

Chapter 7

“Amelia pass me the tape please.” Papa T held the stuffed cardboard box with both hands as I did. “So what’s on your mind princess?” The scent of ripe coconut emanated from him as he sealed in the donated clothing. I met my parents at least once a week these days. We talked, hung out, and worked on volunteer projects. My parents dutifully supported various charities as long as I could remember, but their participation was usually limited to monetary gifts. Volunteering and activism was new for them. Family Pride, had asked its members to donate clothing to the local homeless shelter run by First Central Baptist Church for their winter clothing campaign. First Central Baptist was one of the few local Churches who stood with the LGBT community as ACTV’s influence spread to other pulpits. Sticking to their motto of civil rights for all, they publicly condemned the rise in hateful rhetoric and partnered with the LGBT community to sponsor events that conveyed peace through community service.

After the march against civil rights as the ACTV March became known in more civilized circles, my parents, never eager to get involved in such things, became card carrying members of Family Pride the next day. “We will not sit idly by and let this madman work to destroy all we cherish” Papa T had said at the time. Papa D, well he was a little more intense in his sentiment. “I wish I could grab Sutherland by the throat until his eyes popped out their sockets.” Papa D reminded me where my temperament came from. Good thing Papa T isn’t a werewolf.

Family Pride needed extra space to store the clothing from members for later delivery to the homeless shelter, and my parents volunteered our home. Our 4000 sqft colonial sits on the outskirts Wellington, Virginia, in a well to do subdivision also known as the middle of nowhere.

Or at least that's what residents nearer to the District in the center of town call it. The mountain of hand me downs, stuffed animals and other trinkets, seemed to take up at least 3000 sqft of space. I don't think Papa T will be so eager to offer our home as a drop off location next time.

"Something's eating at you. It's not bad dreams again is it? You know we're here to talk if you need to." "It's not that per se, Papa T" My father sat the box down on the floor grabbed another armful of clothing and began folding them on the table. He motioned for me to continue. "I don't know how to say this Papa T, but I've been thinking a lot lately about my parents" Papa T stopped folding. He placed a tiny pair of girl's jeans to the side, cleared his throat and faced me. "Let's take a break and get some tea. Lemon Ginger OK?" I nodded. Papa T's ripe coconut smell began to sour around the edges. I followed my father into the kitchen and sat at the table. Papa T was busying himself with the tea making process. "Don't mind me dear, please, continue" He said with his back to me. He didn't want me to see the worry and pain on his face. Even though I could determine emotion through scent with an accuracy that's gotten better overtime, my parents still like to keep up the illusion that I couldn't. It was our family's way of not completely giving in to weird stuff. Besides, they deserve to be able to express themselves without worrying about their gloried human-ish bloodhound daughter reading their emotions through their pores.

"I don't know where to start Papa T" He turned to me and smiled encouragingly. His eyes were misty. "Just start wherever feels right for you princess." I exhaled. "O-o-o-K...I've been having these dreams, weird dreams, and in fact they started well before the ummm...the incident." It was still difficult for me to speak about my assault aloud. "I don't want to get into too much detail, but my dreams made me think about my birth parents..." I trailed off awaiting

Papa T's reaction. The whistle of the teapot responded first. "Let me get our tea together Amelia before you continue." I welcomed the brief intermission and used it to gather my thoughts. I wanted to ask him questions in a way that didn't offend or hurt him. Being the child of wonderful, caring, adoptive parents like them is more than an orphan can ask, especially in this day and age. Even though I rarely questioned them about my adoption, I hoped to be extra cautious about the subject. I could only imagine what it must feel like to give a child your all, knowing that at the end of the day, another birthed them. Be that as it may, I had to push forward.

"Papa T, would you mind recounting the story of my adoption?" This made him smile. He handed me my tea and sat down. His emotions were a complex mix of fear, regret, and joy. I know he loved retelling the parts of the story up to and including how they adopted me, but I couldn't understand the fear or the regret. "Oh you know how I love to tell this story." He brightened. "But before I do, I'm curious as to why? You've heard this story before." The tale of my adoption had never made me particularly curious outside of the innate longing to know more about my origins, however the dreams made me seek nuance this time around, hoping that I may notice a detail or two I may have previously missed or forgotten.

"No particular reason, Papa T, I guess I'm a little nostalgic." I tried at being coy. It didn't work. "Yeah right Amelia and I have a one of a kind pair of Jimmy Choo's I've been meaning to give you!" "You shouldn't joke like that," I chided. "And you should have learned by now that you can't fool me." We laughed. "Alright..." I trailed off taking a few minutes to regain my composure. "Well, something's been eating at me. I'm hoping that when I hear the story, something you say might answer some questions I have." "What do you want to know exactly?" I shrugged. Papa T shook his head. "OK, OK, I get it. Just promise me that whatever it is, that at

some point you let me know. I really don't like when you hold back from me." I nodded. My expression was non-committal. "I'm serious Amelia, don't let whatever concocted theories you have in your mind, about my emotions prevent you from confiding in me something important." I looked me dad in the eye so he'd know I was serious. "I promise I won't." He nodded.

"Now, that we have the serious stuff out of the way; let's start with the tale of two sexy lovers on their romantic getaway. Where do I start? Do I start with Derrick and me on the beach in Spain, or something tamer like us backpacking through the Alps, or better yet, me and your father making out in Venice" I winced. My eyes grew wide and I shook my head. Papa T was always trying to get a rise out of me. "Chile stop being so timid, you're a grown woman now, surely you didn't think Derrick and I were sleeping in separate beds, staying an arm's length from one another, or other Puritanical images you have stored in your mind? I've been waiting to share with you these details for a l-o-o-ong time." He gave me a shark toothed grin, clearly enjoying me squirm in my seat. "Well Papa T the Puritanical images help." "Um hmm, well you will surely be missing out on one of the hottest stories of the century. You're Papa D and I...well let's just say we broke several Guinness World Records during our time in Europe. Oooh sweet Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus!" He laughed while fanning himself with his hand. I joined in. Papa T ensured there was never a dull moment in the Jones household. "And girl let me tell you, back in the day, your father, oh my lawd. You know that statue of David by Michelangelo? Well imagine it painted black but with a lot more going on below the waist!" "Papa T!" I groaned. "Too much?" He framed his question with mock surprise. "W-a-a-ay too much as usual dad." I rolled my eyes and sipped my tea. "Alright, your loss Amelia. The PG version it is then, but know that you really are missing out." He cleared his throat. "OK, since you now work for the

FCC, I'll censor out the juicy stuff, and lead up to the part with the cute little baby girl we couldn't leave Europe without." "If it's not asking too much." I smiled. He threw a balled up napkin at me in reply. We laughed and slowly his smile faded as he began his tale.

"We had been in Italy about a month and were taking in as many of the sights as possible. Your Papa D in those days was a real architecture buff, so everywhere we went, we sought out guides to show us the best buildings. While touring some of the older churches and monasteries in Maratea one day, we came across this magnificent building. I'll never forget that day." Papa T's eyes sparkled. "Orfanotrofio San Biagio, the sign read. Our guide informed us that it was an orphanage, which explained why there were so many children around, who perked up at our presence. I had to beg your father to go inside. It was like he was allergic to children. I on the other hand, while not actually ready to be a parent, wanted children someday, and couldn't resist the opportunity. It wouldn't hurt to look around, hand out candy, and hold a baby or two I told convinced your dad. In hindsight, I think he knew that we'd probably end up doing exactly what we did." He paused and took a sip of tea. His face was radiant as he spoke. My father loved abusing double entendre. "PG version, Papa T! Remember, you promised." I threw the napkin back at him. "Sheesh Amelia. It was in my head. Do you want to hear the rest or not?" He rolled his eyes and laughed some more. "Alright, Papa T, but can you try to ease up a little?" "Yeah, yeah, whatever. You came to me remember? I told Derrick we were spoiling you when we gave into that Malibu Barbie demand." I stuck out my tongue. "See that? I should take a picture and text your father right now. Exhibit A." I folded my arms. "And Exhibit B." Papa T looked at his Movado. "Oooh look at the time. OK enough playing around, we can finish the rest of the story in the living room, I wanted to get a few more boxes done before Derrick got home. We have

plans.” “What kind of plans?” I asked and helped Papa T clear the table. “Ummm the kind that parents have when they don’t have children at home with them anymore. You think we died after you fought to be independent?” “Better yet I don’t want to know,” I teased. “Girl get your mind out the gutter. Your father and I are going to see a movie at the new AMC in the District.” He smacked me on my butt as I walked by. “Now hurry up and help me get the stuff put up so I can get back to those clothes. And I’m the one with the dirty mind.” He teased.

“So where was I? Oh yeah, Saint Blaise Orphanage. So Sister Madelena showed Derrick, our guide Catalina, and me around the orphanage, the most adorable little old woman I had ever met. We handed out some candy, marveled at the centuries old architecture, and got to play with some of the kids who were thrilled to meet real life Americans. But when we got to go to the nursery, Derrick panicked.” He laughed so hard he had to cough. “About what exactly?” “The look on my face of course!” More laughter. “You know how I look when Macy’s is having their end of the year clearance?” I nodded. “Well imagine if it was the entire mall following suit and I had an unlimited supply of money!” “I would have panicked too!” I imitated an exaggeration of Papa T’s excited face. I got a shirt in the face for my effort.

“So Derrick was giving me his Amelia sit your butt down face and tone, when he called my name as I stood in the entry to the nursery. I pretended to not hear him. I must have held every child in the room. They were just too precious. But when I came to your crib, I froze and it was like everyone in the room disappeared except me and you.” Papa T’s eyes started to water. “Now see what you done made me do? Go get me some tissue from the bathroom”. I did. “You were the most adorable and precious of them all. Curly hair, big beautiful hazel eyes, and dimples too girl, you probably forgot you used to have those?” I did. “You stood out and not because you

were the only black baby in the building...” He placed a fist to his mouth and coughed. I threw the shirt back at him. “Seriously, though, I must have looked at you for an hour, OK it was like a minute, but it felt like an hour.” I mimed hitting a cymbal with a drumstick. Papa T pretended to ignore me. “Anyway, I felt like Golem with you. I may have even drooled a little. My precious, my precious.” He reached to tickle me, I yelped. After a little more play, he got around to continuing the tale...eventually.

After much deliberation and pleading Papa T convinced Papa D that they had to find out if there was a way to adopt me. It took some time, in fact, they had to stay in country another month to get everything approved and sorted out, but after many legal headaches and sleepless nights, they were able to take me home. “And what of my birth parents?” Papa T seemed to bristle at the question but there was something else too. His scent changed ever so slightly around the edges, he was preparing some sort of deceptive response. “They wouldn’t give us that information. In fact, it was like part of the procedure, or something.” He rushed through. Papa T began folding clothes and packing his box much faster. I waited a moment before prodding. “You sure that’s everything Papa T?” I asked in a steady, measured, tone. Oh Papa T was definitely hiding something. I hated to think that he lying to my face, so I gave him the benefit of the doubt. “OK look, it doesn’t really matter anyway, since I know your filtering my every emotion as we speak, I might as well spill it.” I nodded. “The most they would tell us was that an unidentified woman sought refuge there 13 months prior to your birth, and she died having you.” I grew still. We said nothing for a while. “Is that everything?” I finally asked, breaking the cavernous silence that had opened up between us. “That was all.” There had to be more I thought. “Did they tell anything more than that? What did she look like for instance?” I couldn’t

believe that was it. Images of the pregnant woman from my dreams flashed through my mind. “They were very vague about the details baby, I’m sorry. They told us it was raining when she came, and she gave birth the next day. She was tall and the most beautiful woman they had ever seen Sister Madelena once remarked during our stay.” Papa T placed a hand on my concrete shoulder. “I’m sorry Amelia” I sighed. Well that didn’t help as much as I had hoped. Then again what did I expect? Did I think Papa T was going to go hunt down a photo in bottom of a closet to show me?

Maybe I did. I took a few minutes to accept the tale as it was. There were some new parts to the story I hadn’t heard before. The name of the orphanage, Sister Madelena, and the description of my mother were details I had to file away for later contemplation. I wished I could fly to Italy and ask some questions. Technically I could afford it, but the whole flying thing, cramped in tight spaces with a bunch of people, was not even close to a good idea for me. Part of me knew that I’d find a way to go someday, but in the meantime, I anticipated the dreams, for the first time. I would pay careful attention to the pregnant woman, maybe she was my mother. I broke out in gooseflesh, the idea freaked me out. Could I really be dreaming about a woman I had never met? And if the woman was my mother, did that mean... “Amelia?” Papa T tapped me on my shoulder. I jumped. “Are you OK?” “I’m fine Papa T.” He narrowed his eyes. “Remember your promise to tell me right?” I shook my head. “Well why don’t we start with why we took this stroll down memory lane....”

Papa T was always the easier to talk to between my parents. He’s my original BFF and soul mate diva for life. As long as what I told him didn’t involve too much weird lycanthropy stuff, most of the time I could rely on him to keep things between us. I was reasonably certain

confiding in him about the dreams I had been having would be OK. I did edit out all the werewolf stuff though. He thought it weird too that I would have the dream about the pregnant woman and her husband, but rationalized that it was my subconscious at work, and that I'm just curious about my parents. I wanted to agree with him, but the dreams were too vivid.

It was as if I were witnessing past events and living them simultaneously. Trying to convey these thoughts made my head hurt and so I let it go. Maybe Papa T was right and I was hoping for something that actually wasn't there. It's not like my past dreams about Matthew came to pass. A knot formed in my throat thinking about Matthew and my inner thighs tightened remembering my dream where he used his tongue in ways I hoped to experience one day in real life. However, when I thought about the rest of the dream with the restraints, I remembered the very real restraints I had suffered, and what almost happened. I promptly stopped daydreaming and left Papa T's side to get a glass of water. When I came back, we made polite chit chat for a little while as I helped Papa T pack until he met his quota for the day. I headed home when we were finished and texted Juanita on the way. I asked her to meet me for dinner at my place.