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VANILLA



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## WHAT IT'S LIKE WITH HUNTER

He calls me Vanilla  
and presses his warm nose to my neck.  
I don't know what to do but laugh  
and let him.

He sniffs and smiles and tells me  
I smell like myself.  
Says it like an inside joke  
until it becomes one.

I feel him there, his touch  
settling against my skin.  
His gentle arms  
circling my shoulders.

It's as if a part of me has come loose,  
but instead of spinning off into space  
it turns back and stares at me  
so sweetly.

“Vanilla,” he says, and I press my smile to his.

He could say anything after,  
and it would seem a compliment.

Like a backward sigh,  
he draws me in. Holds his breath.

## EARLY DAYS

As easy as it feels being Vanilla's boyfriend,  
it was hard being friends at first.  
He'd come over to hang out  
and his eyes would scan my room,  
making their way around  
like a sweeping clock hand.  
And I couldn't help but tense up,  
wondering if he was smart enough  
to figure me out.

When our eyes met again,  
he'd change the subject.  
It was always video games  
he wanted to play, anything  
as long as he didn't have to  
look at me. And if I looked at him,  
he'd ask me, "What?"  
as if I wasn't allowed to look  
without a reason.

One afternoon, after a big test,  
when he'd been too busy  
to see me all week,  
I invited him over  
with something in mind.  
I said, "I'm tired of games."

We were almost teenagers,  
and as many other friends as I had,  
I'd chosen Vanilla to *really* know.  
"Let's talk," I said,  
but it turned into silence.  
"Let's dance, then," I said,  
putting on music.

"You mean, together?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said. "Get up."

He looked at me like I was crazy.  
So I danced alone, holding back at first,  
then not caring.  
Vanilla tilted back and forth, still sitting,  
an embarrassed metronome.  
His eyes were locked  
on my dresser mirror.

"I don't know what I'm doing," he said.  
I pulled him up onto his feet, said,  
"Then it's a good thing you have me!"  
My left hand took his right,  
my right took his left.  
It occurred to me then  
that I was definitely gay.  
And following that thought was the thought  
that I might be in love with my maybe best friend.

Vanilla sighed, then stood taller,  
becoming comfortable  
with my hands in his.  
"You make it look so easy," he said,  
watching my feet.  
"It is easy," I said. "It's the easiest  
once you let go and ride the music."

He turned to face the mirror,  
letting go of my hands.  
I told him not to be self-conscious.  
"I'm intimidated," he said,  
and I took his honesty as a good sign.  
"Don't be," I told him. "I dance in here all the time."  
"Practice makes perfect," he said,  
calling me perfect.