

Welcome Home

Colt punched in the keypad code to his home and lumbered through the doorway, letting out a sigh of relief. He had been four states over for a hockey conference this past week and was exhausted. Between the meetings, panels, and interviews, he barely had time to himself, let alone...

“FYYYYYYYYYYYYYYN!” His voice echoed loudly and deeply throughout the house. “I’M HOOOOOOOOOOOOME!” He shut the door behind him as it automatically locked, then dumped his suitcase, briefcase, and suit jacket on the ground. Just as he was fixing his suspenders, an orange blur came flying down the stairs and crashed into him, sending them both tumbling back and knocking Colt to the ground.

“AAAAAAH, IMISSEDYOUIMISSEDYOUIMISSEDYOUIMISSEDYOU!” The calico cat was rubbing his face into the shark’s chest, gripping him tightly. Colt let out a hearty laugh and wriggled himself free of Alfyn’s grasp, wrapping his mighty arms around the cat and giving him a kiss.

“Heh, I missed you too, babe. Sorry I didn’t call, things were nuts. But it was so much fun, I even got you a surprise or two!” Getting up, he walked over to the briefcase as Alfyn followed behind, stars in his eyes.

“It looked like fun! You were so cool and professional up on that stage ‘n all. ‘Hurp hurp hockey ‘n sports, hurp hurp teams.’” The cat mimicked in a deep voice as Colt blushed, slightly embarrassed.

“D-do I really sound like that?”

“Naw, it was cooler when you said it. ‘Specially the ‘hurp hurp’ part.” Colt chuckled and shook his head, turning around while hiding the gifts behind his back.

“Okay, so, I know it’s maybe a *little* cheesy, considering you’re already dating me and stuff, buuuut...” He pulled one hand in front, presenting Alfyn with a foot-and-a-half long hockey stick painted red, gold, and black – the same as Colt’s team, The Chargers – with a lightning bolt down the shaft. Colt’s number, 45, was embossed on the butt end, his signature along the shaft, and a small, resin-covered portrait of himself was on blade. Alfyn’s eyes lit up as he snatched it and held it closely. “Aaaand if gifts to my boyfriend that mostly deal with my own face aren’t *too* self-obsessive...” he reached his other hand around, gently holding a plushie of himself in full uniform, the doll holding a felt hockey stick in one hand and his helmet in the other. Alfyn’s eye grew wide as his jaw dropped, causing Colt to blush once more.

“Oh. My. God.”

“Ah, I know, it’s super embarrassing. But the league is trying to get kids more interested in the sport, so th-” Alfyn snatched it out of his hands and bounded up the stairs to his room before the shark could finish, leaving him dumbstruck in the foyer.

“Oh! Dinner will be ready in 10 minutes; thought I’d try something new!” Alfyn shouted from the top of the stairs. Colt sighed and shook his head, smiling. He gathered his stuff and dropped it in his bedroom before heading to the dining room. A mirror in the hall caught his attention, and he stopped to admire himself. The dress shirt was tight, giving little imagination to the size and shape of his arms. His eyes, however, landed on the buttons that were begging for mercy, his hairy belly peeking between the small gaps. Getting heckled by reporters about his recent weight gain was not what he expected during the trip, but it was definitely a wakeup

call. He poked the lump of fat angrily until Alfyn's voice rang out that dinner was ready, and the smile soon returned to his face as he continued forward.

"Damn babe, smells delicious in here!" The shark sat down cautiously. *Breathe out slowly, carefully...* his mind echoed, as he felt the buttons straining.

"Thanks! Tryna be all fancy 'n stuff." Alfyn removed the cover from the dish in front of Colt dramatically. "And now, my dear Anchor, I present to you: filet mignon with a side of thyme mashed potatoes and garlic-roasted green beans. Bon appétit!" The cat bowed with all the drama of a professional showman and skipped his way to his own meal.

"Wow, just...wow. This looks amazing Fyn, thank you. You've outdone yourself!" *And small portions, thank God*, he thought. It wasn't long until both finished their meals and Colt patted his stomach happily. "Truly delicious. My compliments to the chef, I'm stuffed!" He gave Alfyn a smile as he started to stand, but the cat's small hand kept him down.

"Thanks, but I know my Anchor, and what's dinner without dessert? Surely you saved room..." Colt gave a nervous chuckled.

"I...uh...I mean, that was amazing, I don't want to ruin it with dessert right away. Why don't we circle back to that later, say, after a nice shower or-" Alfyn started to crack a grin.

"You mean *THE* Colt the Bolt is going to refuse...chocolate mousse?" Colt put his thumbs to the side of his head and raised his fingers, while raising an eyebrow at the cat.

"Moose for dessert? Seems wrong." Alfyn chuckled and playfully hit the shark.

"Nooo! You're all fancy 'n stuff, you know mousse is fancy puddin'!" Before Colt could protest further, Alfyn disappeared into the kitchen and returned with an extra-large glass of chocolate mousse – which he gave to Colt – and a much smaller glass – which he took for

himself. He sat down and watched the shark carefully, waiting for a reaction. Colt sighed, picked up his spoon, and dove in. His face must have given away how delicious the dessert was, as Alfyn immediately started beaming with pride. "That good, eh? H-hey! Slow down there or you'll spill it on your nice shirt!" Colt was flying through the mousse; puddings were his weakness, after all. He finally sat back, dropping the spoon to the floor, while catching his breath. He was feeling stuffed but didn't care.

"Y-yeah, it's good." He huffed. ***Damn** that cat is an amazing chef. I don't even want to know if...* his fingers slyly checked around the shirt and he let out an audible groan. He could feel a clear gap where a button used to be. Alfyn looked up, tilting his head in confusion.

"You okay, Anchor? Thought I heard a groan..."

"N-no, that was a yawn. I'm just...exhausted." Only a partial lie, he was tired after that long flight back, and it was starting to hit him hard. Alfyn took care of the dishes, giving Colt a peck on the cheek as he picked up the spoon.

"Go on upstairs, I'll join ya in a minute." Colt lazily nodded, groggy from all the rich food, and did as he was told, while Alfyn scooped up the fallen button with a smile.

Click. Colt's eyes fluttered as he stepped into the brightly lit bedroom and quickly removed his clothes, leaving only his underwear. He turned as Alfyn entered, greeting him with a big yawn while scratching his bloated belly.

"Aww, my poor, tired shark. C'mon big guy, let's get you in bed." Alfyn stepped forward as Colt embraced him in a bear hug and tilted backwards, falling onto the bed.

"Mm, I'm not sleepy, I have to catch up with you." Colt muttered, eyes already starting to grow heavy. Alfyn chuckled, resting his head against the shark's hairy chest, unable to move

out of Colt's grasp. "What'd you do without me? Did you seeeeeeeeeeee..." the shark's voice trailed off to gentle snoring as Alfyn wiggled out of his restraint, turned off the light, and stripped down. He gave Colt a kiss on the forehead, giggling at the loud snore it caused, and grabbed his phone, opening to the videos he saved from the interviews.

"Now then, Mr. Brandy," the voice of a cocky reporter called out to the panel of Colt and his team, "you've put on a considerable amount of weight over the past few months; anything to do with the terrible loss you caused the team at the end of last season?" Colt's attention turned to the reporter as he clenched his hands and snarled.

"Actually, no. Sure, maybe I *have* put on a few pounds, maybe I've lost that six pack, but you know what? It's all f-*bleep*-ing worth it cause I have something you don't, *Richards*: I have someone I love and someone who loves me back. Someone who makes sure I eat well, someone who takes care of me when I'm hurt, someone who deserves way better. My wonderful boyfriend, Alfyn, means more to me than a stupid trophy and a few pounds, so back off. Plus, it seems your memory is foggy; The Chargers *won* last season, thanks to me and a last second goal. Now, any more questions, f-*bleep*-er?" Colt slammed his fists on the table and stood up as a security guard rushed over. Alfyn stopped the video, smiling from ear-to-ear, and scrolled back. He had the timestamp memorized. "I have someone I love and someone who loves me back." Rewind. "I have someone I love and someone who loves me back." Rewind. He played it at least ten more times, feeling the tears welling up in his eyes as his heart filled with joy.

"Mrrsmherm..." Colt mumbled next to him.

"Hmm?"

“What’re you doing?” The shark muttered.

“Heh, just watching a video.” Colt gave a grunt of acknowledgement as he lazily rolled his body, facing Alfyn. The glow of the cat’s phone illuminated the sleeping shark. The reporter was right: he had gotten rather soft in the middle, but Alfyn knew Colt saw it as a testament to their loving relationship. The cat smiled again, locked his phone and tossed it aside, then backed into the shark so the two could cuddle. “I love you, Anchor.” He grabbed the shark’s arm, wrapping it around himself.

“Love you too.” Colt muttered back. He pulled Alfyn in tightly as he rested his chin on the cat’s head, his gentle snores lulling them both to sleep.