sliver of light across the floor. Erick had left just enough light for the guys to be able to see. Todd crawled onto one side of the bed and pulled Erick to him. Tayloe crawled in the other side. Todd was hugging Erick, and Tayloe was hugging him.

Suggested Music:

“Au fond du temple saint”

Composer: Georges Bizet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p2MwnHpLV48>

Saturday, December 28
7th Night of Chanukah
4th Day of Christmas

*“The people who walked in darkness have seen a brilliant light;
on those who dwelt in a land of gloom light has dawned.”*

Isaiah 9:1

On the fourth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me four calling bird.

from “The Twelve Days of Christmas.” The four calling birds represent the four gospels.

Erick’s parents were early risers and were hungry. The three guys somehow showered, shaved and trekked to the hotel restaurant. They ate breakfast and then headed over to the hospital. Dr. Hirsch asked about the new person in their group when they met in Eron’s room. They introduced Tayloe.

“Well, you want an update. Something has happened and I don’t know what. Eron is remarkably better this morning. He wants to go home today. I am hesitant to release him. I need to know what happened for this latest change to have occurred. Medically, I am struggling to make sense of it. He is at day five or six of recovery and it is only day three.”

“I know what happened.” Everyone turned to Todd. “Tayloe arrived.”

Tayloe turned bright scarlet red. Erick’s mouth dropped open while Abraham scrutinized the young man standing in their presence. Eron lay in the bed with a lopsided grin on his face.

“He kissed my boo-boo and made it better.”

“I guess I have that magic touch.”

“Come sit here, I need you beside me to make me well.”

Tayloe moved across the room and sat beside Eron who reached out and grabbed his hand.

In a slow, slightly quivering voice Eron spoke to Dr. Hirsch. “Doc, I have my witch doctor here to help me. He isn’t as smart as you and he is just a lawyer, not a doctor, but I feel much better when he is with me. Can I please go home? Please?”

“Doctor Hirsch, I promise I will take good care of him. If he will let me?” Tayloe grinned at Eron and then leaned over and kissed him on the forehead. “He is stubborn as all get out, but so am I. We are both lawyers and I want him well again so he can fight cases in court. My mother says I have a healing touch. I have lots of experience with injured puppies and kittens.”

Taylor looked at the doctor with his best puppy dog eyes. Eron did the same. Todd and Erick burst out laughing at their silliness.

“On one condition, Eron has to have some evaluations to determine the level of care he needs in rehabilitation. He also needs an eye exam. It is Saturday and we are not fully staffed. Let me try to get those examinations arranged for today and if, and it is a MAJOR if, we can get those scheduled and the recommendation is for outpatient therapy at this time I will release him this afternoon.”

“Okay, everyone clear out. The patient needs to have tests. I am hungry again so we will go eat while Eron passes his tests like he is sitting for the bar exam.” Taylor was escorting people out of the room. He turned to Eron. “Pass those tests or you will be a junior associate again. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, senior attorney. I will give it my best.”

Taylor and Eron grinned at each other.

Dr. Hirsch was astounded at Taylor’s behavior. “Is he always like this?”

Eron laughed and said that was mild. “You should never go out to eat with him because then he becomes even bossier. He is on good behavior today.”

The family went to the hospital cafeteria. Nobody was hungry because they had recently eaten breakfast so coffee and hot tea were ordered. Abraham and Rachel had lots of questions for Taylor. He answered them in a loving, kind way since he had a plan and needed for them to concur. There was no need to bring out the lawyer side of his personality. Instead he treated them like distant older cousins who have come to visit and for him to pay homage. They were absolutely charmed by his behavior. Todd and Erick would cast glances at each other knowing that Taylor was wooing the confidence and trust of Mr. and Mrs. Emmanuelson.

“Why don’t the four of you go to the hotel and check out. Todd, return your car to the rental facility. Erick you can follow him and then everyone come back to the hospital. By that time, I should have Eron ready to go to Newport for the night.”

The group just nodded their heads like bobble-head dolls. Taylor was in absolute control and the Emmanuelsons were comforted by his take charge skills. They knew that if anyone could get Eron discharged it would be Taylor. While everyone went about their assigned tasks, Taylor returned to Eron’s room where a therapist was testing his motor skills. Taylor noted the deficits and instinctively knew what exercises he needed. When he was put in a wheelchair to go to the eye clinic at the hospital, Taylor was right by his side. Taylor sat in the examination room with Eron and asked cogent questions. He was relieved when he was told that glasses with a prism lens would resolve the double vision until the eyes healed; he was greatly reassured. Taylor quietly conferred with the doctor about when the glasses would be ready. Eron and Taylor had a fun time picking out the frames. Taylor tried on frames also and suggested they get matching glasses. Taylor didn’t wear glasses but he thought it would be fun for them both to wear them. He justified it in his mind that it would be less stigmatizing for Eron if they were both wearing glasses; his would have plain glass while Eron’s would have the corrective lens.

When they returned to the unit, they saw everyone waiting.

“Let me find the doctor so I can get this poor little puppy dog out of this hospital.”

Todd laughed at Tayloe's reference to Eron as a puppy. Tayloe was practically bouncing up and down acting like a little boy who was to get his first pet.

Even with the doctor's orders it was almost nightfall when Eron was finally wheeled down to the lobby and put in Tayloe's car. Tayloe and Eron got in the back seat and Erick said he should drive because he wasn't sure how clear the roads would be of ice and snow. They were headed to the Emmanuelson's home in Newport. As they headed into town Mr. Emmanuelson took a turn and Erick kept straight; Eron told Tayloe that his parents were stopping to pick up dinner for everyone. Erick stopped in front of a wood shingled Cape Cod style home. They got out and Tayloe ran around the car to help Eron up the sidewalk.

"I am not a cripple, Tayloe."

"I know, but I don't want you to fall. Let me help, please. Please."

Todd and Erick were getting luggage from the car when Erick whispered something in his boyfriend's ear. Todd smiled and nodded.

They went inside the cold damp house and Erick immediately grabbed wood to build a fire in the masonry fireplace. Todd looked around and realized that while it was a pleasant house that it was small. Very small. The apartment where he and Erick lived was about the same size and Todd thought that was small.

Mr. and Mrs. Emmanuelson came through the front door with bags of food. Todd could smell fried fish. The furnace was warming the house and everyone was taking off their coats. Erick got a stack of plates from the cupboard for Todd to set the table. Tayloe was holding Eron in his arms while they sat on the sofa. Todd gave him a questioning look.

"I don't want him to get cold. Pneumonia can set in. He doesn't need pneumonia on top of everything he has been through."

Mrs. Emmanuelson lit candles on the table and called everyone in to dinner. They sat at either end of the table with Todd and Erick on one side and Tayloe and Eron on the other. Mr. Emmanuelson stood and said prayers for Eron's recovery and grace for the meal.

"Yumm, I love fish and chips. Oh my gosh, it has been a while since I have had this. I hope you got extra tartar sauce. I could eat that just by itself." Mrs. Emmanuelson smiled as she knew Erick's eating habits.

Erick was grinning and digging into his food. Eron was trying to pick up his fork but his eyes would not align and his fingers weren't working properly. Tayloe immediately turned in his seat, pulled Eron's plate toward him, and started feeding Eron. Eron could pick up the fries with his fingers, but the fish and Cole slaw were being fed to him. Tayloe didn't bother using different forks but fed both Eron and himself with the same. When Eron tried to drink from the tea cup he spilled some of it down his front. Tayloe immediately held the cup while Eron slurped.

"I haven't heard you slurp like that since you were a child." Erick smiled at his brother.

"You slurped also. At least I didn't spit in mine." Erick and Eron both laughed.

When the meal was finished, Tayloe helped Eron back to the sofa where he pulled the afghan off the back and wrapped it around his patient. He then wrapped his arms around Eron to hold it in place. Eron sighed and leaned back with his head on Tayloe's shoulder.

"I'm tired. I need to go to bed, please."

Erick helped them up the narrow stairs and told Tayloe where everything was located. Tayloe looked at the twin beds with a skeptical eye.

"Todd and I are going to get a hotel room. We don't want to sleep on the sofa downstairs. We will be back in the morning."

Tayloe started helping Eron to undress and realized that he still had the electrode patches on his skin from the EKGs. His hair was a mess from the goo used with the EEG electrodes.

"You are a hairy beast but I need to get these patches off of your skin. It may pull out some hair. Will you let me do this?"

"Can it wait until tomorrow? I am so tired, Tayloe. I just need to sleep. Please."

"Of course, a shower in the morning will make you feel much better and will help to loosen the electrodes."

Tayloe had gotten all of Eron's clothes off, helped him into pajamas and tucked him into bed. By the time he had stripped he realized that Eron was asleep. He crawled into the twin bed on the other side of the room and lay awake thinking of everything that had happened in the past 48 hours. He heard Eron moan and Tayloe immediately sat up in his bed. The room was pitch black. He listened again and heard another moan from Eron. He crossed the room, sat on the edge of Eron's bed and reached out and touched Eron's head. Eron let out a big sigh and relaxed. Tayloe crawled under the covers and held onto Eron. Eron's arm wrapped itself around Tayloe's torso pulling him in closer and his head was on Tayloe's shoulder. Tayloe felt a kiss on his neck and then he heard snoring. A single tear fell from Tayloe's eye as he fell asleep.

Suggested Music:

"Fly to Paradise"

Composer: Eric Whitacre

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8oDnUga0JU>

Sunday, December 29
8th Night of Chanukah
5th Day of Christmas

“Behold, there will come a time!”

Isaiah 30:26

On the fifth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me five golden rings.

from “The Twelve Days of Christmas.” Five golden rings represent the five books of Moses.

“What time is it?”

“Time to get up!”

Todd threw the covers back, “I am up already. What are you going to do about it?”

“I am going to call the doctor. You have some tremendous swelling in that appendage. It looks nasty and big. They may have to amputate.”

Erick smirked as Todd recoiled.

“They aren’t touching my Sword of Damocles.” Todd smirked. “By the way, what the hell is the Sword of Damocles?”

After Erick told him the parable and its meaning, Todd realized that he was just fine being a big Christian brute for his beloved Jewish boyfriend. He didn’t need some sword hanging over his head.

Erick had gotten up and made coffee. They went to the window wall in their hotel room and looked out at the harbor. Todd stood behind Erick and held him while Erick pointed out different points of interest.

“Let’s come spend some time here next summer and we can tour the big summer cottages on Belmont Avenue. They truly are magnificent. Plus, there is a Cliff Walk where we can get the best ocean view.”

Just as Todd’s hand wandered south into Erick’s underwear the telephone rang. It was Erick’s parents wanting to know if they would come to the house for breakfast.

“Not this morning. We will be there by lunch time. How is Eron?”

After getting an update, Erick smiled at Todd and suggested they had been interrupted by the call. They spent a leisurely morning in bed making love, talking, napping, discussing their commitment ceremony and just holding each other. Finally, Erick allowed as they had to take showers and head over to his parents.

“Do you know if we are spending another night? What is the plan?” Todd was pulling clean underwear from the suitcase and wondered if they were going to need to find a laundromat.

“I have no idea. Let’s go over and figure this out. We need to return to Virginia. We both have school starting soon and we haven’t had any quiet time this holiday. I want to just be at home with you. All of our plans to be lazy and loving have been turned upside down.”

They took a leisurely shower, packed and checked out of the hotel. Erick had let Todd handle the arrangements knowing that it cost a bloody fortune even in the middle of the winter. Todd didn’t say a word about the cost and told Erick that everything was under control.

When they arrived back at the house, Eron was sitting on the sofa looking much better.

“You look good today, brother.”

“I feel much better. Tayloe took care of me last night when I started having bad dreams. He slept in my bed with me and then the dreams stopped and I had a restful night. He was nasty this morning though. He got in the shower with me and ripped off all of those patches. That hurt really bad but he made it better by kissing each place where he pulled off the patch.”

Tayloe looked chagrined that Eron would bring up their sleeping arrangement and his kissing him in the shower. Todd and Erick tried not to look at each other in amazement.

“Well good. Is lunch ready?”

“Almost. Mother is cooking and dad is due home from his office at noon. He just wanted to check up on things since it is the end of the year. A lot of clients have end of the year tax stuff that needs to happen by the 31st.”

When Mr. Emmanuelson returned, they all sat at the table and Mr. Emmanuelson led them in prayer for Eron’s continued healing and grace for the meal.

“I have a question, my son?”

“Yes, dad?”

“What are the plans? You can stay here as long as you need but have you thought about what happens now? What were the medical directions for follow-up care?”

Eron looked at Tayloe. Tayloe spoke up.

“Eron and I had a conversation this morning. We are planning to leave this afternoon for Richmond. We will stop in D.C. tonight to stay in his apartment. We can pack his clothes. We should

be at my apartment in Richmond by tomorrow afternoon. The medical school has world class care and Eron can stay with me while he recovers. He cannot work for the next sixty days. He can get rehab at the hospital and I can look after him.

All eyes turned to Eron.

He smiled and held Tayloe's hand.

"I don't want the two of you to have to worry about me every day. The closest appropriate treatment is in Providence. I can't drive and one of you would have to take off daily to drive me. You can't take off work for the next sixty days. Tayloe talked with Dr. Hirsch yesterday and all of my medical records are being sent electronically to the medical school in Richmond. Tayloe will drop me off at the clinic each morning and I can take the bus back to his apartment.

"Do you have to leave today? Is it safe for you to ride that far? You just got out of the hospital last night." Mrs. Emmanuelson was very worried.

"Eron and I talked about that. He doesn't have much stamina yet and will need to sleep a lot. We decided that Todd and Erick can trade off driving the car. It is Sunday and the traffic won't be too bad today. It will be miserable tomorrow, especially around New York City. If we leave by two this afternoon, we will get there before bedtime."

Mr. and Mrs. Emmanuelson knew that the decision had been reached and were not pleased but couldn't come up with a better solution.

"I must say, that I don't want you to leave. I am afraid."

Erick jumped up and held his mother. "Mom, we are all a little afraid for Eron. But I know that Tayloe will take care of him. Besides, you and dad are coming to Virginia this week for the New Year's Eve party at the Reynold's home. If Eron stayed here you couldn't come because he can't fly yet. You will see him a couple of days."

"I know, I know. It all makes sense in my brain, but my heart is still worried. I love my boys and I always will."

"Group huddle."

Everyone except Todd looked at Tayloe not knowing what he said. Todd gathered them and they formed a circle with Eron in the middle. They were all cuddling and hugging him. Mr. Emmanuelson was between Todd and Erick when he reached his arms across their shoulders and hugged them. He then offered a prayer for safe travels and continued healing for Eron.

Mrs. Emmanuelson insisted on packing food for them to eat on their way. She said she always had food prepared for such emergencies.

"You never know. You never know when you may have to leave in the middle of the night."

That was a sobering thought to everyone. Just a few days prior they left in the middle of the night because of Eron's brain injury. Erick became somewhat morose that he was leaving his parent's house again. He tried to maintain a cheery attitude for the others but pulled Todd upstairs and cried on his shoulder. Todd comforted him and told him that they would come back to visit and that they would see his parents in a few days. After washing his face, Erick was ready to go tell his parents goodbye.

They loaded Tayloe and Eron's suitcases into the car and Todd got behind the wheel. Tayloe and Eron got in the backseat with the afghan.

"Heading south. Here we come."

Todd pulled away from the house and drove to I-95 which would take them home to Virginia. Luckily, it was a bright, beautiful day for driving. It was Todd's first time driving in New England while Erick was his navigator. It was fairly easy staying on I-95. When they crossed the George Washington Bridge, all of the guys except Todd looked down the river toward Manhattan. Todd was so busy driving through the traffic he was afraid to take his eyes off the road. When they were on the New Jersey Turnpike, Todd pulled off at a service area to fill the car with gas and to stretch. Tayloe helped Eron get to the men's room in the service center. Todd and Erick both watched and realized how weak Eron was from his hospitalization. He had put on a good show for his parents. Tayloe was attentive and caring as he helped Eron negotiate a pathway through the throng of folks. They brought back bags of hot food while Erick took over driving. Tayloe fed Eron while Todd fed Erick. They were both slurping their drinks. Eron was feeling good and the guys had a great conversation until they reached the Delaware Memorial Bridge to head into Delaware.

"I am so glad you are driving. I hate this bridge. Oh my God. I hate this bridge."

Todd was freaking out. Erick was holding his breath and had both hands glued to the steering wheel. Everyone finally relaxed and laughed as they crossed over to the south side and got in the Ezpass lanes for the tolls.

"I wonder how much we have paid in tolls today?"

"I never know. I have a smart tag and it just deducts it from an account I have with them. With the fast lane they don't even let you know how much you just paid. I will look it up when I get home."

"You will let me know and I will pay you back." Eron felt like he was a burden and didn't want to be.

"You are to focus on getting well. Let me worry about the money. No more conversations on that subject."

Erick started smiling when he heard Tayloe. It was just like his conversations with Todd. Todd knew what Erick was thinking and reached out and held his hand. They both looked at each other and laughed. Tayloe arms reached across the seat and squeezed Todd's shoulder. They all quieted and Eron fell asleep in Tayloe's arms.

The traffic increased as they approached the metro DC area. Erick had been to Eron's apartment many times and knew exactly how to navigate the streets and circles to arrive there and found a loading zone in front of the building.

Tayloe leaned over and kissed Eron on the head. "Wake up Prince Charming. You are home." Eron opened his eyes and looked disoriented. He lay there for a minute and Tayloe could see the cognitive wheels starting to turn. There seemed to be several misfires before everything was working properly. He thought that perhaps they should not have made the long drive in one day.

"Are you okay, Eron? Do you need to lie here for a minute?"

"I think I am alright. Can you help me? I feel very tired." Just at that moment, Todd returned from the lobby of the apartment building with a wheel chair. He had asked the concierge for assistance; the man went to a storage closet and pulled it out.

Erick was gathering the luggage to be taken to the apartment. After he made sure that Tayloe had Eron in the wheel chair, Todd had the luggage in the lobby, Erick then went to park the car. After everyone was in the apartment, Eron said he was hungry. The basket of food from Mrs. Emmanuelson was demolished in one sitting.

"I'll send Todd out to get breakfast food in the morning. There is nothing in the refrigerator."

"Thanks, brother. I cleaned everything out before leaving for Newport. Tayloe can you take me to bed, please?"

Tayloe blushed and told Eron to give him directions to the master bedroom. Erick led Todd to the guest bedroom.

After unpacking their clothes, showering, and putting on pajamas, Erick and Todd went back to the living room. They were watching television when Tayloe came in. He looked exhausted.

"He is asleep. He barely had his head on the pillow before he conked out. The poor fellow is really tired. Perhaps we should wait until lunch time tomorrow before we drive to Richmond. That will give him more time to rest in the morning."

"How are you going to do this, Tayloe? You look exhausted."

"When we get home, we will set up a routine then everything will be fine. Routine will be important in his life. I may need your help when you have some free time. I also think I can get mom to help."

Tayloe gave a startled look. "Did you hear that?"

There was a faint calling from the master bedroom. Tayloe immediately jumped up and practically ran down the hallway. A couple of minutes later, Tayloe reappeared and said that Eron wanted to know where he was. Tayloe then excused himself and said he was going to bed. He entered the master bedroom and then closed the door.

Todd took Erick's hand and then leaned into his shoulder. He, too, was exhausted. They turned off the television and went to the guest bedroom.

The four men were safely ensconced in their beds for the evening. Tayloe was holding Eron whose head was firmly planted on his shoulder. He had briefly roused when Tayloe got in bed and pulled him close. Eron had kissed Tayloe's neck and then started snoring again. Todd kissed Erick's eye lids and told him of his deep abiding love. Erick then kissed Todd and said they would be together forever. They held each other during the night as if they were clinging to the very essence of life.

Suggested Music:

“River”

Composer: Joni Mitchell; Performer: Ben Platt

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCtSAu2paSw>

December 30
6th Day of Christmas

On the sixth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me, six geese a-laying.

*From "The Twelve Days of Christmas, the six geese a-laying
represent the six days of creation.*

Erick could smell food. He knew that there was hot food in the apartment. And coffee. The smell of hot coffee was like a magnet in pulling him out of bed and into the kitchen where he found Todd with bags of food and a large container of hot black coffee.

"Would you wake the children and tell them to come to breakfast?" Todd had a grin on his face.

Erick walked down the hallway and quietly opened the bedroom door. He smiled and then went back to the kitchen to get Todd. Todd looked in the room and tears came to his eyes. He saw Eron holding Tayloe in his arms, their legs were intertwined, and a look of contentment on their faces. They looked so in love and so peaceful.

They exited the room, closed the door and then Erick knocked and told them that breakfast was ready. They heard mumbling from inside the room and then Tayloe told them that they would be there in a couple of minutes. Todd had the food arranged on plates in the dining room when Eron and Tayloe came walking in. Eron followed behind Tayloe with his hand on Tayloe's shoulder for guidance. They both looked well rested.

"Okay guys. Here's the deal. An ice storm is coming and we need to get out of town or we will be stuck here for a few days. After breakfast, let's pack the car and drive to Richmond. All of the ice will turn to rain once we get south of Occoquan. It was already misting when I went out to get breakfast food."

Tayloe looked at his patient. "Eron, can you tolerate the rest of the drive or do we stay here in your apartment for a couple of days? It is up to you."

"Who is driving?"

Erick spoke up and said he was.

"Good, these southern boys don't know how to drive in ice. I feel safe with you driving." Eron was smiling as he looked at Tayloe. "Of course, you are my knight in shining armor and I will follow you anywhere."

Tayloe became flustered and told them to get everything ready for departure.

The men quickly showered and readied the apartment to be vacant for a couple of months. Eron was having a hard time making decisions about what to take. Tayloe was trying to help Eron pick out clothes and reminded him that they could drive up on weekends to get more if needed. That seemed

to calm Eron. Erick went to get the car and the rest got everything downstairs. They were waiting when the car pulled in front of the apartment building. It was already starting to sleet.

Erick pulled away from the building and knew that crossing south of the Potomac would help with the weather. He drove through the streets and noticed an absence of traffic. Apparently, the weather forecasters had scared folks enough to stay home. Everyone was tense because of the icy roads and silence pervaded the car. They did not want to distract Erick.

As predicted, once they crossed the bridge at Occoquan, the sleet and ice turned to rain. It was a miserable slow drive the rest of the way to Richmond. Todd started talking about the six days of creation. He received very little in the way of response. The guys weren't interested. All of a sudden, a smile crossed his face and he started singing:

“The toe bone connected to the foot bone,

The foot bone connected to the heel bone.....”

Everyone laughed and started singing. There were fights about which bone was connected to which. Eron had them roaring when he was singing about the penis boner being connected.

“Only my crazy brother would be singing about his boner in the car.”

“Well, I sing what I know and lying here in Tayloe's lap I have a boner and so does Tayloe.”

That stopped all conversation and singing. Eron realized he had seriously misspoken. He closed his eyes and internally cried in his heart that Tayloe could not love him the way he needed to be loved. Eron fell asleep with his head in Tayloe's lap. There was no longer a boner next to his head. Eron was wrapped in his mother's afghan; Tayloe had his head back on the headrest and was lightly snoring when they drove through Fredericksburg. Todd was insistent that he should stay awake and quietly talked to Erick the entire time. They were both exhausted and neither wanted to wreck the car so close to home. They were also embarrassed on Eron's behalf.

Once they got Eron settled into Tayloe's apartment, they noticed that the refrigerator was full of food and there was a bowl of fruit on the kitchen table. His parents had come over to restock everything. Tayloe took Erick and Todd to the train station to catch the afternoon train to Lee Hall station where their car awaited them. They walked into the apartment and couldn't believe they were back home. Everything was just as it was when they left five days prior. It was all frozen in time. They stripped and took a shower before lying down for a late afternoon nap.

When they awoke neither wanted to cook nor did they want to leave their safe haven so they ordered in pizza. They checked voice mail and found several inconsequential messages but there was one from Yonatan saying that they would not be back for New Year's Day as they were staying until the very last minute before returning to school.

The Chanukiah was still in the front window. The Advent wreath was still on the dining room table. Todd insisted they light all of the candles for their dinner. They ate a quiet dinner, cleaned the table and then went to bed to explore their bone connections. They sang about Ezekiel and the dry bones from head to toe including the new bone that Eron had mentioned. When they finished all of their bones were knitted together though none were dry. They were glad to be home and still in love with each other. They had survived the scare from Eron's health problem and they were stronger for it. Todd knew that he would always be the strong one during crises and Erick knew that he had a man he could depend on when the world turned upside down.

Suggested Music:

“Dry Bones”

Delta Rhythm Boys

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVoPG9HtYF8>

Tuesday, December 31st
New Year's Eve
7th Day of Christmas

On the seventh day of Christmas, my true love gave to me,

seven swans a swimming....

from "The Twelve Days of Christmas." The seven swans represent

the gifts of the holy spirit: wisdom, knowledge, counsel, fortitude, understanding, piety and fear of the Lord.

All too suddenly Erick and Todd found themselves getting up early, packing the car and again driving to Richmond. They had been back in their home less than 24 hours. Robert and Marjorie were sitting at the breakfast table drinking coffee when they arrived. Erick grabbed a mug for hot tea while Todd poured himself a cup of coffee. There was a mellowness of being with family.

"We will get out of your hair for a little while. It is going to be a busy day."

Todd suggested to his mother that he and Erick were going down to Shockoe Slip for a late breakfast so that his parents could have some time to themselves.

"Nonsense. Tayloe and Eron are on their way over. You will need to pick up Mr. and Mrs. Emmanuelson at Byrd Field at 11:30." Todd chuckled because it had been years since Richmond International Airport had been called Byrd Field. It was a way his parent's generation subtly let everyone know they were "old Richmond". New arrivals never used the moniker unless they were truly pretentious and those folks could be spotted a mile away.

Todd heard a car door slam and knew that his brother had arrived. Tayloe walked in the back door. He was followed by Eron who had his hand on Tayloe's shoulder. Eron had a big smile on his face. Tayloe led him to the table and helped him get situated.

"Eron's new glasses have not arrived yet. Perhaps today. He is still seeing double so he is a little unsure how to maneuver in new places."

Marjorie quickly prepared an array of food for them to enjoy. Normally, there would have been Bloody Mary's for them to drink but given Eron's medical condition she decided to err on the side of caution.

"Mom, where are the Bloody Mary's?" Tayloe was not the first to notice, but the first to speak up.

"Gosh, with everything going on, I guess I forgot them. Do we really want them today?"

The men said they did and Tayloe and his dad concocted them very quickly. When a drink was put in front of Eron he declined.

“I am not sure how alcohol will interact with my meds so I will pass this time.”

Tayloe looked at him with puppy dog eyes and said he could have one sip while they toasted each other. Eron laughed and said with his double vision it was almost like there was a pack of dogs with pouting faces. Tayloe had put a straw in Eron’s drink so he wouldn’t spill the drink down his clothes.

“Sissy stick. That is what they were called when we were growing up. Now I feel like an old man invalid who needs a bib and a straw. If Tayloe starts to feed me this morning I am going to hit him. He is being overprotective. Be prepared.”

Tayloe grinned from ear to ear.

They made their way through breakfast with Eron not making too big of a mess. Tayloe did reach over a couple of times and Eron would slap his hand. Marjorie would laugh and Robert said, “Good on you, Eron. Don’t let him take control of everything. We can’t eat at a restaurant that he is not ordering food for everyone. The boy has some control issues.”

That engendered a laugh from everyone because they had all experienced that part of Tayloe’s personality.

“I am just trying to be helpful.”

“Brother, you fed me until I went to elementary school. I was afraid that you would sit at our lunch table and try to feed me. I seriously could not handle a knife and fork when I first went to kindergarten. People made fun of me.”

“You never told me that before.”

“It was because I loved you for being my big brother and never wanted to do anything to upset you.”

That provoked an “ahh” from everyone else at the table.

Just at that moment the doorbell rang. Tayloe hopped up and greeted the delivery man who had a package. Tayloe had asked the ophthalmologist to have the prescription sent to Richmond for it to be filled.

“It is our glasses.” Tayloe opened the package and told Eron to close his eyes while he slipped the glasses on his face.

Eron opened his eyes and looked at Tayloe. “Who are you? Have we ever met before?” Everyone roared with laughter. “They work. I am not seeing double anymore.” Eron took the other pair of matching glasses and put them on Tayloe’s face. He then leaned over and kissed Tayloe on the lips.

Everything at the table stopped.

Tayloe turned red and Eron apologized for his behavior.

“I apologize, I didn’t mean anything by that. Erick and I have always kissed each other. I apologize.” He excused himself from the table and found his way to the den. He sat in a wing chair by the fire and silently cried thinking he had ruined everything. He couldn’t hear anyone talking in the kitchen. Eron was sure he would be put on the next train north.

Robert came into the den and stirred the ashes then grabbed another log to throw on the fire. He then sat in the wing chair on the other side of the firebox.

“You have been through a lot the past few days. Are you feeling better?”

Eron sighed and said that he was feeling better but was still adjusting to the medicines. He said he also had some physical deficits that required rehabilitation.

“I am so young to have something like this happen. I should be thankful, and I am thankful that they were able to fly me to Boston for care. I dare say that I will never play contact sports again. It is a lot to take in.”

“I hope that Tayloe has been helpful and not a hindrance.”

Eron glowed when Robert mentioned Tayloe’s name.

“He has been great. He said I can stay at his apartment to recover. Tayloe will drop me off at my rehab therapy each day. I will take the bus or get a taxi back to his apartment. Rehab starts next Monday. The care here is more advanced than what is available in Newport.”

They sat in silence. They could hear Marjorie cleaning the kitchen but Eron didn’t hear the guys.

“Where are the guys?”

“Todd told Tayloe to go with he and Erick to get your parents from the airport.”

“I see. I should wonder why I wasn’t invited but sometimes it is best not to ask.”

Robert could see that Eron was in an emotional state. He knew that his recent near death experience exacerbated the feelings he was having.

“I hope you don’t think this rude or untoward but do you love my son?”

Eron gasped and sat up straight in his chair. Eron was trying to arrange his thoughts to answer when Marjorie walked in with mugs of coffee and short breads.

“I couldn’t help overhearing the question, I want to know the answer also.”

Marjorie sat on the footstool beside Eron’s chair then reached out and held his hand.

Eron felt like he was on trial. He was the lawyer and was used to asking the tough questions. He looked at each of them and then nodded his head.

“Yes, I love him. However, I am not sure exactly how he feels about me. I have gotten mixed signals from him since we met. He is now treating me like an invalid who needs his care and attention. I know he loves me like a brother but I don’t know beyond that.”

Robert and Marjorie both nodded their heads.

“That is the Tayloe we know. He is such a loving, caring person who is ready to help anyone in need. He always brought home injured animals when he was growing up. He would nurse them back to health. We always made him find good homes for the animals and he was diligent about where he placed them. We always thought he was going to become a social worker or a veterinarian. He likes to fix animals and people. He hasn’t been able to settle on one person though. He has never let anyone get really close to him; except for Todd. He and Todd have always been exceptionally close.”

Marjorie looked at Eron. “One piece of advice, if I may. Focus on getting well. You have had a traumatic brain injury and you need to focus on your recovery. Let our dear son help you but we don’t know if he is gay and we don’t think he knows either. Be gentle with him because he is confused. His bravado is to cover his insecurities. He could never make up his mind about food and that is why he ordered for everyone thinking if he didn’t like what he had he would try someone else’s meal. Have you noticed he does that? He and Todd never competed over dating girls in high school. We know the reason why Todd rarely dated; however, Tayloe dated every weekend but it was mostly someone different each time. He never settled on one girl.”

Eron nodded his head. Robert looked at Eron and cleared his throat.

“Well, tonight we are introducing Todd and Erick as a couple to our friends and family. Is it asking too much for you to propose a toast?” Eron agreed and Robert beamed. “Just so you know, probably everyone here except for you guys will be heterosexual. Ahhh, and one more thing, as soon as you offer a toast, be prepared, because Tayloe will offer one also. He doesn’t like to be upstaged.” They all laughed.

They heard the car pulling into the driveway. Robert and Marjorie got up and were prepared to meet Mr. and Mrs. Emmanuelson instead it was just the guys.

“We dropped them off at the Linden Row Inn to refresh before lunch at the club. Erick and I also checked in so we won’t be a burden to you. We will pick them up on the way to the club.”

The Emmanuelson family was awed when they arrived at the country club. Erick and Eron held their parent’s hands as they walked through the lobby to the dining room. There was a buffet lunch served that day. Marjorie had checked with Erick to ensure that his family would eat the array of foods offered on the buffet. Robert led Rachel Emmanuelson through the line and Marjorie guided Abraham. The fellows fended for themselves though Tayloe did find himself trying to assist Eron. Eron was polite but insistent when he loudly whispered to Tayloe that he was okay. Tayloe was startled and took that as a brush-off, had a hurt look on his face, then pulled himself together and sat beside Mrs. Emmanuelson during lunch. He was rather subdued. As they were eating dessert,

Marjorie got everyone's attention and said that she had a fun thing for them to do so as to get to know each other better.

"Everyone knows the song, "The Twelve Days of Christmas" and I don't mean to offend but someone has assigned religious meaning to each of the twelve gifts. Today is the 7th day and we sing about seven swans swimming. There are seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and I wrote the gifts on pieces of paper and I thought we would pass this around and we could each talk about how we are going to use that gift during the New Year.

"Mom, there are seven gifts but eight people, so I guess I don't get one." Tayloe was giving her a broad grin. His first since they arrived at the club.

"Ahh, I was waiting for someone to do that. Since you asked, the person who does not get one has to lead us in singing "The Twelve Days of Christmas." At that point Marjorie passed the dish with pieces of paper and made sure that Tayloe was the person who did not get one. She leaned over and kissed him on his cheek and said she was looking forward to his singing.

"Who is going to start?"

Eron smiled and held up his hand. "This is not school, dear Eron, so you don't have to raise your hand. Please, go first." Eron's voice was a little hesitant and slow but he persisted. Eron spoke about the word counsel and that he was legal counsel. He had a tremor in his voice and said that given his injury he hoped that he could be a legal counsel to people in the future. He said he remembered what a fellow named Timmy had said one night at Erick and Todd's apartment about holding the wealthy accountable for how they treated the poor and disenfranchised. Eron said it changed his entire way of thinking about justice and that as an attorney he hoped that he was able to represent his clients better through this new understanding.

They continued to go around the table until they reach Todd. "Hmmm, I am not an English major or a religion major so I hope I get this right. After all, I am just a mathematician." He looked at Erick and smiled when he said that. "My word is piety. I think it has negative connotations such as someone pretending to be deeply religious but really isn't. I guess that is false piety. But I really think it means someone who is deeply religious and sincere in his or her beliefs. Since the beginning of Advent and then with Hanukkah I think I have become more faithful to God; it has deepened the love I have for Erick. I hope to continue that during the coming year." The guys leaned into each other and kissed.

Last, but not least, was Erick. "Todd has helped me return to my faith. Sure, we did all of this Christian stuff but we both were able to see it as us growing in our belief systems and our love for each other. I was surprised how much overlap was there. My phrase is "Live in fear of the Lord." I see this as a positive aspect of our lives. Jews typically don't think of God as man or woman. God is God. We are also used to arguing with God. So, through this belief we live in fear or awe with God. God challenges us to be our best. Fear is this feeling that we might disappoint God and we don't want to do that. God is in us, God is us, so our awe of God propels us further to be the best that we can be."

There was a silence that embraced the table.

“I don’t think I have ever heard a preacher explain it any better than you did, Erick. Thank you.” Robert was acting like the proud parent.

Taylor jumped up from his chair and started singing “The Twelve Days of Christmas.” Before the song was finished, he had encouraged other people in the dining room to join in and had them acting out each of the stanzas. People were laughing and enjoying themselves by the time they finished. Even the Emmanuelsons were laughing and singing along.

When it was time to leave, Eron asked Erick if he could go back to the Linden Row Inn and take a nap with him. He said he was tired and needed some time alone with his brother. Todd said that was fine and he would take Taylor to his apartment. Taylor stood there looking like someone had smacked him in the face. He then stormed out of the club and waited by Todd’s car.

“I need for you to calm down, Taylor. Eron had a terrible accident and he needs his brother right now. They have always supported each other the way that you and I have supported each other.”

“Yeah, but if something would happen, Erick would turn to you. He would want you to give him comfort. Eron is asking for Erick’s help. I can provide it.”

“The difference is that Erick and I are partners. It is still a fairly new relationship but we look to each other for everything in life. I would not abandon the support I would need from you but it is different.”

“Well, I am there to support Eron but now he has turned me away. It started this morning. Why does he not understand how much I care for him?”

“Do you love him, Taylor?”

There was silence.

“I love you, Todd. I love our parents. It is different loving someone outside of our family, you know.”

“Do you love him, Taylor? Have you told him that you love him?”

Again, there was silence.

“I think he senses that. He loves you. It is written all over his face. He would give himself to you as a partner. The ball is in your court, big brother. He is fragile both mentally and physically and is afraid of being wounded. It is self protection on his part. If you are afraid of how mother and father might react, don’t worry. I told you how wonderful they were with me. Think on this, you are both miserable right now.”

“I need a nap. Please stay and take a nap with me.”

Todd cuddled Taylor until they both fell asleep. Taylor had a restless sleep and kept waking Todd. One time, Todd woke and gently turned Taylor over so he was holding him. Taylor had been humping him in his sleep. His subconscious brain was working overtime in the sex

department. When it was time to get up and get dressed, Tayloe looked even more distressed than before they laid down.

“I did nothing but dream of Eron and I kept trying to make love to him and he kept pushing me away. He rejected me each time. I can’t live with his rejection. It was absolutely wrong for me to convince him to come here for rehabilitation. I will be a basket case before he heals. Todd, I love Eron and he knows that.”

Todd grabbed Tayloe and comforted him at his reveal. He knew that coming out was a difficult and ongoing process and Tayloe had taken the first small step. They took showers and Todd said he would dress when they got to the Linden Row Inn. Tayloe put on his new glasses. His eyes welled with tears thinking that they matched Eron’s. He and Eron would look alike at the party.

Eron was having a similar conversation with Erick at the Inn.

“It was a mistake. I should not have come. I will take the train back to Newport and figure out a way to get to my rehabilitation each day. I cannot do this. He fucking walks up to the edge and then backs away. There is no greater feeling than being wrapped in his arms. He kisses me and holds me and loves me but can’t admit to loving me. Love is more than just being wrapped in his arms at night. I need for him to make love to me. I need for him to say he loves me. I don’t think he is capable of doing that. I love him, I need him but he is not able to love me back.”

Erick held Eron while he cried copious tears.

Todd and Tayloe gathered the Emmanuelson family and then headed to their parents for the New Year’s Eve party. Eron and Erick took Todd’s car while Todd drove Tayloe and the Emmanuelsons to the party. Again, Tayloe was devastated by what he considered a slight on Eron’s part; Eron needed to be with only his brother. He didn’t understand that Eron was trying to protect his heart; they were both hurting themselves and each other.

The party was in full swing when they arrived. Robert looked at his watch when they walked in the door. Of course, they were late, as usual, and their father was always a stickler for being on time. Even on New Year’s Eve. A trio of musicians was set up in the living room and people were dancing. Everyone was having a great time. The first people to greet them were Pate and Timmy. The beach boys didn’t think they would know anyone at the party but several people who had been at the development meeting in the spring came up to them. Pate knew this was prime ground for making business contacts but decided that the evening was about Erick and Todd and he wasn’t going to be slipping business cards to anyone..... unless they asked. Nash and Jan moved across the room and hugged Todd and Erick. They made a formidable pair: Jan was beautiful wearing a gold gown shot through with emerald threads and Nash was in a tuxedo with gold and emerald plaid cummerbund and bowtie. They were wearing the colors of their college.

Eron kept close to Erick all night. He held his hand quite often. He was very comforting to his parents who were not used to such affairs. He finally convinced them to dance and was surprised at their agility. He took delight in everything they did that night. Eron noticed that Tayloe hung out with some friends but kept looking his way. Eron had been introduced to a girl named Cynthia who was hanging onto Tayloe’s every word and onto his arm. It was obvious she was in love with

him. Eron also noticed that Tayloe was drinking a lot. In fact, he was drunk. Eron had not been around Tayloe that much but had never seen this side of him. Tayloe had made himself the center of attention amongst the young professional crowd. He was worried for Tayloe and almost went to speak to him but was accosted by Mr. Reynolds who asked if he was ready for the toast. It was timed to be just before midnight.

“We would like to welcome friends, new and old, to our home tonight. Marjorie and I have been blessed by your friendship for many years. Tonight, is special for us because we are here to announce that our son, Todd, has a partner and we know that Erick has asked Todd to marry him, so this is like an engagement party for our son and his soon to be husband. I have asked Eron Emmanuelson to offer the first toast to the couple.”

Eron was stepping forward when he looked into Tayloe’s eyes. He saw hurt, he saw confusion, but most importantly he saw love. He knew that Tayloe loved him whether he was able to say it or not.

“My brother and I have always been so much alike. Maybe because we are twins.” This drew laughter from everyone in the room. “I met Todd the first week of December when I drove to Williamsburg to meet this man to whom my brother swore his love. I was planning to be the legal counsel and ask tough questions of this man who would have the audacity to love Erick. I didn’t need to ask tough questions because what I saw were two men completely in love with each other. All I could do was to offer my good wishes. So, tonight is another milestone on their journey by announcing their engagement. Erick and Todd, my family is thrilled that the two of you are together and I wish you every happiness for the rest of your lives. Three cheers for Erick and Todd.”

People raised their glasses and cheered. Erick and Todd kissed and then both were embarrassed.

Eron was about to step back into the crowd when he felt someone grab his hand. It was Tayloe. Eron smiled knowing that Tayloe would try to one-up-him by offering his own toast to Erick and Todd. Eron stood in place when Tayloe spoke. Tayloe was clearly drunk.

“Could I have everyone’s attention, please?”

Then Tayloe dropped to one knee.

“It is not only Todd who loves Erick. I met you when we both showed up to interrogate our brothers. The moment I saw you, I loved you. It wasn’t at the restaurant but on I- 95 as we were both heading to Williamsburg. You cut me off. When I looked over at the driver in that mean car I fell in love with his looks. I knew it then and I know it now. Then when I actually met you, I realized that behind those handsome looks was a man of quality and integrity. We have not had the luxury of time like our brothers, but when you had your recent accident, I knew that I could not live the rest of my life without you. I knew for the first time in my life that there was only one person I truly loved and that person was you.” Tayloe reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a ring box. “Please do me the honor of telling me that you will be the man in my life. I promise that I will love, worship and adore you the rest of our lives.”

Tayloe opened the ring box and there were two wide rose gold bands inset with diamonds. Tayloe had worked with the jeweler to use his grandmother's diamonds in a way that enhanced the beauty of the bands.

Eron swayed and was immediately righted by Erick. Tayloe also swayed and Todd moved behind him and held his shoulders.

“Please be my husband.”

Eron, along with members of both families, was shocked. No one had seen this coming. There had been no gradual buildup of the relationship. There had been no conversation about being together forever. There had been no asking permission to marry into the family. There was only the emphatic statement that Eron had to come to Richmond so that Tayloe could take care of him.

There was silence while everyone waited for Eron's answer. He didn't like to be surprised in this way. He didn't like to be put on the spot in front of a hundred people. He was a lawyer and could come up with a thousand reasons to say no. But, deep down, he knew that he loved Tayloe and loved his family. He knew that Tayloe loved him in return. There were hurdles to be crossed but he believed that together they could cross them.

“I fell in love with you the moment we met. I will always remember our dinner at the Williamsburg Inn. Your generosity of spirit, your love of me, and your love of our families is both overwhelming and yet comforting. You feel like home to me. Of course, I will marry you.”

Tayloe stood, grabbed Eron and they kissed while the countdown for the New Year's started. They were still kissing when people started singing “Auld Lang Syne.”

Suggested Music:

“Auld Lage Syne”

Performer: Sabine Ehrensperger

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hm1hwxc92Mo>

“It's Probably Me”

Gregory Porter

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lSzICmwmRsA>

Wednesday, January 1
New Year's Day
8th Day of Christmas

On the eighth day of Christmas, my true love gave me to,

Eight maids a milking.

from "The Twelve Days of Christmas." The eight maids a milking represent the eight beatitudes: blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger after righteousness, the merciful, those pure in heart, the peace makers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

Taylor lay in wonderment. He was severely hung over and for the briefest of seconds wondered what he had done the night before.

He looked down and saw the ring on his finger. He turned his head and Eron was smiling at him. He then looked down and saw the arousal of two men in love.

"What did your doctor say about hot, sexy love making?"

"I didn't ask but it is a little too late to ask isn't it."

"Yeah, I suppose so. I just didn't know if something bad would happen to you if we did it again."

"Well, my guess is after seven times in one night, one more won't hurt."

At that point, Eron slid down the bed and took his partner. Taylor arched his back as they made contact. His hands found Eron's head and gently maneuvered him in a way that pleased them both.

Taylor was glad there were thick brick walls between his apartment and his neighbor's unit. He was hoping the sounds would not carry through the walls. He and Eron were both very vocal in their love making. They had a natural affinity to tell the other what was needed and then exclaim pleasure when it was given.

After they were both satisfied, they lay back in bed. Eron propped up and looked at Taylor's chest.

"We have a problem. Your chest is covered in a rash."

"Yep, it does itch. I guess your hairy, beastly man body rubbed me the wrong way. Har, har, har."

"Let me get some cortisone cream which will relieve the itching."

Eron got up and went to the bathroom to check in his dop kit. Sure enough, there was a new tube that had not been opened. He went back into the bedroom, unscrewed the cap, put some cream on his fingers and started spreading it across Taylor's chest.

“Two questions, lover man. First, what exercising do you do to have such a nice chest and second why is it shaved?”

“Easy. I was a swimmer all through high school and college and all of the swim team members shaved their bodies. That gave me the muscles in my chest and a slim waist. When I started dating women they would always complain that my hairy chest hurt their titties. So, I shaved it for the team and for the women.”

“Well, I won’t complain about a hairy chest. You are so hairy everywhere else it looks odd to see you with a smooth chest.”

“Yep, the girls complained that there would be hair all over the bed sheets if I spent the night with them.”

“How about the fellas?”

“What fellas?”

“The men you went to bed with.”

Tayloe looked like a fox caught in the hen house. He didn’t know how to answer.

“You’re not telling me that you are a man virgin?”

Tayloe nodded his head.

“You’ve never been to bed with a man?” Tayloe shook his head. “You’ve never sucked cock?” He shook his head again. In a small voice, Tayloe answered, “you’re the first man I have ever been with. Including Boy Scouts. Never ever. Swear to God.”

Eron fell back against the headboard.

“You didn’t hesitate at all last night. When I said I wanted to take you, you gave yourself to me. Then you took me and it was incredible.”

Tayloe smiled. “Glad that you liked it because.....I LOVED IT. For the first time in my life everything made sense. I would always fumble with women and they would think it nice that I was such a virginal young man but then they wanted it rough and tough. I just couldn’t do it with them. I was always afraid I wouldn’t be able to get it up.”

Eron laughed. “Well, you had no problem with that last night. I don’t think that bat went down all night. By the way, that thing is huge.”

Tayloe smiled again. “Actually, it has not gone down since the night I met you. All I had to do was think about you and then...boing....up it would come again. That scared the hell out of me. I wanted to run away from you but I also wanted you in my bed every night. It was so highly conflicting for me. I thought I was going crazy.”

They were lying facing each other and kissing when the telephone rang.

“I just want to make sure you are awake and getting ready for lunch. You have one hour to get here. Don’t be late. We have lottttsssss of questions.” Todd was laughing as he hung up the telephone.

“Well, my fiancé. I am going to have to get used to saying that. I am engaged to a wonderful man. We have to be at my parent’s house in an hour. We should be prepared for a ton of questions, but I only have one.”

Eron raised his eyebrow.

“When we are both sober in the cold light of day will you still marry me?”

Eron laughed. “You were the one who was drunk last night. Counselor, in law school, we learned that a marriage proposal was a contract and we both agreed to the contract. I do not back out of contracts. You are stuck with me.”

Taylor smiled from ear to ear. He also looked highly relieved that Eron still wanted to marry him. “I know what is sticky and it is these sheets; I feel like I am stuck to them. We will put them in the wash while we go have lunch.”

The men went into the shower and Taylor grabbed the razor. When he soaped his chest, Eron stopped him and said there was no more shaving of his chest. He wanted to see what it looked like hairy.

“I still go to the gym every morning to swim.”

“Good I will join you. They will need to change the pool filters more often from our hairy bodies.”

At that, Eron slapped Taylor’s ass and they shared a kiss before shaving each other’s faces.

When they arrived at Robert and Marjorie’s home everyone was already at the table and they were on edge. Taylor looked at them and said that he and Eron had talked again this morning about the proposal and that Eron had agreed to lower his standards and marry him. There was a huge sigh of relief. After grace, everyone wanted to see the rings that Taylor had custom made.

Marjorie could not contain herself anymore and said she wondered why he had gone to look at the rings in the safety deposit box. Taylor looked at her wondering how she knew about his looking at the rings.

“We have a lot to plan in the next few months. If Todd and Erick would agree I would love for us to have a double wedding.” Eron had a look of surprise on his face. “That is if it is alright with my fiancé. Gosh, I love that word.” Taylor was smiling at everyone.

Todd and Erick looked at each other, laughed, and then said yes.

“One more thing, mom and dad. Your children are grown or I am anyway.” He smirked at Todd when he said that. “Mom, no more asking the bank manager about my habits of looking in the safety deposit box. Dad, no more looking at Todd’s bank account information. Let your boys be men.”

Marjorie was chagrined that she had disclosed the information about the diamonds. Robert looked at Todd and apologized.

“Okay, we won’t pry but remember I am still the trustee until you are twenty-five so I have the right to look at your accounts.”

“Only to see how they are performing and to ask if the payouts are adequate. You’ve got to let us grow up. Especially since we now have partners and soon to be husbands.”

The Emmanuelsons sat not saying a word. They would never have considered invading their son’s lives the way Marjorie and Robert had done.

Marjorie had prepared various dishes so that everyone would have something they enjoyed eating. Of course, there was the traditional pork roast with sauerkraut, black eyed peas, collards, and rice. She had also roasted a chicken with apples, made a delicious chicken tarragon soup and had sweet potato pie and baked apples for dessert. No one left Marjorie’s table hungry.

After they ate, Rachel said that they had a plane to catch. The women said that they would be in touch to start planning the wedding. Todd reminded them that he, Erick, Eron and Tayloe had some say in the planning.

“Okay, let us know the date and the location of the wedding and then we will take it from there.” Marjorie and Rachel hugged each other. There was genuine affection between them.

When Erick and Eron returned from taking their parents to Byrd Field, the men gathered in the den for an afternoon of television football.

Marjorie walked into the room to see Tayloe and Todd curled up on one end of the sofa covered in a quilt. Tayloe was holding Todd like he always had. Erick and Eron were at the other end of the sofa, covered in a quilt, holding onto each other.

“Well, I guess this is the man’s world this afternoon. I will make a bowl of popcorn and some hot chocolate.”

“Mom, we don’t want hot chocolate. We want beer.”

Marjorie gave Todd a look and was about to say something when she realized it was five against one. Robert saw her look and told her it was a new reality in the Reynold’s household. She delivered the food and told them her waitressing days were over and they would have to wait on themselves for the rest of the day.

Marjorie went into living room to read. When she heard the game end, she popped her head into the den to tell the men it was dinnertime. She saw the couples had rearranged themselves. Todd was holding Erick in his arms; Tayloe was holding Eron. They were all asleep, including Robert. Tears of joy came to her eyes that her sons had found love and they were all settled. She had always thought that Tayloe would find a bride and she had hoped against hope that Todd would find a girl also. That was not to be. Marjorie walked over to Robert who was sleeping in his recliner. She shook his shoulder and then put her finger to her lips to indicate for him not to speak. She then pointed to the boys. They would always be boys to her. He smiled, reached out to hold her hand and then he kissed it.

Robert arose from his chair and then he and Marjorie walked over to sofa. They touched each of the boys and when each of them opened their eyes, both Robert and Marjorie leaned down and kissed them on the cheeks. It was the best New Year’s present anyone could give.

Marjorie said it was dinner time. Todd jumped up and said he was the Master Television Chef and he was cooking dinner. Marjorie tried to object but Todd was adamant. He told Erick to set the table while he prepared the food and for everyone to stay out of the kitchen and breakfast room until they were called.

Todd took the left overs and created sandwiches, Texas caviar, dirty rice, and pommes frites. When he called everyone to the dinner, Erick lit the candles on the Chanukkiah and had set the table with the Chanukah china that Todd had bought.

“Chanukah is over, but we don’t think we got to fully celebrate because someone decided he wanted a helicopter ride to Boston, so we are celebrating tonight as the last night of Chanukah.” It was a joyful night.

“Well everyone, since I was the master chef for dinner, Erick and I are tired and we are going back to Williamsburg. We checked out of the Inn this morning and want to spend some time at home.”

“No, you are not. You are too tired. It has been a long day. You are going upstairs and going to bed. Right now.”

Todd was starting to object when his father said until he was married that he was still in charge of the house and he would do as he was told.

Todd grinned, turned to his father and said, “Yes, daddy. Whatever you say, daddy.” Robert laughed and told Erick he would have his hands full with Todd. Erick chuckled thinking that Todd really was a handful...and more. The boys ran upstairs. Robert’s attention turned to Tayloe and Eron.

“We’ll have breakfast at eight in the morning, we expect you and Eron to be on time.”

“Yes, daddy.” Everyone laughed.

Tayloe and Eron walked out of the door after kissing Robert and Marjorie good night.

It was a happy New Year’s Day in the Reynold’s home.

Suggested Music:

“Cantique de Jean Racine”

Composer: Gabriel Faure

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzUMfVpugq4>

Thursday, January 2
9th Day of Christmas

*On the ninth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me,
nine ladies dancing.*

*From "The Twelve Days of Christmas." The nine ladies dancing represent the
nine fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,
goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

Taylor called his mother at seven in the morning.

"Don't fix breakfast. Eron and I are bringing food. Well, you'll need to make the coffee and have the juice but we'll bring everything else."

Marjorie protested but was secretly glad. She was tired from six weeks of entertaining and being entertained. Each year she was astounded by all of the social commitments that were crammed between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve. She was making the coffee when Todd and Erick approached her from behind and planted kisses on each of her cheeks. They were already dressed and had on matching L.L. Bean barn coats.

"Where are you boys headed? Remember, we have breakfast in an hour. Your brothers are bringing it."

"We'll be back by then."

Todd and Erick raced to the back door. They were acting like ten year olds, pushing each other to see who was going to drive the car, laughing, and then suddenly stopping and kissing each other....in the driveway....in front of the neighbors who were out for their early walks. Marjorie smiled and thought that all of their friends and neighbors would know that Todd was gay and engaged to a man by the time the holidays were over.

The two couples arrived at the house at the same time. They got out of their respective vehicles and stood in the driveway kissing and hugging each other. They walked in with bags and boxes of food.

Taylor laughed and said "I almost got arrested this morning." Robert choked on his coffee.

"Yep, I almost got into a fight with a cop at the Krispy Kreme store on Broad Street over buying the last of the raspberry filled donuts. He told me to give 'em up or he was going to cuff me. I swear they need to put up a police precinct sign out front of that place."

Everyone laughed.

“Well, I see you are here. There had better be some raspberry filled donuts also.”

“Yep, donuts for everyone. Also, Hardee’s egg and cheese biscuits and also some chicken biscuits.”

Todd held up a bag and said it was filled with Ukrop’s muffins. Erick held up a bouquet of flowers and handed them to Marjorie. She crushed the flowers when she hugged Erick and kissed his cheek. She didn’t care. She loved that he brought her flowers.

Eron then held up a container. “I am the only one bringing something healthy. This is fresh fruit.”

Marjorie grabbed some breakfast plates. All of the containers were placed on the table and everyone chose what they wanted to eat. There were sugar highs all around. They were enjoying the food and bantering. Everyone was in a good mood. Erick thought the timing was right.

“Mr. Reynolds, I have a question, if I may?”

“Certainly, Erick. What’s up?”

Erick suddenly seemed uncertain and he looked at the other guys.

“Well, we have all been talking and none of us have the answer. If you get angry, please only get angry with me. Not Todd or Tayloe. Or, if you don’t get angry give me all of the credit for being brave enough to ask this question.” He grinned. “Anyway, what I want to ask is.....”

Everything had stopped. Everyone put their forks down. It was obvious that Erick was having a hard time asking whatever it was he wanted to ask. Erick reached out and grabbed Todd’s hand for support.

“Well, we all think it is wonderful, of course. Who wouldn’t? But we are all confused.”

Marjorie reached out and took Erick’s other hand.

“I think I know what you are trying to ask. May I? If I get it wrong you can still ask your question.”

Erick nodded his head and looked at his future mother in law.

“You want to know how two old, well middle aged, stuck in the mud, parents could so freely accept their children’s sexual orientation.”

Erick nodded his head and held Marjorie’s hand even harder.

“Robert, why don’t you start?”

Robert thought he was prepared for the question and had been wondering when it would be asked. However, he found it hard to talk about.

“Todd and Tayloe, you remember my business partner, Senator Fairfax.”

Both boys nodded their heads.

“And you remember his son, Arden.”

Again, both boys nodded their heads.

“Well, Arden died this fall.”

At that point, Tayloe let out a gasp and turned to Eron for support. Eron didn't know the Senator or his son but knew that he had to support his partner. Todd was being stoic.

“Dad, my secretary checks the obituaries every day to identify family members of our clients and she didn't clip one for Arden.”

“Tayloe, there wasn't one.”

“Why?”

“Chuck disappeared from the office one day. The next day we were told there had been a family emergency and he would be gone for a week or so. It is normal for partners to take at least a week off when a family emergency happens. None of us were told what the emergency was. When Chuck came back to work, I told him that I hoped that everything and everyone was ok, and I offered a general condolence for anything bad that may have happened. Chuck nodded his head and then turned and walked away. A week later he walked by my office and asked if I had time to talk. I was really busy but told him I always had time to talk with him. He wanted to go to the Commonwealth Club. He found a corner table in the bar so no one could hear us. It was too early for the after-work crowd so we didn't have to worry about that. He asked after both of you boys. I puffed up with pride telling him of your achievements. He asked probing questions about your schooling, career choices, general happiness, what you did for fun, if we were close as a family, and were Marjorie and I accepting of your choices. It was all rather odd. Then he asked what I would do if one of my sons told me he was gay.”

At that point, Robert looked at Todd.

“I will apologize up front for what I told him, Todd. I told Chuck that I thought you were gay and that Marjorie and I had talked about it since you were in high school. I think you and Arden were friends in high school.”

Todd nodded his head. In fact, Arden and Todd had gone out on a few dates though nobody knew. For Todd, Arden became a friend to talk to about his wants and desires in terms of having a partner. Both fellows recognized they were not meant for each other but they became good buddies. In fact, Todd had stood up for Arden at school when other students made fun of him. Todd was on the football team and was a National Honor Society scholar so the other students respected him and listened when he told them to stop teasing Arden. Todd was also the shoulder to cry on when Arden would tell him about the physical and emotional abuse his father doled out. Arden

played in the band and was in the drama club. He was smart but not Honor Society smart. He could also be flamboyant; not too much, but for conservative St. Christopher's school a little was perceived as a lot.

“Anyway, Chuck told me about a meeting he had in D.C. He thought he would connect with Arden while he was there. Arden was a student at Georgetown majoring in International Policy. Apparently, it was a surprise when he developed into quite the scholar. He had planned to work for the State Department after graduate school. Chuck was going to surprise Arden with his visit. Chuck and some clients had left a restaurant and were driving through Dupont Circle on their way back to their hotel when Chuck saw Arden. He was standing in front of a gay strip joint. Someone in the car said that was where all of the queers went to dance up on stages and people would put money in their bikini underwear. Arden was standing out front in a pair of bikini underwear with dollar bills sticking out of the waistband of his briefs. He was laughing and it looked like he was having a great time. Chuck didn't tell anyone that his son was a dancer in a gay strip club. Chuck thought Arden was like some modern day Delilah. The next day Chuck called Arden and invited him to lunch. Chuck got somewhat rough with Arden at lunch and called him a pansy faggot. I am only saying what Chuck told me. I normally don't talk like this. Arden started arguing with his father and his father slapped him in the restaurant. He physically slapped him. He also told Arden that if he didn't change his ways immediately, he was no longer part of the family and that he would be disinherited. Chuck told me that Arden walked out of the restaurant. A week later the police called Chuck and asked him to identify a body. Apparently, Arden left the lunch with his dad, went home and slit his wrists. They found the body in a tub of water after someone from the school had asked for a wellness check on Arden. Chuck said it was the most awful thing that had ever happened to him and Evelyn. His only son killed himself because Chuck told him he was disowned. Chuck said he was only trying to scare him into being straight. Chuck was gutted. He and Evelyn had him buried at the family farm up in the Northern Neck. They got a priest out of Maryland to do a funeral. They told no one.”

There was silence around the table.

“Anyway, I came home and told Marjorie that we needed to talk. I told your mother that we would not do that to our son.” At that point, he looked at Tayloe. “Little did we know you were gay also. No way. I might not understand everything. Hell, I don't understand a lot in life but I was not going to reject my two boys. You mean so much to me and I love you more than life itself.”

Robert teared up. Todd and Tayloe jumped up and grabbed their dad. They were all crying when Marjorie joined the group. Eron and Erick looked at each other and stood at the same time. Erick started singing and then Eron joined in:

May His great Name grow exalted and glorified. Amen.

In the world that He created as He willed.

May he give reign to His kingship in your lifetimes and in your days,

And in the lifetimes of the entire Family of Israel, swiftly and soon. Amen.

May His great Name be blessed forever and ever.

Blessed, praised, glorified, exalted, extolled,

Mighty, upraised, and lauded by the Name of the Holy One, blessed is He.

Blessed is He beyond any blessing and song,

Praise and consolation that are uttered in the world. Amen.

May there be abundant peace from Heaven, and life

Upon us and upon all Israel. Amen.

He who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace

Upon us and upon all Israel. Amen.

By the time Erick and Eron had finished, all six were huddled together holding onto each other for support.

“I need to take five. I have to pull myself back together because there is more to the story.”

All four boys ran upstairs and washed their faces. Todd had recovered his wits while the other three were still shaky. Again, he realized that in a crisis he was the one who could maintain a sense of objectivity. Erick looked at him and asked if he was okay.

“Yes, I am fine. I am deeply saddened by Arden’s death, particularly the way it happened. He was always emotionally fragile; his father had berated and beat him most of the time while he was growing up and Arden couldn’t deal with the rejection. He just wanted his father’s love. The few times that Arden did something to please his father, he was told that he was a good soldier. Not son but soldier. He only wanted his father’s love and acceptance. He would sometimes come get me from class when someone said something particularly nasty. I could always calm him down and get him back on track. I wish that he had called me but we lost touch after going to college.”

“You don’t cry though. I broke down when I found out about Eron and it was you who got everything organized. You looked after me then you took care of Tayloe. My parents said it was your calmness that helped them get through those days. They said you were so intense but so calm that they felt that everything was under control. They said they could not have made it through without your peaceful presence.”

“That is kind of your parents. I will need to think on that.”

They all returned to the table and Marjorie had cleared everything away.

“I don’t think we really want more food, do we? I know that I have no appetite.”

Todd looked at Erick and then at his dad.

“Do you think it would help if I talked to Senator Fairfax?”

Robert was surprised at the question.

“I don’t know, son. Chuck told me they were going to spend Christmas and New Year’s up at the farm. Do you really want to drive up there?”

“Yes, I would like to tell the Senator about the Arden I knew.”

“Okay, let me call him but don’t be surprised if he says no.”

Robert called Chuck and was stunned when he received a positive response. In fact, they were all invited up for the day. Todd said that he and Erick would drive separately since they would be going directly to Williamsburg when they left the Fairfax’s home.

Robert suggested that they should dress nice but not wear suits.

“Maybe business casual. No bowties.” He laughed because he knew Todd and Erick loved their bowties. “By the way, I don’t know if you want to disclose your relationships to Chuck and Evelyn. They might not be able to handle it.”

After agreeing on a route, and with specific directions from Robert, the two cars left Windsor Farms and headed northeast. Erick let out a low whistle when they went through the gates to the farm. Todd grinned and said, “Now, this is real money. Be prepared.”

They were greeted by a pack of hounds. Todd loved tri-color hunters thinking they were the most beautiful dogs in the world. Todd and Tayloe got out of the cars and the dogs immediately calmed as they walked toward the front door. Erick and Eron were less keen to put themselves in the middle of the pack. Marjorie would just bop them on the nose when they stuck their snouts up the front of her skirt. She laughed merrily and told them they were bad dogs.

The front door opened and a large commanding man walked across the porch to greet them. He was followed by a petite woman dressed in a wool skirt and an expensive sweater set. The pearls were real. The rest of her jewelry was discreet but expensive.

They were taken into a large parlor with the windows overlooking the upper reaches of the Chesapeake Bay or the Potomac River. It wasn’t clear to Robert whether that was the bay or the mouth of the river.

Mrs. Fairfax had a maid bring out afternoon tea assuming they hadn’t eaten on the drive up. The boys displayed their best manners but it was evident they were hungry. Mrs. Fairfax had a wistful laugh talking about the appetites of young men. They had a general conversation about the holidays without anyone mentioning the upcoming nuptials among the four young men. Robert talked about Erick’s prowess as the quarterback for the annual football game. Chuck Fairfax chuckled several times and spoke warmly about the annual face off with the Price family.

They had talked themselves out of pleasant topics and the conversation was lagging when Todd spoke up.

“Senator and Mrs. Fairfax, I am so deeply sorry about Arden. He and I were in elementary and high school together. We lost touch with each other when I went to William and Mary. I will say it was my fault that we lost contact. I was so busy enjoying myself that I always deferred when Arden would call and ask me to come to D.C. for a weekend. I am sorry I did that.”

Todd then told funny stories about he and Arden at school. Todd worked hard to make sure that every story included humor and that Arden was the good guy. He told a few fibs but figured he would be forgiven. Everyone laughed at Todd’s stories and several times Erick reached out and touched Todd’s hand. When he realized he was doing that he would quickly withdraw his hand as if scorched. One time the Senator gave Erick an odd appraising look.

There was quietness in the room except for the hissing logs on the fire.

“This may be asking too much, and if so I understand, but can I go to Arden’s grave? I need to tell him goodbye.”

The senator looked at this wife and then said, “Let’s all go to the graveyard.”

The sun was low in the sky when the dogs led them to a stand of cedar trees near the river. A black cast iron fence enclosed the graveyard.

Todd had stopped by a florist before they left Richmond and picked up a floral arrangement. He had it in his hands as he and Tayloe approached Arden’s grave and placed it there. They touched the grave stone and then kissed their hands. Eron and Erick had each brought rocks which they placed on the headstone. Marjorie had brought the bouquet of flowers from Erick and placed those at the foot of the gravestone. Spontaneously, Todd started offering a prayer. Immediately afterwards, Eron started singing the Kaddish for the second time that day. Erick joined in and their singing wafted through the trees to the river. By the time they finished the hounds were joining in the singing. This brought laughter from the boys and smiles from everyone else.

A last ray of sunlight breached the tree branches and shone on Arden’s headstone. Mrs. Fairfax caught her breath.

“Thank you for giving our boy a proper goodbye. We didn’t know how to do it. Let’s go back to the house because I need to talk with you about something.” The Senator was being his grandiose public persona again and not the grieving father.

Each couple held hands as they walked across the lawn to the house. They entered from the portico on the water side. Erick continued to hold Todd’s hand when they sat. The Senator looked at them for a few seconds.

“I was a fool. I have ruined our lives and I will always regret that. Thank you for coming here today to provide comfort and support to us. Todd, thank you for bringing our son back to life for a short while. If you will excuse me, Mrs. Fairfax will see you out.”

They understood the abrupt ending was because the Senator was overwhelmed and did not know what to say or how to act. They were gracious in their goodbyes with Mrs. Fairfax. They did not see

her looking out of the window as they each kissed the other before getting into the cars; particularly the boys. It seemed that they clung to each other just a tad too long for straight men. She knew that they were two couples. She had known for many years that Arden was gay and hoped that one day her husband would come to understand and accept him. She now had to focus on not blaming her husband every day for killing her only child. She considered what he had done as murder.

She looked out again as Robert helped Marjorie into the car. Perhaps she had made a friend in Marjorie Reynolds and could visit her. She needed a friend.

“Mourner’s Kaddish”

Composer: Maurice Ravel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3USptfcZc>

Friday, January 3
10th Day of Christmas

On the tenth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me

ten Lords a leaping.

From "The Twelve Days of Christmas." The ten Lords a leaping represent the

Ten Commandments.

Erick reached out to slap at the alarm clock. He was sure it was still the middle of the night. He continued to beat the clock but it continued to ring. Todd jumped up from the bed and ran to the kitchen to answer the telephone. Erick fell back to sleep; the holiday had taken its toll on him.

Todd's returned to bed and wrapped his arms around Erick and held him tight. Todd wondered if he would get so tired when he got as old as Erick. Of course, there was only five years separating them. He started kissing Erick's spine.

"Let me sleep. Just let me sleep, please."

Todd worked hard not to be in a huff. He slipped out of the bed and went back to the kitchen. He knew one thing that would get Erick up: food. He started by making coffee. He then started cooking turkey bacon which Erick loved. Next, he started scrambling eggs and knew that lift off was fast approaching.

Erick stood at the kitchen door rubbing the sleep from his eyes. He looked absolutely adorable and Todd could picture him as a child coming down for breakfast holding a teddy bear.

"You don't play fair. You knew that if you started cooking I would get up. I really needed the sleep this morning, lover."

Todd had a mischievous grin on his face.

"Tempting fuckit."

A smile started moving across Erick's face.

"Yes, time flies. Now say it correctly."

"I don't know how. Maybe you need to come over here and teach me." Todd was pouting like a little boy.

Erick walked into the kitchen and stopped in front of Todd. He spoke the Latin phrase. Again, Todd said he didn't know how to say it.

"You may need to get like right here in my face so my mouth can get it right." Erick moved in closer. "I think you need to be closer." Erick started grinning.

“This is tempting. Oh, fuck it.” He leaned into Todd and kissed him. He kissed him hard. They were both making moaning sounds.

“Let’s go back to bed.”

“Nope, we are going to eat breakfast then we have to make a road trip.”

They sat at the table and they fed each other. Each bite of food was followed by a kiss. It took them forever to eat breakfast but they considered it time well spent.

“It is so nice to be back home. One more trip to Richmond then we’ll be back to our routine. I liked our routine, whatever it was. Did we really establish a routine before Advent started?”

“Our routine was to get up in the morning, make love in the shower, go to school, come home and make love, eat dinner, then make love again then go to bed for the night and wake up about 2 a.m. and make love again. I liked that routine.” Todd was grinning.

“Did we really make love that much?”

“Everyday.”

“Then let’s start that routine again, please.”

Todd and Erick cleaned the kitchen and then headed to the shower. They were thankful for the hot water. Erick was wide awake by the time they finished.

“By the way, who called so early this morning?”

“It will be revealed later this morning. We are taking a road trip.”

“Where are we going?”

“Clue number 1. It is someplace we have been before.”

Erick laughed and started naming the places they had visited.

“Yes, it was one of the places you named. Clue number 2. It is near the water.”

All of Hampton Roads was on or adjacent to the water so Erick started naming every place he could think of. He started putting on the clothes that Todd had pulled from the closet. They were dressing up: dark blue suits, crisp white shirts and red bow ties. Their ankles were adorned in the festive Chanukah socks and their wrists displayed the colored knotted silk cuff links. They put on their Wayfarer sunglasses and stepped out of the apartment. They got in Todd’s car but left the top up since it was an especially cold day. Todd drove down the ramp onto the Colonial Parkway. They stopped in Yorktown and Todd ran into a florist shop and returned with a large bouquet of flowers which he placed in the back seat. Todd continued driving north on Route 17.

“Are you ready for the next clue?” Erick nodded his head. “Okay, it involves British aristocracy.”

“I know, I know. We are going to Washington D.C. to visit with Prince Edward. I have always thought he was a queen.”

Todd gave a hearty laugh. Erick decided to enjoy the scenery and not worry about where they were heading. He was on a road trip with his fiancé and that was all that mattered. When Todd turned the BMW and passed through the gates of Cameron Farms, Erick realized where they were.

“You know that it was Lord Fairfax of Cameron who owned all of this property and a million more acres at one time. This farm is just one small part of the original land grant.”

“Why are we here?”

“It will all be revealed soon. Remember, your manners my Lord, we are in the presence of a descendant of Lord Fairfax, a retired Army General, a retired State Senator, and a business partner of my father’s. He called this morning and requested our presence for lunch. A request from a General is the same as a direct command.”

The Senator and his wife came out the front door and stood on the porch to welcome them. They were surrounded by their tri-color hounds and Erick dared to reach down and pat one on the head. He felt the tongue that licked his hand and he instinctively wanted to pull it back. He hoped that his face did not show the horror he felt. Mrs. Fairfax extended open arms to welcome them; the Senator gave them a hearty handshake. Erick feared there was dog slobber on his hand. Todd gave Mrs. Fairfax the bouquet of flowers and she gave them a smile of thanks. Todd knew the difference between the polite smile and a genuine smile and they received the real thing.

They were led into the parlor overlooking the river where they were served drinks. After sipping at his drink, Todd knew he had to be careful that he didn’t imbibe too much. He thought his drink was straight up bourbon. The problem was he liked it, he really liked it.

Mrs. Fairfax said that lunch was ready in the dining room. A young male servant brought in plated food after they were seated. Erick asked insightful questions about the farm, modern day farming techniques and maintenance of a historic home. He knew that rich old people liked lots of praise and he freely gave it when responding to their statements. Todd was so proud that his partner fit so naturally into a stronghold of the FFV (First Family of Virginia). When there was finally a lull in the conversation, the Senator spoke up.

“I guess you are wondering why we called and asked that you come have lunch with us today?”

“Yes sir, but we are so pleased that you called.”

“Am I right in assuming that you are a couple?”

Todd looked at Erick. “Yes sir, in fact we are engaged to be married. It was announced at my parent’s New Year’s Eve party.”

“And your brother?”

Erick spoke up. “It surprised us all when Tayloe asked my brother, Eron, to marry him at the same party.”

The Senator’s eyebrows lifted and were almost at his hairline. He looked at Todd. “And your parents are okay with this?”

“Yes, sir.”

The Senator then turned to Erick. “What about your parents?”

“They were at the party and celebrated with all of us. They already knew that my twin brother and I were gay. However, no one expected that two sets of brothers would marry. We certainly didn’t.”

There was silence for a moment.

The Senator then did his best harrumph and Mrs. Fairfax gave him a look that shut down his bad behavior. He then started talking. Both fellows were spellbound by what he had to say.

It was after dark when they pulled up to their apartment. It had been an intense, exhausting afternoon. They were sworn to secrecy about what had transpired. They also felt privileged that they had been included. There was genuine love and affection from the Senator and Mrs. Fairfax when they hugged and parted that afternoon. Both fellows reflected that it had been a life affirming time; they had spent time loving God and loving their neighbor as they explored the value and meaning of life. A new day had broken.

Suggested Music:

“Morning Has Broken”

Performer: Cat Stevens

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZAsfB1Np-8>

Saturday, January 4
11th Day of Christmas

On the eleventh day of Christmas, my true love gave to me

eleven pipers piping.

from "The Twelve Days of Christmas." The eleven pipers piping represent

the eleven faithful disciples.

"We had an incredible time. Being at the apartment in Brussels felt like home. How does something so different feel so right?" Matan was practically bouncing in his chair as he recounted their time in Europe. "I can hardly wait for us to be there this summer."

They had arrived home on Friday evening after deciding they needed a couple of days to unwind. Plus, they never knew about the travails of travel and they allowed time for contingencies. Etienne had been their steward on the flight home. He was ecstatic to see them again. This time they exchanged addresses and telephone numbers. Yonatan and Matan made sure Etienne understood that he was welcome to visit them at any time.

Their house in Suffolk was filled with friends who were there for a welcome home dinner. Ayal had called and asked everyone to bring food and drinks for the evening. There was telling of the stories of their lives over the holiday season. Todd was in the thick of everything. He was laughing and recounting his remembrances of the commitment ceremony and then Erick proposing to him at the beach. The photographer for the commitment ceremony had sent pictures for Yonatan and Matan to choose from. The photographs were passed around and the guys were recounting all of the events of the wonderous day.

"I was expecting Herbert to give me grief over the cost of the ceremony and party but all he had to say was that it was a wonderful evening. He was so proud of us and the fact that all of our friends were so supportive. When he and Judy were wed it was a small ceremony because his family objected to the marriage and Judy had no family. Of course, when they returned to Paris, Judy called Jeremiah every day to check up on his treatment. She would then call and give us an update." Yonatan gave Jeremiah a big smile. "Then she had Bobby to worry about. She was in heaven the entire time. She said she had two more boys to take care of."

There were questions of Todd and Erick about their upcoming ceremony. Everyone was surprised, but then not really, when they said it was a double ceremony with Eron and Tayloe.

"We expect everyone here to be at the ceremony. Of course, we are having to hog tie Tayloe because he is already on full-tilt planning the service. If you think he is bad in a restaurant that is nothing compared to him planning a commitment ceremony. Erick and I get to sit back and let him do all of

the work. My brother, Tayloe, is something else. He is going to be the definitive groom-zilla.” Everyone laughed and knew that Erick had accurately described his brother.

“I just knew that Tayloe was going to bust out of the closet one day and that ole closet door is probably still flying through space. All I had to do was look at the two of them and knew it was gonna happen. They were all over each other while Tayloe was still pretending to be a straight boy. He is worse than some of those college frat boys. Well, I guess I don’t get to do the twins now.” Jeremiah winked at Erick and they both laughed.

“You aren’t doing anyone. You are with me.” Bobby leaned over and kissed Jeremiah.

There were many questions for Bobby about what lay behind the large bandage across his optical orbit.

“I go back to the doctor next week and hopefully I can take this off. I move back into the dorm tomorrow and it will be strange not being in Tim’s house. Poor Tim had to run the bookstore and be nurse to the two of us. We were a mess. I am sure the guys at school will razz me when they find out who hit me in the face.”

There were questions about Toby and not surprisingly Matan and Yonatan chose not to talk much about him. He had been nothing but trouble for the two of them. They supported Bobby with his case of assault against Toby but they had nothing to add. To end the conversation, Yonatan said that after the lawyers finished with Toby, he probably wouldn’t be hitting anyone again for a long time.

Black had his arms around Tim holding him close. It was obvious how much they had missed each other. One couldn’t move without the other following right behind; it was like there was a short elastic band connecting them. When Jeremiah got up to get another drink, he walked up to Tim and kissed him on the cheek. Bobby was right behind him and kissed Tim’s other cheek.

“Don’t I get a kiss? I drove the get-away car when we rescued you.”

Jeremiah stopped and looked at Black.

“Can I be honest?”

“Are you ever anything but honest?”

Everyone laughed at Black’s seemingly rhetorical question.

Jeremiah looked at Black and in a small quiet voice said, “You scare me. Tim is so mothering to us and you are like this stern father who has just come back from war. I keep thinking that I am going to have to salute you or something. Sorry, dad. You asked.”

There was absolute silence in the house. Black had tears in his eyes as he walked over to Jeremiah and enfolded him in his arms.

“I loved you the minute we arrived at the shelter that morning. I wanted to cry that day because of what had happened to you. I was so glad when Tim said he wanted to foster you; it was like we were making a family. You are my family, Jeremiah. You are my son and I love you.”

Jeremiah looked up at Black and started crying and laughing as he planted kisses all over Black’s face.

“Wait, I get to kiss him also. You are like my baby daddy Marine.” Bobby planted kisses on Black with the final one on his lips. Everyone had tears in their eyes as they witnessed the coming together on this family.

Yonatan slipped out of the room. When he returned he had the Chuppah in his arms.

“Ya’ll are just too emotional tonight. This is supposed to be a party. Look at what Martine and Genevieve made for us. He spread the quilt on the breakfast room table. The quilt from the Chuppah had the boys filled with awe at its beauty. They looked at the squares and the messages written or drawn on them. All of the messages were affirming and loving.

Martine laughed, “Just think, when you go to bed and are doing that nasty stuff that gay men do, all of those people and their thoughts and prayers will be right on top of you. I bet the vibes from your love making reach out to them and let them know what you are doing under this sacred cloth.”

Yonatan chuckled and said that they would put the quilt in the guest bedroom because what he and Matan did in bed would make most people blush. It would be an heirloom quilt for them.

There was a knock at the front door and Black immediately went into security mode. Everyone knew to let him do his job. Standing there were three men who were chatting. Lee Humbert had just arrived from Paris and came directly from the airport. Tayloe and Eron were standing there also.

“You are just in time.”

There were greetings all around. Then Ayal and Zeke disappeared. Matan gathered everyone in the dining room and then turned off all of the lights. Nobody knew what was happening until Ayal and Zeke walked back in with a birthday cake that held sixteen candles. Jeremiah was in shock. Bobby was grinning like a Cheshire cat.

Everyone started singing Happy Birthday to Jeremiah who stood crying into Bobby’s shoulder.

“Blow out the candles. Blow out the candles.” Everyone was shouting and enjoying themselves. Bobby leaned over and whispered something in Jeremiah’s ear which made him burst out laughing. Jeremiah then leaned down to blow out the candles while never taking his eyes off of Bobby.

“Okay, what did Bobby say?”

“I’m not telling.”

“Awww, come on Jeremiah.”

Jeremiah blushed. “Okay, Bobby said to think about blowing him while I blew out the candles.” All of the guys hooted while Bobby stood back, smiled, and shook his head back and forth at the lack of a filter on his boyfriend’s mouth.

Black got everyone’s attention after they had eaten a slice of cake.

“Our son has a birthday tonight. His ‘mother-smother daddy’ told him he was too young to go to a gay bar to dance. His ‘baby daddy Marine’ however said to hell with that. We are creating our own gay bar on the deck tonight. Put on your coats and let’s go celebrate my son’s birthday.”

Everyone could hear music playing from outside. They ditched their cold drinks for hot mulled apple wine and walked through the doors into the freezing temperature. Jeremiah and Bobby started the first dance while people stood watching them. Then they all joined in. Yonatan noticed that a boat pulled up to their dock. He went over to tell Black who said to ignore it and not to point it out to anyone else.

Black walked up to the stereo and inserted a different CD than the beach music that Yonatan had been playing. He had everyone form a circle with Jeremiah and Bobby in the middle. He handed Jeremiah a handkerchief and told he and Bobby they needed to hold it while dancing. Then he had everyone put their arms across each other’s shoulders as Erick and Eron led the group in the Hora. Green had walked up the steps and joined the group. When they finished dancing, they heard a rocket report and looked to the water. There were fireworks going off from the riverbank. No one could believe it. Jeremiah and Bobby walked up to Tim and Black to hug them. The men wrapped the boys in their arms.

When the fireworks finished, people heard Klezmer music on the stereo. Black handed out kazoos and told them they were going to play along with the Klezmer music to welcome everyone home and to celebrate Jeremiah’s birthday. The sound they produced was awful as they danced around the deck creating dissonant chords with the pipes piping at a fevered pitch. Then they started listening to each other and somehow slowly the sounds became harmonious as they banded together as a family.

Jeremiah and Bobby went up to Black and told him he was the coolest dad in the world. Black whispered in Jeremiah’s ear that Tim was staying with him for the night and for he and Bobby to use plenty of protection when they got home. Black grinned while looking at Jeremiah whose mouth was hanging open. He then threw his arms around his shoulders and kissed him. It was unclear who was more moved: Jeremiah or Black.

Everyone was enjoying what they were doing but the yowling dogs in the neighborhood halted their joy filled time together. They were waking the neighbors. Matan started snickering which led to everyone having a good laugh to finish the night. As people departed, they were filled with love, peace and joy; for Jeremiah and Black there was also a great sense of anticipation.

Suggested Music:

“Wedding Medley”

Performers: The Sounds of Klezmer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMiCUTsjQCE>

Sunday, January 5
Twelfth Night

On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me

twelve drummer's drumming.

from "The Twelve Days of Christmas." The twelve drummers represent the

twelve points of The Apostle's Creed.

The boys arrived at the house in Windsor Farms early that morning. It had been a long night and they were tired. Todd was glad that school was starting because that meant they wouldn't be making the trip back between Richmond and Williamsburg quite so often. He loved his parents but this Christmas break had been filled with enough drama to fill the calendar for several years.

Todd chuckled when he walked into the kitchen. His mother was still in her dressing gown. She had lined up cereal boxes on the counter. She no longer had to be the perfect hostess; it was only family so she got to be mother. Marjorie thought of Erick and Eron as her children and she didn't have to put on her public face. Erick and Todd grabbed her and planted kisses on both cheeks.

Todd filled his cereal bowl with Special K. He looked over and Erick was filling his bowl with Cream of Wheat.

"No, please tell me it isn't that nasty stuff he calls breakfast food."

Marjorie laughed and said that Eron had already filled his bowl with the same.

They went into the breakfast room where they found their father and the brothers. There were grunts of greeting. Tayloe grinned with his mouth full of a Krispy Kreme donut. It looked disgusting. Todd laughed and told Tayloe that he looked like a five year old.

"He acts like that also." Robert smiled as he said that.

Robert was reading the Richmond Times Dispatch at the breakfast table. That was a key indicator it was a family breakfast.

"Good golly. I don't believe this."

"What dad?"

"There is an obituary for Arden Fairfax."

Everyone caught their collective breaths.

"Let me read this to you." It was a beautiful, thoughtful, praise filled accounting of Arden's short life. Robert choked up and couldn't continue. He handed the paper to Todd who scanned the obituary and continued reading.

“A Service of Life was held on January 2 at the Fairfax Family Cemetery at Cameron Farm in Westmoreland County. The service was led by Todd and Tayloe Reynolds of Williamsburg and Richmond, respectively. The Jewish Prayer for the Dead was sung by brothers Erick and Eron Emmanuelson, partners of Todd and Tayloe Reynolds. Memorial donations may be made to the Jenner-Ward Family Foundation which provides assistance to gay youth.”

Everyone stopped and looked at Todd.

“What can I say? Senator Fairfax called and asked Erick and me to visit the farm. Mrs. Fairfax and the Senator were trying to write an obituary and needed assistance. We spent the better part of a day with them. I told more stories of Arden and helped them understand the truly remarkable person he was. Mrs. Fairfax did all of the writing while we talked. I didn’t know she had a graduate degree in English. It was Mrs. Fairfax who said she wanted donations to be made to a group that assisted gay youth. The Senator scowled and she only had to look at him before he changed his demeanor. He agreed but asked if it needed to be included in the obituary. She was adamant. She is one amazing woman. Mom, she would like to come visit with you. She needs a friend. It is not easy being the wife of his excellency.”

Robert suggested they all stay at home that morning instead of going to church.

“Oh, thank God.” Erick then let out a sigh of relief which elicited laughs from everyone.

“This Jewish boy can only take so much of your Christmas celebrating.”

At that point Tayloe jumped up and said they needed to sing “The Twelve Days of Christmas” one last time. He assigned different days to different people. Of course, he got to sing the chorus of five gold rings. He was quite dramatic in his singing. Eron struggled with the twelve verses.

“What does twelve drummer’s drumming mean?”

Marjorie had the answer.

“It means life everlasting. I don’t know exactly how the drumming gets translated into life everlasting but that is religion isn’t it. Sometimes it just doesn’t make sense.”

They settled down in the den, the boys taking either end of the sofa as they fell asleep. The fire slowly died in the fireplace, Robert was reading a book and Marjorie was doing her needlepoint. All was well with their world.

After lunch, Eron and Tayloe drove to Byrd Field to pick up the Emmanuelsons. They had flown in for an important meeting. Erick was jokingly referring to it as the Yalta Conference, Part Two. They would be planning their commitment ceremony the next day. It was also the first day of school and Todd had bent Erick’s arm to let a graduate assistant cover his classes. Todd had contacted his professors and explained the situation and they offered congratulations but one professor wasn’t happy that a prized student was going to miss the first day of his last semester at school. The professor told Todd that everyone had to make tough choices in life and missing the first day of class was not a good way to start the semester. Todd thought about tough choices having to be made and he decided that he chose love everlasting with Erick.

Suggested Music:

“The Twelve Days of Christmas”

Performers: Straight No Chaser

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kYEK-pxs_A

Monday, January 6
Epiphany

*Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness,
and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life.*

Book of Common Prayer 1789

Abraham and Rachel had arrived in Richmond on the afternoon of January 5th for the Twelfth Night party. There was much singing and merriment. They knew their lives would change significantly with their sons marrying into such a socially well-connected family in Virginia. Abraham reflected that he was glad they lived in Newport because they could never repay all of the social debts by living in Richmond. Of course, he didn't think about the fact that he would not have been included into the society events in Richmond if they lived in this very southern city.

When the idea of planning for the wedding started, Rachel had offered for everyone to come to Newport but was glad when the boys said they wanted to meet in the south where it was marginally warmer. Abraham and Rachel graciously accepted Marjorie's invitation to stay with them. Flying and staying in hotels on a regular basis had the potential to stretch their budget especially as they had to help pay for a big wedding.

Lunch was going to be a working meal at the country club. Marjorie had suggested this time of socializing and working together. She felt it would build the bond between the two families. The boys had made basic decisions and their mothers had started planning options.

Robert and Abraham were sitting in the family room having a drink that morning and getting to know each other. They found a lot in common since they both worked in finance. Robert was a director in an investment firm and Abraham was an accountant with his own firm. Abraham was so happy when Robert picked up a "Wall Street Journal" earlier that morning for them to read. Abraham read it cover to cover every day. He would now have less catching up to do when he and Rachel returned to Newport.

"So tell me about your family, Abraham. Does everyone call you Abraham or do you have a nickname?"

"Most people just call me boss."

They both laughed.

"Actually, I am sometimes called Abe at some social gatherings and I have become fond of the name. It is so less formal and doesn't sound as Biblical as Abraham. I like that."

"Is it okay if I call you Abe?"

"Yes, may I call you Bob?"

They looked at each other and they started laughing at the same time.

“Okay, Robert it is.”

“I have a question. Actually, I have many questions. First, I think we need to give our wives a budget for this wedding. Marjorie can get very carried away.”

Abe looked uneasy. He wasn't of old money like Robert and Marjorie. Robert could sense the reticence in Abraham.

“I have a couple or three ideas. Please tell me ‘no’ if any of these don't work. Option 1 is that you pay for the wedding and Marjorie and I will pay for the reception. Option 2 is that Tayloe and Todd pay for the wedding and you, Rachel, Marjorie and I will pay for the reception or Option 3 is that we split everything fifty-fifty.”

Abe still looked uncomfortable.

“I think I can trust you Robert so I will lay my cards on the table.” He named how much money he and Rachel had set aside for their sons' weddings. It was more generous than Robert expected. Surely, to double that amount of money would allow the parents to give their boys away in style.

“Abe, I suggest Marjorie and I match that amount and today we put that number on the table. If the boys want to spend more money, then they have to come up with the additional funds. If they spend less then we will put it into annuities for their children.”

Abe's eyes grew wide.

“We want grandchildren so badly. We had reconciled ourselves to the fact that we would never have them.”

“There will be grandchildren if Marjorie has anything to do with it. She has long wanted to be a grandmother and will figure out a way for that to happen.”

Marjorie had reserved a private dining room at the club. Everyone showed up with papers and folders. Marjorie had said it was a working meeting and all of her years with the Junior League had prepared her to conduct such a gathering. She already knew the outcome goal for the day.

A buffet of soups, salads and sandwiches was set up along with various drinks; sweet ice tea being the predominant beverage offered. All of the Emmanuelsons however asked for hot tea. They never drank cold tea in the winter. The wait staff quickly switched out the sweet tea and everyone started drinking hot tea.

Marjorie had brought a gavel with her and laughingly said it was from her years of running meetings. She then said that with six hard headed men, she or Rachel might need to use it to knock some sense into people. As soon as she said that she looked at Eron and grimaced. “I apologize my dear, Eron. I meant no offense.”

“Don't apologize Mama R., he never had any sense to knock out of his head.” Erick knew exactly the right thing to say so that everyone laughed. He had started calling Marjorie, Mama R. and Eron had started doing the same thing. Todd and Tayloe called Mrs. Emmanuelson, Mama E. All of the boys called their fathers, sir, dad, or Mr. Emmanuelson or Mr. Reynolds. There was no abbreviating their names.

Robert interrupted and said that he and Abe had met earlier in the day. When he called Mr. Emmanuelson, Abe, every head in the room snapped around to look at Abraham. Abe grinned and said he loved the name.

“Anyway, we met this morning about finances. We are both finance men and we want to set some parameters early in the game.” He named a figure that the parents would provide for the wedding and reception. “Anything more than that comes from the boys’ bank accounts. If you do not spend all of it, we will put it in a trust for your children.”

Rachel and Marjorie both teared up and hugged each other.

“Well, Marjorie, I think we can find places to cut back so that there is money for our grandchildren. Do you agree?”

The women continued to hug.

“Well, husband, you certainly know how to derail our meeting from the start. Do you gentlemen have anything more to add?”

“Nope, in fact, there is a poker game this afternoon and Abe and I will get out of your hair so you and the boys can decide how this is going to work.”

Abe and Robert thanked everyone for lunch and then got up to join a poker game. Abe said he hoped they won enough money to pay for this extravagant wedding. They laughed and put their arms across each other’s shoulders.

Rachel stood. “First on the agenda is the location for the wedding.” Rachel had moved to a white board that had been rolled into the room. There were questions on the board that had been prewritten. She held up a marker and was ready to write the answers.

The men looked at each other.

“We have a dilemma. Todd and I want it at Bruton Parish Church. Eron and Tayloe want it at Ohev Shalom, the National Synagogue, in Washington, DC. We can’t seem to reach agreement.”

Marjorie put on her business face. “So, has it been decided that this is a Jewish wedding ceremony?”

All four of the men said “no” at the same time.

“This is so difficult.” Todd sounded whiny though he didn’t mean to sound like a petulant child.

Marjorie had led enough strategic planning sessions that she asked Rachel if she could lead them through a planning exercise. Rachel sat down, looked at Marjorie and said, “Good luck with this crowd.” That broke the ice and everyone laughed. Marjorie spent an hour helping them articulate what was important, who was important in their lives they wanted at the wedding, and what the ceremony represented to them as couples.

“I have a suggestion, Mama R.”

“Yes, Erick?”

“I know we have a budget though old money bags here that I am marrying has lots of cash that he does not want to spend. My guess is that his brother feels the same way. So, in the olden days, people would travel to a wedding and there would be a feast that would last seven days. Seven being the number of days in creation and Shabbat. Can we hold a seven-day wedding feast?” Todd and Tayloe did everything except throw their tea cups at Erick. Marjorie used her gavel to get them back on track. Erick turned to Todd. “Listen to me, my love. If we start with a ceremony in Washington, DC on a Saturday night. It will no longer be Shabbat and we can hold the ceremony in the synagogue and then a celebration at a hotel ballroom in town. Many of our families and friends from New England can attend as well as Eron’s work friends. We can then have small dinner parties all week. We would start with one in Newport, then one or two in Washington, then in Richmond, then in Williamsburg. We could ask different people to host them which means the cost would not come from our budget. The following Saturday, we would have a second ceremony at Bruton Parish church. Then we either have the reception in Williamsburg or everyone can drive to Richmond for the reception. If there are a couple of dinner parties in Richmond during the week there is less pressure about having the reception in Richmond.”

Everyone looked stunned. Rachel got up from her chair, walked around the table and then kissed Erick on the cheek. “You were always the smart one.” She winked at Eron as she said that. No one bothered to say that Erick had proposed an eight day celebration instead of seven because it didn’t matter.

“Let me get all of that information on the board.”

From there they worked through all of the agenda items including suggested hosts for the parties throughout the week.

“I bet Yonatan and Matan will host a party for us.” Todd was ready to call them that very minute.

“We have plenty of time, we are not getting hitched until May.”

“I know, but they are spending the summer in Brussels and Paris. We need to get on their calendar.”

“Okay, we will see them at school this week and ask if they will host a dinner. We have to include them in the services. It is only right since they asked us to participate in theirs.”

“We need to meet with Rabbis and Priests to make sure they will conduct the services. A lot of people frown on interfaith marriages, especially Rabbis. Plus, we are all men. There will be no bride walking down the aisle. We also have to decide who is going to be in the wedding party and then plan the wedding service. I appoint Eron to do this work while he is sitting around doing nothing.”

The good-natured uproar started again. They knew that everything would work out and all would be well.

Meanwhile, Robert and Abe had finished playing poker. They did not win enough money to pay for the wedding or even their afternoon cocktails. They were sitting in club chairs enjoying themselves while waiting for the wedding planning meeting to end.

“Abe, answer a question for me, if you can. Do you know a Rebekah Emmanuelson?”

“No. We don’t know anyone in Newport by that name.”

“Let me rephrase my question. Are you related to anyone named Rebekah Emmanuelson?”

“Well, my great aunt had that name. I never met her. She moved to Vienna and married a doctor. I was told they had a lot of money. They died and everything was lost during the Holocaust. Why do you ask?”

“Another question, if I may. Where did you live during the war?”

“My father sent me to Brussels. My great uncle by marriage, Oscar, who was Rebekah’s husband, told my father to send me to Brussels. My father was given the name of a doctor who would protect me as much as he could. I was taken in by a Catholic family during the war. I still know the Catholic Mass backwards and forwards. I remember that beautiful church: St. Catherine’s. Rachel and her family lived in Amsterdam. They hid also and somehow survived until the last year of the war. They were found and her parents died in concentration camps. She survived. My family were all killed. What is this about, Robert?”

“I am not sure, exactly. A Mr. Cohen may be calling you. He is a lawyer in New York. Apparently, he is well connected in Europe. I am doing some investment work for his firm. One of the foundations I am working with is named the Rebekah Emmanuelson Feldsher Foundation. I don’t know how common the Emmanuelson name was in Austria before the war.”

“Did you say Feldsher? That is the name of the doctor my great aunt married. I would love to know more about my family. I was sent away for my safety and they all died. I went back to Vienna after the war and found out I was the only survivor in my entire family. No trace of anyone. I didn’t stay in that horrible city, I got out as soon as I could.”

Robert had goosebumps on his arms. “One last question, do you know of a young man named Matan Abraham Jenner-Ward?”

Abe sat up straight in his chair. “I know the name. The word is he came into some great wealth recently. Also, when he and his husband were in Paris and Vienna this fall, they met with the Great Rabbis of those cities. Every day they met. That is unheard of. The Great Rabbis don’t have the time to meet with someone repeatedly. The word quickly moved through certain circles about the great potential of this young man. He is supposed to be very impressive. His husband is now managing the family investments. That would be a great investment account to have, huh. Imagine having that much money. I heard they live somewhere here in Virginia. Erick told me he knew of them at William and Mary.”

Robert sat thinking what a small world we all lived in. Could it possibly be? He would call Mr. Cohen the next day.

“What a Wonderful World”

Performer: Louis Armstrong

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWzrABouyeE>