

Gutter was standing in *his* hallway, wearing nothing but *his* towel.

Havi blinked a few times. He took off his glasses to make sure Tanum hadn't replaced them with trick "see everyone nearly naked" glasses. Gutter thankfully dissolved into a blue and beige blur. Unfortunately, the glasses seemed normal. Havi put them back on. Gutter was still standing there, nearly naked.

"Oh, hey," Gutter said casually, like it was a completely normal thing to be in someone else's house with wet hair, wearing their towel around your waist and drying your hair off with – was that a dirty shirt? That *completely* defeated the purpose of bathing. "I didn't think you were home. Guess you were in your study or something, haha."

"Ha ha," Havi agreed weakly. "Why are you. What did. Did you use my shower?"

Gutter shrugged. "I went for a run and got tired and your house was closest. Oh, I don't have a change of clothes, though. Can I borrow some of yours? We're about the same height, so..."

No?! "No!"

"What am I supposed to do then, just walk home in dirty laundry?" Gutter gave him puppy dog eyes, which, Havi noted anxiously, had a very different effect now that Gutter was six feet tall and muscular and nearly naked rather than a scrawny eight year old.

Havi hesitated and weakened. "I'll clean off your clothes. And then leave."

"Sure." Gutter tossed him the shirt he'd been toweling his hair with, and Havi got a faceful of sweaty, damp clothing. "The rest of them are in the bathroom."

Still not quite sure this was actually happening, Havi stepped into the still-steamy bathroom to find Gutter's pile of discarded clothing. With a flick of his fingers, the sweat and dirt vanished from the clothes in a swirl of blue light. Havi stopped the spell short of folding them neatly as well. That was too much of a favor.

"Thanks!" Gutter managed to step in to the bathroom at the same moment Havi was leaving, so they had to slide by each other in the door. Havi could feel the heat of the bath still lingering on Gutter's skin.

That was an odd thing to notice, he realized with another twinge of anxiety.

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Had Gutter always been over this much? He was here again, browsing Havi's shop right before closing time.

"What's this?" Gutter picked up a carved bone box.

"Put that down," Havi said.

"You shouldn't sell stuff if it's dangerous just to pick it up." Gutter tried opening the box, but it was sealed somehow.

Truthfully, Havi didn't even remember what was in it, if anything. (He should really do inventory soon...) "It's not dangerous, I just don't want you rearranging everything."

Gutter set it down, pouting dramatically at Havi. Havi studiously ignored him, continuing to tally up the receipts for the day.

After a blessed moment of silence, Gutter asked, "Then where do you keep the dangerous stuff? Up here?"

Havi looked up to see Gutter reaching to a top shelf, where there were several wooden boxes. "That's not for you either," he snapped.

Gutter twisted around to stare at Havi over his shoulder with one hand still on the latch of the box over his head. The bare skin of his hips showed between his taut shirt and pants. Havi looked back at the receipts.

"I can't believe you're telling me, a paying customer, that I can't touch things in your public store," Gutter said mock-sternly.

Without looking at him, Havi said, "Then the paying customer in here had better pay for something in the next five minutes, because we're closing."

"What about one of these?" Gutter rattled the latch on a glass case.

"Don't-!" Havi jerked his hand up in a futile motion as Gutter opened the case. An alarm blared and magical ropes shot from the ceiling and floor, tying themselves around Gutter's wrists and ankles.

After a moment of shock, Gutter started laughing. "What kind of security is this?" He tugged on the ropes, but they held him fast, suspended about six inches off the floor with his arms and legs extended.

Covering his ears, Havi made his way over to the alarm to shut it off. The ringing continued in his ears in the silence. He surveyed Gutter dangling from the ropes.

"Can't you just snap your fingers and make it go off?"

"Tanum set it up," Havi said absentmindedly, twanging one of the ropes. It held firm.

"Ow," said Gutter.

"You deserve it." Havi waved his hands around, feeling out the shape of the spell. Tanum's sorcery magic was so odd sometimes. Gutter twisted himself around to look. Havi resolutely ignored the three inches of skin between the hem of his shirt and his belt.

He finally found the spot in the spell to dispel the magic, and twisted. Too late, he said, "Watch your step."

Gutter stumbled as he dropped to the floor, and put his hands on Havi's arms to steady himself. For a second, Havi was worried that Gutter would lean another inch forward, and he jerked backwards out of reach.

"Geez," said Gutter, and Havi mumbled, "Sorry." He was being ridiculous. He was definitely imagining ridiculous things. Wasn't he?

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Havi was *sure* Gutter didn't come over this often, but he seemed to be at Havi's house every other day

now.

"I need you to teach me about magic." Gutter was leaning across his kitchen counter.

"The entirety of magical practice, or are you looking for a specific discipline?" Havi said drily.

"I want to learn how to message people." Gutter waved his hand back and forth between Havi and himself. "But with pictures instead of just words."

Havi looked up from the book he was reading and squinted at Gutter. "You want to what?"

Gutter left the counter and spun a chair around to sit in it facing Havi. He leaned forward. Havi leaned backward an equal and opposite amount.

"I want to learn how to use Message to send pictures instead of just words. Can you do that?"

It wasn't like the possibility had never occurred to Havi, but he'd never thought that reworking the spell in that way would be worth the work. "You'd have to change the entire structure so it had a pictorial element as well as verbal one, which might involve adding a physical spell component and basically render the secrecy of the spell useless. But then, it isn't technically a verbal spell to begin with – maybe the shape could just be warped..."

Gutter nodded enthusiastically. Havi's explanation slowed as suspicion grew.

"Why?"

With a shrug, Gutter grinned. "Show me how to do it and I'll tell you."

Havi pursed his lips and picked his book back up. "What I told you is all extremely theoretical. I wouldn't be able to even try it without much more research and experimentation."

"Okay, okay!" Gutter leaned in a little more, still grinning. "I thought I could use it to send dirty pictures to people."

Havi looked at the words on the page, but his eyes couldn't process any of them over the roaring panic in his head. He was not imagining this, as ridiculous as it was. Somehow he managed to say evenly, "I'm not going to teach you a spell for that. That's incredibly inappropriate."

"We're all adults here, right?" Gutter's hands, clasped between his spread knees, were very close to Havi's leg.

"Are we?" Havi continued to stare at the book without taking anything in. "Go home."

"But you-!"

"Go home."

With a huff, Gutter stood up, leaving his chair askew.

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After that, the last thing Havi wanted to hear when he headed upstairs after closing the shop a few days later was Tanum saying, "I forgot to mention, we're having the Callows and McKellys over for dinner

tonight!”

His brief hope that only the parents would be attending was quickly dashed when Gutter sauntered in with Jojo’s sons. Havi’s attempt to sit as far away from Gutter as possible lost against Gutter’s efforts to sit right next to Havi. Havi couldn’t even be grateful that Gutter was sitting between him and Nifty.

The first time Gutter’s knee touched his it could’ve been a coincidence. After all, the table was crowded. Havi moved his leg away. A minute later, he felt Gutter’s knee again. Five repetitions later, Havi gave up.

*Well, if this is all he’s going to do* – Havi barely had time to think before Gutter was leaning over him with a muttered “‘Scuse me,” to grab the chicken. His hand brushed Havi’s shoulder and he managed to scoot his chair close enough so that his entire thigh was pressed against Havi’s.

Gutter wasn’t looking at him, but he was grinning in that particular shit-eating way again and Havi knew with utter certainty that he was doing it on purpose. *Why?* What was he trying to do here? Except, well, the obvious, which...couldn’t be? But Havi didn’t know what else Gutter could be trying to accomplish, and he was definitely doing it with intent, and honestly he had to admit to himself that this wouldn’t be half as confusing as it was if Gutter wasn’t half as attractive as he was! Gutter pushed his leg harder against Havi’s and panic welled up inside him.

*“I’m going to go get dessert,”* Havi said, and fled from the table.

Behind him, he heard Gutter say, “He looked weirdly upset, I’ll go check on him – no Tanum, don’t worry about it, you cooked—” before the closing door muffled the sound.

Shakily, Havi cut pieces of cake and put them onto plates. He felt simultaneously like there was a rock and a storm in his stomach. He felt like his skin was on fire. The door opened and shut quietly behind him.

Gutter touched the back of Havi’s shoulder.

Havi rounded on him. “What are you *doing?*” he hissed.

“Whoa!” Gutter grabbed the hand that Havi had forgotten he was holding a knife in. He lowered it down to the counter. Gutter didn’t let go.

“What are you doing,” Havi repeated.

“Just checking on you.” Gutter’s grin was back. “Are you sure it’s safe for you to be wielding knives if you’re this twitchy?”

“Not with you antagonizing me like this.”

“Hmm.” Gutter put his other hand on Havi’s hip, which was so blatantly flirtatious and also very warm. “I’ve always thought of myself as more of a protagonist.”

They were so close and Gutter was so tall and his mouth was right next to Havi’s mouth and *oh we are NOT doing this. He’s my friend’s SON, I’m MARRIED, we’re in the KITCHEN.* He tried to step away from Gutter but his back was against the counter. Gutter rubbed his thumb in circles on Havi’s hip and he could feel Gutter trying to slip his leg between Havi’s like it was a smooth move. Havi thought wryly, *Kid, I’ve been doing this for a lot longer than you.* On the other hand, he was also getting hard.

"You're completely crazy," Havi told him.

"You're really cute for an old man," Gutter replied.

*Oh for Gods' sake.* Havi grabbed the front of Gutter's shirt. He wasn't actually sure what he was going to do with it once he had it in hand, but Gutter had apparently already decided for him because he crushed their mouths together.

He was actually...a good kisser. He also stuck his hand down the front of Havi's pants almost immediately, which seemed like it might be moving a little fast. Havi's hands hovered above Gutter's back for a minute before shamefully settling on Gutter's ass, pulling him in to press against Havi. Fine. Fine.

"Damn, you've got a nice dick," Gutter said. His breath was hot against Havi's ear. Havi bit his own lip hard. "I'd love to bend you over the counter and—"

Havi wasn't going to let that go on for very long. He muttered a spell and a heavy blanket of Silence descended upon the kitchen. Gutter's mouth continued to move for a few more seconds and then he shut it, looking puzzled.

*'Ha ha, but I can just do this instead,'* Gutter told him in a Message. *'And now I can use my mouth for other stuff.'*

Oh gods, Gutter slid to his knees and Havi tilted his head back. An inaudible groan escaped from his mouth. He couldn't watch this.

*'Is everything okay?'*

Havi stiffened as the Message reached him. That wasn't Gutter's voice. It was Tanum's.

*'I'm fine.'*

*'You've just been in there a while is all?'*

*'We couldn't find the ice cream,'* Havi sent back, and then realizing in horror that that might provoke Tanum to come help, added, *'Got it now though. I'll be out in a minute.'*

At least Tanum didn't Message him again, since Havi accidentally looked down and was too distracted to form coherent sentences. Gutter looked filthy, with one hand wrapped around Havi's dick and the other one stuffed down his own pants. Snippets like *'Fuck me--,'* and *'Gonna choke,'* bounced into Havi's head. He couldn't be bothered to try to block them out.

Havi could barely maintain concentration on the Silence spell anyway. He felt it flicker and die entirely as Gutter swallowed his dick down to the base. Thankfully Gutter's mouth was occupied, but Havi could now hear the muffled sounds of conversation from the dining room, reminding him that *they were in the kitchen at a dinner party.* Havi stuffed his hand into his mouth to keep from making noise. His face and neck burned.

*'I'm getting close,'* he told Gutter, who redoubled his efforts instead of pulling away. Havi bit down harder on his hand, grabbing Gutter's hair with the other one as he came into Gutter's mouth.

As Havi sagged against the counter, panting, Gutter freed his dick and stroked a few more times. His

mouth was red and wet and open. He let out a shuddering gasp as he came on the floor. It was fucking obscene.

Havi threw a rag at Gutter. "Clean that." Without looking at Gutter he picked up half the plates of cake and ran out of the kitchen.

In the dining room, Tanum greeted him with a peck on the cheek. "You okay?" Tanum whispered, taking a couple of the plates. "You look really...flushed."

Havi heard the kitchen door open and close behind him. He didn't turn around. He couldn't turn around. He was never going to be able to look at Gutter again. "I'm gonna go lay down in the bedroom," he muttered and turned to walk stiffly away.