



the
Way ^{*to*}
Will
Drew Hunt

The Way to Will

By Drew Hunt

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Trapped Nerves

By Drew Hunt

For Dick. I couldn't have done it without you.

Oh! My! God! I must have stood there, mouth opening and closing like a goldfish for a couple of minutes as Will's statement sank into my thick head. Will loved me! William Thomson loved me! But why had he waited till now to tell me? Why did he say it just before running off to catch his plane?

I'd won a two-week coach tour of Florida by entering a competition on the back of a tin of fruit. Will had bought his own ticket. Only the dozy travel company had over-booked, double-booked, or whatever on their hotel rooms, so Will hadn't had anywhere to sleep. There was a spare bed in each of my rooms during the tour. The prize had been for two people, but not long before the holiday was due to start my bitch of a girlfriend broke up with me. I'd decided to go to America on my own. So I'd offered Will the spare beds. Only one thing had led to another, and by the time the holiday was over I'd

realised I was gay, and Will and I had become close. So much so he'd just told me he loved me. *Oh heck, what should I do?*

"Is everything all right, sir?" an airport guard asked me.

"Uh, um, yeah." Though 'course it wasn't.

"Would you either go through the line or move aside, please?"

I realised I was blocking other people from going through the barrier.

It all suddenly got too much. The noise, the bustling people, Will's comments. I had to find a seat and sit down. So I picked up my airline bag and found a bench. "Shit, what do I do?"

I rubbed at my face. I still couldn't get my head round what Will had said. He loves me. *Me*, Graham Knight, was loved by another bloke.

Oh, God, I was sure I was gonna wake up in a minute. I got back to asking myself why Will had waited till now to tell me.

Then it hit me. He was afraid at what I'd say.

When someone tells you they love you, it's kinda expected that you tell 'em you love 'em back. That's what I'd done with the bitch, Amy. She'd tell me she loved me, usually after I'd bought her something she'd been nagging me to get her. And I'd just say something lame like, "I love you, too," back at her. Though I don't think now I ever really meant it. Not like I did with Will.

Shit! Yeah, if Will had hung around for a reply, I'd have said I loved him, too, and I'd have meant it. *Oh, God!*

Sitting there, I realised time was getting on and I'd miss my plane if I didn't get a move on. So, as if I were in a trance or something, I stood up and walked back to the security barrier.

"Boarding card?" the guy asked.

"Huh?"

"Your boarding card, sir. I need to see it."

"Oh." I opened the zip pocket of my bag and pulled out the pieces of paper. The guy reached for them, but I pulled away. "I...I can't."

"Excuse me?"

"I can't go. I gotta get to Will."

I turned away from the guy, who had a puzzled expression on his face, and ran hell for leather to the security point Will had gone through. But they wouldn't let me through 'cause my boarding card wasn't the right one. I tried to explain I didn't want to get on a bloody plane, I just wanted to speak to someone who was.

"I'm sorry, sir, but that isn't possible."

I wanted to argue but knew it wouldn't do any good.

I don't know how long I wandered about the airport not knowing what to do. I couldn't fly back to Britain until I'd settled things with Will, but I couldn't see him--his plane had probably taken off by now anyway. Seeing a sign that read *Traveller's Aid*, I shuffled over to the desk it pointed to. A middle aged woman who seemed to have a kind face smiled at me.

"Um, I should have got on a plane to Manchester in the UK, but I didn't. My friend has just

flown to Cleveland, and I sorta need to speak to him and..."

I'm sure she thought I was daft. I could hardly come out and tell her the real reason I wanted to see Will.

"Yes, a number of airlines fly to Cleveland. I'm assuming we're talking about Cleveland, Ohio?"

"Yeah, but I haven't enough money for an aeroplane ticket."

"You could maybe cash in the one to the UK?"

That idea scared me. If Will didn't want me, I'd be stuck, and I wasn't sure my ticket would be worth anything anyway 'cause I'd not got on the plane when I should have. I explained all this as best I could, though I was so worked up, I don't know how much sense I was making.

* * * *

To cut a long story short, I got my bags back from Virgin Atlantic Airways and was told to get a taxi to the Greyhound bus station in Orlando where I

could travel on one of their buses to Cleveland. I got a right bloody shock when they told me at the bus station it would take a day and three hours to get there.

"It is over a thousand miles, sir," the woman, nowhere near as nice as the one back at the airport, said.

"Okay, guess I've no choice then."

I paid for my ticket, which used up most of the spending money I had left from what the tinned fruit company had given me. Though I'd not liked it at the time, I was glad now that during the holiday Will hadn't let me pay for many things.

I had to wait for more than an hour for my bus, though it seemed like a bloody sight longer. When the thing eventually did set off, late, it was not like the posh buses I'd been riding on during the tour. It was scruffy, no one had cleaned the thing in weeks, empty crisp packets and drink cans were on the floor, and some of the seats looked stained with...well, I didn't want to know. The air conditioning didn't work, either, and it was a warm day, too. I was glad there weren't many other people on the bus, so

I could sit at the back by myself and think. Though I came to realise thinking might not be such a good thing.

After draining the can of Coke I'd bought in Orlando, I needed the bog, but the one on the bus was in a right state and it smelled, too. I decided I could wait till we got to the next stop to use the loos there.

Looking at the bus timetable--or schedule, as the woman at the desk had called it--I'd have to wait until 3:40 PM before we got into Jacksonville. That was over an hour away. Fuck, I didn't know if I could last that long.

Let me tell you, the moment that bus stopped, I was running down the aisle in one hell of a hurry. Thankfully I found the gents easily, otherwise I'd have pissed my pants. Jesus, the relief was amazing, almost as good as getting off.

Then I remembered the last time I got off. It was with Will. Wow, being able to fuck...no, scrub that, make *love* with Will. Shit, he'd been tight. Made all the times I'd screwed women seem

like...like. I didn't know. With Will it had felt loads better, more real, more...I didn't know. Will, I just wanted to get to Will, but that was still almost a day away. What time was it now? I looked at my watch. Ten to four.

Then I started to ask myself what the hell was I doing getting a bus half-way across a foreign country just to tell someone I loved them? Why the shit couldn't I do it on the phone or in an email?

'Cause you wanna see him, be with him, shithead, a voice in my head told me.

The wait for the bus to leave Jacksonville was bloody long. An hour and twenty minutes actually. I kept pacing up and down, hoping the time would go quicker, but of course it didn't. I began to wish I'd cashed in my plane ticket and flown to Cleveland--at least then I'd be with Will and I'd know for sure if he really did love me.

But eventually the bus did leave, and I found my seat at the back again, only this woman--probably in her mid-thirties--was also on the back seat. I thought about sitting further forward, but

decided not to. The seat was big enough anyway that I didn't have to sit right next to her.

God, that was a mistake. We'd only been going about five minutes before she shuffled over to me. I didn't know what was stronger, her God-awful perfume or the smell of booze. I think it was a tie. A quick look at her face and I could see she had put on her makeup that morning with a trowel. And what with the heat and all, it was starting to run.

"Hello, honey, you travelling alone?"

"Uh, yeah."

"Say, you not from round here, are ya?"

Despite smelling like a distillery, her voice didn't sound all that slurred.

"No." I wished then I had a personal stereo or an MP3 player like Will. Then I could put it on as a way of telling her, or anyone else, I didn't want to talk.

"Nah, hon, didn't think you were. Are you Australian?"

"What? No, I'm from Britain. Yorkshire."

"Oh, where's that?"

Did she mean Britain or Yorkshire? During the tour I'd found out the average American didn't know much about world geography. "Yorkshire is in the north of England."

"Ah, you're near London, then? I heard of London."

"No, it's about two hundred miles away. I only went once as a kid." I felt like adding, "And no, I didn't go and have tea with the Queen."

She kept on asking stupid questions, and I did my best to answer them. Eventually I pretended to go to sleep, but that only stopped her for a bit. I felt something on my leg, but as I wasn't sure, I stayed still. Whatever it was slowly moved up my thigh before stroking my crotch. Snapping my eyes open, I saw the woman was handling my tackle.

"Oy, get your bloody hands off me!" I stood up and moved away.

"Sorry, I just wanted to--"

"I don't bloody care what you just wanted to, I

ain't interested."

"A good looking boy like you?"

"Yeah, which means I wouldn't touch a tramp like you with a bloody barge pole."

That shut her up. God, I wished I had a camera, all the more so when I added, "And beside, love, I prefer other blokes."

God, it was great to actually come out and tell somebody I was gay.

She shot me a couple of really hard looks and came out with a load of crap from the Bible. I just ignored her, and she slunk off to a seat further up the bus.

I doubted Will would have approved of how I'd treated the dozy cow. He always got upset when I'd say something to the few people on the tour who would say stuff to Will. But then I didn't like how Will just seemed to let people walk all over him. That was gonna stop and no mistake if I had anything to say about it. Nobody was gonna put my Will down.

Even though I'd probably only travelled about

a hundred of the thousand odd miles, it seemed like I'd never get to Cleveland. Time just seemed to stand still, especially when the bus sat at its stop waiting in the station. What was all that about? Surely it only took a few minutes for people to get on and off or go get a sandwich.

Shit, it'd been ages since breakfast, not that I'd eaten much. The thought of leaving Will had sort of taken away my appetite. Mind you, I'd been a bit off my food for the past couple of days. Thinking about it, I realised Will hadn't eaten that much either. He'd been quiet, too. Poor Will. I wanted to get to him, tell him it was all okay, I'd look after him, and...shit, he didn't need looking after. I mean the bloke was older than me, for Christ's sake. But then he'd liked it when I'd sort of protected him, held him, and loved him. Oh God, I wanted to get to him. Why couldn't this bloody bus go any faster?

Finally we pulled into a place called Savannah, GA. What the heck was the GA business anyway? According to my piece of paper, we had a fifty minute layover. *Ahh!* I was even starting to think in their bloody strange language, *It's a stop, waiting*

time, not a layover, Graham.

Needing to find some grub, I got off the bus and went to find a cafe.

I saw a Subway. We'd started to get them in Britain, so it didn't seem too foreign for me. I also had to watch how much I was spending. I knew I'd need some money for the taxi when I got to Cleveland.

After I'd eaten, I trudged around the bus station. It was dark and getting quite cold. I got out a pullover from my bag and put it on. Again, time really was dragging. Why did we have to wait so bloody long for the connection?

I walked past somebody using a pay phone and suddenly remembered. Mum, she'd be at Manchester airport soon, picking me up, but of course I wouldn't be there to be picked up. I knew she'd worry--she hadn't been that happy about me going on the trip in the first place.

"You won't know anybody there, our Graham. It's a long way, and they won't let you come home early if you're homesick."

Okay, she babied me a bit, but, well she's my mum, and...Oh, God, I missed her. What was I doing not getting on my plane and getting on a bus instead to go tell my boyfriend I loved him? Fuck, shit, damn! I couldn't help it, I started crying. Hell, I never cried. But then I'd never been in the middle of a foreign country on my own at night, and...

"Young man? Are you all right?"

I looked up to see a thin, bent old priest leaning on a walking stick.

"I, uh. I'm sorry." I sniffled and wiped my eyes.

Lowering himself slowly onto the bench next to me, he looked at me. He seemed kind. His thin, lined face looked kind, anyway. But he was a priest, and I could hardly tell him what was wrong, or at least not all of it.

"By the sound of your accent, you're a long way from home."

"Yeah." I nodded and hoped he wasn't also gonna mistake me for an Aussie.

"Yorkshire or thereabouts, I'm guessing."

"Yes, Father, near Leeds."

"I spent a couple of very rewarding months in Yorkshire." The priest rubbed his chin. "Though that was many years before you were born. Forgive me." The man held out a thin, bony hand to me. "Jerry, Jerry Gibson."

I shook his hand--he had quite a firm grip, though his skin was dry and felt like old paper. "I'm Graham Knight, Father."

"Please, just call me Jerry."

"It doesn't seem right. I, uh, well, I was brought up a Catholic, but, um--"

"You found other--more interesting--pursuits."

"Uh, something like that. I'm sorry."

I didn't know why, but I sort of felt comfortable with the bloke. He wasn't anything like the strict old fart, Father Simons, who I had to listen to when I was a nipper.

"So, young man, what has you so upset? Homesickness?"

"Uh, sort of." There was no way I could tell him I was travelling to tell another bloke I loved him. The priest seemed nice enough, but I knew that'd soon change once he knew I was a poof.

"I'm on a bit of a journey myself." He looked slightly sad. I didn't think I ought to ask him what he meant, but he went on anyway. "I'm going to visit my sister in Charleston, West Virginia."

"Oh." I nodded. "That sounds nice." I knew I was no good at making polite conversation at the best of times, but when it was a priest, I was really lost. At least he hadn't started going on about God.

"Oh, she means well, I suppose."

Looking at my timetable, I saw that my bus was also going to Charleston, so I asked him if he was on my bus.

"Yes. Perhaps we could visit during the night, it might make the journey pass a little more pleasantly?"

"Uh, yeah." Why did the Yanks always say *visit* like that?

The priest and I got talking as we waited for our bus to turn up. I was surprised at what an interesting bloke he was. He told me about his time in Britain, and he'd not just done the tourist thing some of the others on the Florida trip said they'd done. Seemed he'd used his visit to decide if he wanted to become a priest or not. Obviously whatever he'd seen in my country had made him decide to join the God Squad.

Finally our bus turned up. Father Gibson had some trouble lifting his case, so I offered to take it for him.

"Thank you, young man. Not many people your age would be so considerate."

I blushed. His case didn't weigh much. He must have been really weak not to be able to lift it. Handing the cases over to the driver--who put them in the space under the bus--we walked round to the door. Father was out of breath once he'd climbed the stairs into the bus; he seemed to almost collapse into one of the front seats. Though I normally sat at the back, I still sat with him. Maybe talking with him would help pass some time. So

long as he didn't start banging on about the Bible.

Father Gibson fished in his pockets and pulled out a couple of pill bottles. Shaking out some tablets, he swallowed them with some water. "There, they should start working in a bit."

I nodded, thinking they were for travel sickness or something.

"You never said what had gotten you so upset out there."

"Oh, uh." I thought he'd forgotten, but despite his age, the bloke was really sharp. "I just felt a bit lonely. You know, a long way from home, missing my mum, and--"

"Are you on some kind of student travel vacation?"

"Uh, no. I..." How was I gonna tell him what I was doing without actually telling him?

"Oh, Father. With you on board, we should have a safe journey." Shit, it was the drunk woman from the other bus. She sounded even more tanked up than before. Probably she spent the time

between buses in a pub or something. Turning to me, her face screwed up. "Father," she raised a shaking finger. "You shouldn't sit with him. He's gonna burn in hell, he's an abom--" She hiccupped. "An abominanation."

"Ma'am?" Father Gibson asked.

I covered my face with my hands and wanted the floor to swallow me up.

"He told me he's a fag. A filthy homer, homosexieral."

"I suggest you take your seat, ma'am. The bus will be leaving shortly." The old priest's voice was steady. But I still couldn't look at him.

A couple of moments later, I felt a hand on my shoulder. "Graham, please look at me."

Slowly I lowered my hands. "I'm sorry, Father. I'll go and sit somewhere else, I--"

"Graham, I'm an old man and I've seen many things in my time. You, despite what you may choose to do in the privacy of your bedroom, are a good person."

"Thanks. I, uh, well, I...I've only just found out, that I'm, uh." Jesus, whoops. Hell, though is that any better? Whatever. I was dead embarrassed. It was almost like I was giving the priest my confession.

"Was the reason why you were so upset back there related to your sexuality?"

"Uh, well sort of. You see I've been on a bus tour of Florida, and I met someone."

The priest nodded. "But you're a long way from Florida."

I sighed and told him all about meeting Will and how I really got to like him and...

"You fell in love with Will."

"Yeah, sorry."

"Graham, please don't apologise. Love is a very beautiful thing. Though many of my fellow priests wouldn't agree with the type of love you and Will enjoy, I'm not one of them. I...well, that's another story. Please go on, tell me more about Will and why you're currently on this Greyhound bus and talking with this old man."

"Father."

He shook his head. "Graham, I am old. That's a fact. Now about Will. Is he also in love with you?"

I told him all about what happened at the airport and me needing to go see him in Cleveland. "I hope I'm doing the right thing. I mean, I've only known Will for a fortnight."

"You won't know if you're doing the right thing or not until you see him."

"Yeah, and by then it'll be too late if I've done the wrong thing."

"But if you didn't go and see your friend, you'd never know. That, I suspect, would be a lot worse than the possible pain of rejection."

"Suppose so."

"Life is all about making mistakes, Graham. But it's how you learn from those mistakes that determines what you make of your life."

"Thanks."

We fell silent for a bit. I was really glad I'd been able to speak to the priest like this. In some ways I was thankful the drunken old lush had outed me.

Not long after setting off, the driver told us the onboard toilet was out of order. This seemed to upset Father Gibson. He admitted he needed to use the bathroom a lot.

So when the bus pulled into Beaufort, I asked the priest if he needed to stretch his legs. "I think I probably should."

He got stiffly to his feet and shuffled off the bus, holding tight to the handrail as he got down the steps. I thought he'd have a bit of trouble getting back up again, so I got off the bus to wait for him. I was right--he really struggled to get back on board.

"You're a good boy, Graham. Will is a very lucky man to have someone as considerate as you for a boyfriend. "

That made me really embarrassed.

"Do you have any pictures of your vacation in Florida? It's been a long time since I was there."

"Uh," I remembered the photo album a couple of old ladies who had befriended us had given me. "There's some in my case. I'll get them out at the next stop."

When we pulled into Walterboro, Father needed the loo again, so I got off with him. Finding the photo album in my case, I took it out, closed the case, and put it back in the storage area.

I remember when people came back from their holidays and showed Mum their snaps, I'd always make some excuse and leave them to it. But Father Gibson seemed really interested in the photos and the stories behind them. He even said Will looked like a, "Very nice young man." I had to agree with him about that.

"It feels really odd me talking about my boyfriend, or someone I hope will be my boyfriend, to a priest."

Jerry patted my knee. "It's wonderful to see young love, no matter what form it takes."

"I don't know how long I'll be able to stay with Will or anything. I mean I'm British, he's American,

and..." I started to feel sad.

"If you and Will are meant to be, then trust me, God will find a way for you to be together."

"Yeah." This was the first time he'd mentioned God, and I was all right with it.

"Maybe you'll be able to find a job over here? Though I imagine leaving your family may be more difficult for you."

"Yeah. There's only me, Mum, and my Gran. I lost my job not long before I flew over here." I told him about Amy and how I used to work for her dad, and how when she dumped me, the job went, too.

"I don't want to make you feel uncomfortable, Graham, but maybe you losing your job like that was a sign."

"Uh, I don't know."

"Think of it like this. If you hadn't lost your job, would you have gone on that particular tour?"

"Uh, maybe, but I'd have had Amy with me."

"And so you wouldn't have met Will, or at

least not have been open to the possibility of seeing as much of him as you did."

"Yeah, they mucked up his reservations and he had to bunk in with..." I felt my face heating up.

But Father Gibson was great--in fact, he laughed really loud. "See what I mean? It could have all been planned to happen the way it did."

"You think?"

"Who knows? But isn't it a comfort to think some higher power has been looking over your shoulder, guiding things so you could meet and fall in love with Will?"

I wasn't sure about that, but it was a nice thought.

Again, Father Gibson needed to get off the bus when we pulled into Orangeburg. I decided to go as well. Every time the bus stopped, the priest got off to pee. Made me glad I wasn't old.

* * * *

We pulled into Charlotte where we'd have to change buses. I looked at the timetable and saw

we'd be there for an hour. I was getting a bit hungry so I told Father Gibson to use the loo--I'd see to our cases and meet him in the cafe.

Father seemed to be taking a lot longer than usual. I don't know if it was 'cause I was tired--it was two in the morning after all--but something didn't feel right. So I thought I better go check on him. Good job I did, 'cause when I got into the lavs, a couple of black kids had Father Gibson pressed up against a wall.

One of 'em had a knife and was waving it in the priest's face, shouting, "Come on Padre, hand 'em over!"

I crept closer to the two and, sounding a lot calmer than I felt, I said, "I don't think that's a good idea, pal."

The guy with the knife spun round, and before he knew it, I'd grabbed hold of his wrist and pulled his arm behind his back.

"Let go of me, motherfucker!"

"Let go of the knife. And if you don't, I'll break your fucking arm." I tightened my grip and pushed

his arm a bit higher up his back.

He screamed.

"Joel, do it, bro. it's not worth it," the other guy said.

Joel tried to struggle free, but I'd gotten too tight a hold of him. Using a trick I learned in the playground back at school, I spun Joel to face the tiled wall and bashed his head against it.

"Let fucking go of the friggin' knife!" I shouted.

"Tyrone, do something ya fag, he'll fucking kill me."

"Uh, no, I'm getting outter here," Tyrone said, running away.

Seeing he had no other choice, Joel let go of the knife. It clattered to the floor and I kicked it toward Father Gibson. "Stand on the knife, Father."

Once he'd done as I'd asked, I threw Joel at the wall, letting go of him. He slumped to the floor but soon recovered. But I was ready for him and had my fists raised.

"Come on, pal, if you wanna take me on. Though trust me, I've won more fights than you've had hot dinners."

"Fuck this!" Joel said, bearing his white teeth. "You better make sure I don't meet you down some dark alley, limey! 'Cause me and my gang will slice you up good so even your mamma won't recognise ya."

"Someone who picks on old priests doesn't scare me. Now go on, just do one. Run home to your mummy so she can change your underpants for ya." I glanced down at the dark spot in his trousers where he'd pissed himself.

"Fuck you and the whore who raised you," Joel said before scarpering.

Once he'd gone, the place went really quiet--all you could hear was a tap dripping, as well as Father Gibson's unsteady breathing. He didn't look at all well.

"You okay, Father?"

He nodded, but I wasn't convinced.

I don't know what made me do it, but I walked up to the old priest and gave him a hug. He was just a bag of bones. A shaking bag of bones.

"Graham, that was a very brave thing you did. They could have seriously hurt you. I--"

"They were just kids. Probably out to score some money to feed their habits."

I folded up the knife and wrapped it in toilet paper. I wanted to take it to someone to call the police, but Father Gibson said he wouldn't press charges. I tried arguing with him, but he wouldn't budge.

So I dropped the knife down a grate in the floor before helping my friend out of the room. "You still want something to eat, Father?"

"Graham, I really wish you'd call me Jerry. And yes, although I don't have much of an appetite, I would like to go get something to eat. I think we both need it."

"Yeah."

"And Graham, I'm buying."

"Okay, Fa--um, Jerry."

* * * *

Once Jerry was back in his seat on the bus, he took a couple of the pills he'd been holding in the toilets. I was beginning to wonder what they were. Surely those kids earlier wouldn't have robbed him just for some travel sickness pills. "Such a waste."

"Huh?" I'd started to doze off.

"Those two youngsters back there. I don't think either of them could have been in their teens. Such a waste they're already set on a life of crime."

"They're the waste. Waste of space."

"There is good in all people."

I wanted to argue, but...well, it wouldn't have been right.

"I didn't thank you properly. Without you intervening, I--"

"You buying me that meal was thanks enough. This bus fare took most of my spending money, and I've still got to pay for a taxi when I get to

Cleveland.

"You must let me give you some money, then."

"No way! Sorry, Jerry, but no, I should have enough."

"You really do live up to your surname, don't you?"

"Huh?"

"You were a true knight back there."

"Give over." I was blushing again. "I only did what was right."

"But not everybody would. A couple of people came into the bathroom while I was being, um...but when they saw what was going on, they turned and left."

"Really? Sounds a bit like the parable of the good Samaritan, doesn't it?"

Jerry chuckled. "And I thought you'd be uncomfortable if we started talking about religion."

I blushed. This bloke was sharp.

"There are similarities between what happened in the bathroom and the parable. Though in the Bible story, one of the people who refused to come to the aid of the man on the road to Jericho was a priest."

I nodded, beginning to wish I hadn't started this conversation.

"Fear not, Graham, I won't turn this into a lecture on scripture. Excepting to say that in the Gospel of Luke, he says, 'And the next day, he'-- that's the good Samaritan--'took out two denarii and gave them to the inn keeper and said, take care of him; and whatever more thou spendest, I, on my way back, will repay thee.'"

"Uh?" Then I worked out what he was going on about. "But that was the good Samaritan paying money for the man, not the other way round."

Jerry smiled. "You're right. As the subject of money seems to disturb you so much, I promise not to raise it again."

"Thanks, 'cause I didn't do what I did for money."

"I know, and that's what makes your actions all the more laudable. Will is a very lucky man to have you as a boyfriend."

I couldn't believe it. Will and my relationship was being approved of by a priest!

* * * *

We finally got into Charleston at half past nine in the morning, and I helped Jerry get off the coach. He was pretty weak, I put it down to him not getting much sleep.

"Whereabouts did you say your sister was picking you up?"

"She didn't say. But you go on, you've got to get your connecting bus."

"I've got a few minutes," I said, getting Jerry's case from among the luggage piled beside the bus.

"Ah, there you are, Jerry," A short woman with tightly permed grey hair said. "Gracious, you look terrible. You'd have been better getting a flight or even allowing Horace and I to come get you, but oh, no--"

"Please, Marjorie, don't fuss."

"If I didn't, who would?"

"This is Graham, my good Samaritan," Jerry said, putting a hand on my arm.

"Thank you, Graham." Jerry's sister nodded at me.

"Oh, um, no worries. I was glad to be able to help."

"Ah, you're from Australia. My, you *are* a long way from home."

"No," Jerry said, "Graham is English. From Yorkshire. Please, I think I need to sit down for a minute, I..."

In the morning light, I could see Jerry's cheeks were sunken, his eyes glazed. He looked really ill. I led him to a bench and got him sat down.

"I told you the journey would be too much for you, but would you listen?" Marjorie asked.

"Please, Graham, my pills," Jerry wheezed.

I found them and unscrewed the cap on his

bottle of water.

"Thank you," he said once he'd taken the medication.

"I think you ought to go and see a doctor. You don't look well."

Jerry shook his head. "I've seen an awful lot of doctors these past few months, and none of them can do anything for me."

I must have looked confused.

"You see, I've been diagnosed with terminal cancer. The doctors said I had a few months before...well, before the Almighty calls me. So I've used the time left to me to do some travelling round the country."

"I...I don't know what to say."

"There is nothing you *can* say, son."

"Oh, Jerry, if only I'd have known."

"I didn't tell you because, well, I didn't want the news to overshadow the conversations we've had. It was wonderful to be able to share in your

youth, your vitality."

"But I--"

Jerry held his hand out to me. "Graham, I'm at the end of my life. But you're just starting out on a new chapter of yours. I want you to get to Cleveland and do the very best you possibly can to make a go of things with Will."

I couldn't stop crying. It wasn't fair that a kind understanding old bloke like Jerry was dying.

"Please, Graham. Please promise you'll do your best to love Will and make him happy."

"I will, Father Jerry, I promise."

"Good. Now you best be on your way. You can't miss that transfer. God be with you," Jerry said, making the sign of the cross.

I turned and ran for my bus, which was due to depart any minute.

* * * *

It was late afternoon when we pulled into the bus station in Cleveland, and it was bloody cold.

There was snow on the ground. No wonder Will chose to go to Florida for the sunshine.

I got into the back of a taxi, gave the driver Will's address in Shaker Heights, and sat back. The last few miles to get to Will were definitely the worst. All my doubts about whether he'd want me--despite what he'd said in the airport--kept raising their heads. Was I just a holiday romance to him? Could I make it work with us? He was older, brainier and liked classical music and stuff. Would he get bored with me, and...

I knew one of the first things I'd have to do when I got to Will's was call my mum. She'd be frantic with me not getting off the plane. Mum and I were really close, and I was upset I'd made her worry. Then I got scared--what if when Will saw me, he just slammed the door in my face? What would I do? I tried telling myself that wouldn't happen, but...was I making a complete prat out of myself trekking half-way across America like this? There was a word for what I'd done, impet- something or other. Will would know. *Oh, God, please let him be in, please don't have him turn me away.*

The bloody taxi driver kept moaning on about his fucking aches and pains. I had to listen about how the weather made his arthritis worse, how he could barely get out of bed some mornings. I also got told that every time he ate something, his ulcers would flair up. "My doctor, he not understand."

I just wished the bloke would shut the hell up. But he didn't. He told me about every pill he'd ever swallowed and how none of them did any good.

Finally, just before I was ready to strangle the taxi driver, we arrived. And oh, God, I thought I was gonna throw up. I even thought about asking the medical disaster area to turn round and take me back to the Greyhound station. Seriously, I would have done, but I only just had enough money for the fare to Will's place.

Staring up at the posh-looking building, I wondered for the hundredth time if I was making a mistake. I was about to press Will's doorbell when someone came out of the main front door and held it open for me.

I went inside and took a look round. It

seemed Will's place was on the second floor, so I started up the stairs, my heart pounding so hard I thought it was gonna jump out of my chest.

There it was--number 202. No going back now. Knocking, I waited. It seemed like ages before I heard someone come. The door opened, and there he was, my Will, the man who said he loved me. He just stood there staring at me.

"Hey, mate, know anywhere 'round here I can get a decent cup of tea?"

"Gray?"

I nodded.

He just stood there.

This was a bad idea. I was about to turn away when he said, "Sorry. Please, come in. This is a surprise."

I stepped into his hallway and put my case down. "When you told me you loved me back in Orlando, you didn't wait for a reply."

"Uh, well--"

"Cause if you'd waited, I'd have told you I loved you just as much as you love me."

"You do?"

"Com'ere, ya daft bugger." I took him into my arms. "How could I not be in love with a kind, loving, gentle bloke like you?"

"Will, I swear, for someone who's supposed to be a CPA," a bloke said coming out of one of the rooms holding an envelope, "you're impossible! I found the cheques, but the drawer they were in's a mess! Oh!" He noticed me. "Who the devil are you?"

I wanted to ask him the self same question.

Loosening our hug, Will said, "Um, Gray, this is my ex, Sean. He's come to collect some cancelled cheques."

"Oh, right." I remembered what Will had said about how Sean had dumped him for somebody younger and more exciting. I felt my muscles tensing up.

"Yeah, I'm Sean, but who are you? But more

to the point, why are you here, pawing at Will like that?"

I'd taken an instant dislike to Sean. Each time he opened his gob, I liked him even less.

I could feel Will beginning to tense up too, so I cuddled him tighter. "I'm Graham, Will's boyfriend."

"Boyfriend?"

"Yeah. Got a problem with that?" God knows what Will ever saw in this bloke.

"What? Will, couldn't you at least have picked a guy who's a little less, um, pugilistic? Someone who doesn't drag his knuckles along the floor like a--"

Will had to hold me back. "Sean, that's enough! If you've got everything you came for, then get out!" I'd forgotten how sexy Will was when he did his firm and in control bit.

Sean looked a bit shell-shocked, probably 'cause I bet Will didn't often stand up for himself like that.

I leaned to the side and opened Will's door.

"You heard him. Do one."

When Sean had crossed the threshold, I asked, "And Sean?"

He turned round to face Will and me.

"Have a nice day," I said before slamming the door in his face.

Will turned in my arms. "I can't believe it! You really love me?"

I kissed him. "'Course I do, ya silly bugger. Why else would I sit on a Greyhound bus for over twenty-four hours?"

"Oh, Graham."

"But the journey has made me feel like crap. So your first official duty as my boyfriend is to make me a cup of tea. Think you can manage that?"

"Gray, babe, you can have anything you want."

"Yeah I know, and trust me, I'll be taking you up on that," I said, giving him a squeeze. "But right now I'll settle for a decent cuppa."

THE END

ABOUT DREW HUNT

Having read all the decent free fiction on the net Drew could find, he set out to try his hand at writing something himself. Fed up reading about characters who were super-wealthy, impossibly handsome, and incredibly well-endowed, Drew determined to make his characters real and believable.

Drew lives a quiet life in the north of England with his cat. Someday he hopes to meet the kind of man he writes about.

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Founded in 2010, JMS Books LLC is owned and operated by author J.M. Snyder. We publish a variety of genres, including gay erotic romance, fantasy, young adult, poetry, and nonfiction. We are an invitation-only small press. Short stories and novellas are available as e-books and compiled into single-author print anthologies, while any story over 30k in length is available in both print and e-book formats. Visit us at jms-books.com for more information on our

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