

BRODY LEVESQUE

What about
Max?





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Excerpt from Harvey Milk's "That's What America Is" speech, given on Gay Freedom Day, June 25, 1978 in San Francisco, California used by permission by the estate of Harvey Milk.

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One

Life never seems to get any easier does it? It's simple, some people hate other people just because they can. Stupid huh? Yeah, well, if you're a person with a different skin color, religion, or sexual orientation, then, "Fuck you, it's on!" That's usually followed by more angry words, and sometimes, a beating or worse. I ought to know, it's why I am standing here in this stupid hospital room's doorway watching my big brother slowly die. It's so wrong! The only thing he ever did to anyfuckingbody was to be nice, be himself, be a teen, be Max and yeah okay, be gay, so WHAT THE FUCK?!

I'm so pissed, yeah, I know I shouldn't cuss, "It's not lady-like" is what Mom's always whining. Yeah, well, I so want to scream 'Fuck You' at the world right now. My brother looks like a freakin science fair project gone bad. Oh and with some 'nice' bruises to go with his new battered and bandaged 'look.'

"Meghan honey?"

I look up at my Dad's face. He looks like hell. I reach over and squeeze his hand and he pulls me into a tight hug. I bury my nose into his suit jacket and smell that funky cologne he always manages to bathe in which pisses Mom off royally.

"Honey, we need to get something for dinner. The nurses will take care of him. Max'll be fine."

I burrow deeper into his coat and hold on tighter.

"Meghan, sweetie, let's go get Mom and get something to eat, okay?"

I grunt. I'm not normally a freakin' cave girl, but that's the best I can do right now. I am choked up and so don't wanna cry again.

Dad reaches up and strokes the back of my head and then lets go of me. I look up into his bright green eyes and I see the pain in them. Damn, this really sucks.

"Okay, Daddy, let's go I guess. Can we come back after dinner? Please?"

He nods at me and glances over my head at Max lying in the bed. This is so pathetic and so wrong. It's a freakin nightmare complete with really ugly shit included as a bonus.

All you can hear is the sound of machines beeping and especially the gasping noise of that one stuffed down his throat. He's got tubes to piss out of, and feed him, and Christ, the wires! If he could see himself he'd really be bummed. Then there's that really nasty smell that every freakin hospital I've every been in has, kindaofa floor-wax/antiseptic/who knows what mix. Yuck!

Oh SHIT, my eyes are watering. Nope time to go, right NOW! Dad gently turns me around and we walk out of the Intensive Care Unit to find Mom. She's down by the Nurse's station talking to some old guy in a white lab coat and those green scrubs that everybody's wearing.

Oh no, she's got that 'look' she uses just before she frosts somebody. I look up at Dad and see him frown.

"Joanne, let's go eat, Meghan and I are starving."

"Yeah Mom, come on."

Mom hesitates, I know what she's probably thinking. 'What? Leave Max alone?' The old guy interrupts;

"Ah Mr. Galloway?" My Dad nods. "I'm Dr. Wheelus from the Orthopedics department. I'm the surgeon in charge of your son's case. I was just telling your wife here that although the prognosis will be very guarded for the next forty-eight hours, barring any serious complications or infections we should be able to wean him off the sedatives' regimen and let him wake-up by himself when he's ready." I feel my Dad's grip on my hand tighten.

"Doctor Wheelus, Did the bullets..." my Dad's face contorts, "were you able to fix the damage to my son? I don't understand, what can we expect? Will he recover?"

My Mom makes an awful choking noise, Dad lets go of my hand and quickly puts his arm around her.

"That part of the surgery went well and we're fairly positive that the damage was contained and repaired. However, his recovery and the long term effects are a huge question mark, Mr. Galloway, and there are no certain answers that I can share with you and your wife and, ah, your daughter." He smiles apologetically at me.

"And there of course is the chance that your son could develop life threatening complications, which, ah well..." The Doctor trails off uncomfortably as that bit of good news sinks in. Jesus, this is one seriously fucked-up mess. I turn away from my parents and walk back to the window to the ICU room and watch Max. Yeah, well, watch the machines that are keeping him alive for now anyway. I see the reflection of the scene behind me and my stricken parents clutching at each other like they're drowning. Yeah, well shit, we ARE drowning, all of us- but especially my unconscious brother. That Doctor is still rambling on about medical shit I'm sure, but I've tuned him out, I don't want to hear it. Damn it, Max can't freakin die, I won't let him, shit, I need him!

I see a nurse's reflection slide up next to me in the window blocking my view of the drama going on behind me. "You gonna be okay hon?"

She's got one of those slow, sticky-syrupy southern accents like a Country Music Singer or that lady chef Paula Deen on the Food Network. I shake my head. Nope, I am most definitely NOT gonna be okay until I see Max's quirky lopsided grin and those greenish-gray eyes of his again. She takes hold of my hand and I feel her put something in it. I look down and realize that it's Max's 'Live Proud' rainbow Gay-Pride bracelet that he always wears and never takes off.

"We have to remove everything, jewelry, watches, you know before surgery and I was going to give this to your folks, but..." She stops for a sec and gives me 'the look' so I just rescue her sorry butt fast.

"My Mom and Dad know that my brother is Gay and it's not a biggie with them or me, K?"

She just shakes her head. We stand there for a long minute and then she disappears.

Thank God! Her tone of voice suggested that Max is a diseased cockroach. What the hell is wrong with people? It's like being Gay is a terminal disease or a fucking plague, shit! Yeah well so much for tolerance and understanding.

I realize that I've got a big bad case of sewer mouth going, but at this moment in human history, fuck it! Hell, some asshole shot my brother because he didn't like what? Max being Gay? Strange? Long-haired? A typical teenager? Like I said...fuck it.

"Meghan sweetie? Let's go."

I slip Max's bracelet into my pocket and follow my parents down the hallway to the elevators. We get outside and before Dad says anything all three of our cell phones go ballistic. We'd turned them on as we had come out of the elevators and walked out through the front lobby. Dad grimaces and I just shrug, welcome to today's world of Twitter and text me raw, yeah right?

"Mister and Missus Galloway? Would you care to comment on your son's shooting?"

Oh just perfect! First our cellphones go crazy and now bright lights and obnoxious television reporters surround us blocking any chance of a quick escape to our car. Yup, this is it! Last freakin straw, oh hell no, not this! Enough shit already it's time for 'Betty Bad Ass!'

"Why don't you ball-less motherfuckers leave us alone!" Tears blind me as I rage out at them.

"Meghan Elizabeth Galloway! Don't you DARE use that language!" Mom's more pissed at me the sewer mouth than them the parasitic press. Fat chance of getting forgiven for my mouth now it's a matter of public record that Miss Manners I'm not. Mom can seriously hold a grudge for awhile and this one ought to be a whopper. Oh well, life's a bitch...

Dad shoves a cameraman out of our way guiding Mom and me through the crowd of reporters heading towards the hospital's parking garage. As he does he tells them; " I don't have anything to say right now and I'd appreciate if you folks would please give my family some privacy."

"We are very stressed and really can't handle anything more right now, so please folks, please respect this request? Okay? Please give us some space!" Some of them are still shouting questions at us as we walk away, talk about people-skills impaired...

He leans into me and softly whispers, "I'm proud of you Megs, but you and I both know that Mom would shoot me if I told them off the way you just did. PLUS, that mouth of yours is still way too nasty and too dangerous." I can't help it but I start giggling. I can feel him sympathetically squeeze my shoulder and I feel safer now. We finally get through and lose the reporters and as we walk along I scroll through my cell's messages.

Looks like a bunch of texts and a couple of voice mails mainly from my friends and some of Max's friends and classmates who know both of us. I figure I'll go online and update my Facebook and MySpace pages when we get home. I really don't feel like talking, twittering or texting anybody right now. Oh and FORGET IM'ing. No way, no freakin way. NO instant messages period. I can't even think straight right now.

Dad rips down the ramp and then exits the garage turning onto southbound Wisconsin Avenue stopping at the light. I look out the back window. Cool, no parasitic-paparazzi-press losers chasing us.

He looks over at us, "Where do you girls wanna eat?" I look up and see that Mom's zoning and obviously could give a rat's..., uh I think I'll clean my act up a little here, ...butt.

"Dad, how 'bout Boeymonger's over on East-West Highway by the Bethesda Metro station?"

"Sounds good. You okay with that Jo?"

Mom nods at him and continues to stare out the windshield. I am starting to feel really shitty... oops, crappy again right now. Freakin situation is out of control. My cell starts to vibrate letting me know that the world wants in. Sorry world, not now, I can't deal with it.

Dad pulls up in-front of Boeymonger's and lets Mom and me get out while he goes to find a parking spot. When he catches up we're already in a booth by the window looking out at the people walking by and the rush hour traffic on the busy street.

Mom is still looking spacey which is starting to scare me a little. Dad notices and flashes me his trademark 'everything's gonna be good' grin. I sure as hell hope so. It's so weird sitting across the table from my parents without Max next to me. I feel like a part of us is missing. I look around the other tables and notice that none of my friends are around even though this place is a major hang-out for our high school. Odd, none of Max's friends either- which is weird, too, because usually if you wanna find somebody they're always here. Plus there's a super fast free WiFi connection you can access, and yeah, after getting tons of texts I figured somebody'd be here. Suddenly I feel very alone.

I scope out the menu and decide that I'll order one of Max's favorites, a Boeey Chicken Wrap in a Spinach Tortilla, crispy potato wedges, an Arizona Green Tea, and a cheesecake brownie, just because. Yeah, I think so, why the hell not? I'm starving.

A waitress comes over and Dad orders The Georgetown and coffee of course, and Mom finally slips out of her stupor and asks for The Pita Pan and an Iced CafÈ Mocha. Yup that's my parents, the caffeine addicts. I give her my order and she takes off and brings us back our drinks pretty quickly.

Gee, this bites. Dad's now avoiding looking at me, kinda staring away at who knows what and Mom's back into her personal twilight zone. Damn, *'I need to talk about this guys, I need to know why! Why the hell did that person shoot Max?'* I miss my big brother- oh crap, now I'm crying again. Dad reaches over the table and takes my hand, gently squeezing it.

"Megs, I know you're really having a tough time with all of this, so are we. But we'll pull through this honey, it's what Max would want and I think you know that better than your Mom and I do. Okay?"

Mom's hand joined Dad's on-top of mine and she gives me a teary-eyed grin. I gotta say it, I really love them alot. "Thanks guys, I so just can't understand why..."

"There's never a reason that makes sense sweetie, never." Dad looks at Mom and she nods.

The waitress comes over with a tray and serves us our food. Not much else to say I guess... we start to eat silently.

I'm the one spacing out now as we drive back up Wisconsin Avenue towards the hospital. I guess, I dunno, I can't stop thinking about what's happening to Max and as I stare out the window I decide that I can't go back there and see him like that. I need a break.

"Dad? Mom? Can we go home...um ah, can I go home please? I don't feel like going back there right now."

Dad looks at me in the rearview mirror, "You sure Megs?"

"Yeah Dad, I'm sure. I just need some time to absorb all this."

My Mom twists around in her seat and faces him. "Troy? That may not be such a bad idea, I mean it's not like Max is going to be awake at any point soon. Remember what the Doctor told us? And... and it's been a terribly long horrible day too, I need to rest. I'm beat," Her voice cracks, "I'm not sure that I can stay up much longer." My Dad nods. "Okay girls, let's go home then." He signals a left turn and we turn onto St. Elmo Avenue cutting through to Old Georgetown Road and the way to our house.

I cannot freakin believe it! Those loser parasites are camped out in front of our house! SHIT! Dad looks really pissed and Mom's mouth starts twitching. "Meghan? NOT a word out of you young lady!" Mom tells me with that 'You'd better not defy me look' on her face. Dad starts to chuckle, "Joanne, we'll just pull into the garage that way neither of you'll have to deal with them." He reaches up and clicks the garage door opener that's clipped to the sun-visor. We pull into the driveway and we're practically blinded by the bright TV lights mounted on their cameras aimed at our car. Dad pulls past Mom's Subaru Forester into the garage and the door closes behind us.

I bolt out of the car and head into the kitchen where I'm surrounded by our two dogs yelping, tails wagging, and happy to see us. Suddenly my brother not being here really hits me hard and I sink to the floor and pass out.