

**Love On... 5: Love on the Boil**

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Editor: Maryam Salim

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PO Box 170549

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[www.loose-id.com](http://www.loose-id.com)

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## Screwed the Pooch

The last time I saw Darren Carter, we had just finished a marathon fuck session to celebrate our college graduation. We'd been boyfriends for most of senior year, after meeting at a GLBT dance party, but we had both been avoiding the conversation about what would happen after commencement. I had already accepted a job on Wall Street, but I hadn't told Darren I'd be moving to New York.

I knew that he'd been interviewing for jobs and internships in his field, East Asian Studies, but he hadn't shared any results with me.

\* \* \* \*

"I'm leaving for Japan tomorrow," he said, as I pulled out of his ass.

"That's what you were thinking about while we were fucking?" I asked. I peeled the condom off my dick and tossed it toward the trash can beside the bed. I missed, but I was too irritated to care. "The whole time we're doing it you're thinking about leaving me?"

"I wanted to tell you," he protested, as I stood up. He looked so sexy there, his skinny, hairless body covered with a sheen of sweat, a flop of brown hair over his forehead. "I could never figure out the right time."

"And this is the right time? While I've got your jizz all over my chest?"

Darren had come on me while I was making my final thrusts up his ass, and I could already feel a cold, clammy mess congealing among my chest hairs.

"Don't be such a drama queen," Darren said.

"Me!" I heard myself screech and made a conscious effort to dial it back. I was the stud, after all. The butch one nobody suspected was gay. I worked out and tended bar in the evenings. Darren was the queen who made a big deal out of everything.

"You're moving to New York anyway," Darren said. "Did you think I wouldn't find out?"

"Have you been reading my e-mails?"

"When you accessed your mail on my laptop the other day, you never logged out of your Gmail account. It popped up without my doing anything."

I pulled on my shorts and T-shirt without bothering to clean myself up. "So this is it? Thanks for the fuck; see you around?"

"You're the one who's always saying you don't want to get wrapped up in some heteronormative relationship," Darren said, sitting up against the pillows. "That we're just having fun together. What, did you think I was going to come to New York with you? We'd get an apartment in Brooklyn together? That I'd be your little woman, make you dinner every night?"

His words stung because I had been thinking that. Yeah, I didn't want to get wrapped up in anything too serious with Darren, wanted a chance to sow some wild oats and all that crap. God knew I'd fucked a lot of guys before him and figured there would be a lot more after him. But I always thought I'd be the one to end things, not Darren.

I stuck my feet into my deck shoes. "Have a good life," I said and I walked out the door.

\* \* \* \*

I admit I'd stalked him once or twice on social media over the last five years. Saw that he'd loved his postgrad year in Japan, how he'd moved to Portland for a job at a museum of Asian history. I'd gotten busy with my startup and had no time for anything that wasn't work related or didn't lead to a quick fuck.

So I was stunned to see him in the reception area of Phil Sweet's office. Sweet was a venture capitalist I'd been courting for months, trying to get him to invest in my business. He'd asked me here for a face-to-face that I was sure was going to lead to a much-needed cash infusion.

A year before, I'd cashed out all my retirement savings and moved to Miami to start Cockteals, a business selling tea-based cocktail mixers to bars and restaurants. I wanted to start selling to the public too, but for that I needed cash to ramp up production and make distribution and advertising deals. I'd met Sweet at a venture hive event and intrigued him enough that we'd come this far together.

Seeing Darren in Sweet's lobby threw me for a loop. "Darren. What are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same question."

He looked good. In the five years since graduation, he'd filled out a bit. His normally pale skin was tan, and I liked the way he'd cut his hair—very short on the sides, high and puffy on the top.

I noticed a tattoo on his right wrist—a teacup. And then it clicked. "You have a tea business too?" I asked.

"What do you mean, too?"

Sweet's secretary opened the door behind the receptionist. "Mr. Sweet will see you both now."

Darren stood, and we followed the secretary to a conference room overlooking Lincoln Road, the pedestrian thoroughfare in the heart of Miami Beach. I'd spent a lot of time on that street over the past six months, talking to every restaurant and bar manager who'd meet with me. I was proud of the connections I'd made. I hoped Sweet was too.

Phil Sweet had been born under a lucky star. He'd majored in physics in college and moved to Silicon Valley as the tech boom was beginning. He'd founded an Internet

startup, which had eventually been acquired by one of the big players in online marketing. At that point, he'd cashed out and become a venture capitalist.

He was a tall, rangy guy with a perpetual tan that came from spending a lot of time on his hundred-foot yacht. He'd invested in a Miami company that taught coding to inner-city kids, and fallen in love with the weather and a gorgeous Cuban woman, so he'd relocated his business to Lincoln Road a year before.

He shook my hand and Darren's. "Darren Carter, meet Eddie Gonzalez," Sweet said.

"We've met," Darren said. "We went to college together."

"Oh yeah," Sweet said. "I knew that. But yours was a big class, wasn't it?"

"Two thousand. But Darren and I had some interests in common." I was feeling generous, so I added, "Darren's the one who introduced me to tea in the first place."

"Great. So you know about each other's businesses?"

"Nothing at all. We haven't been in touch since graduation," I said.

"Let's get reacquainted. Darren, you want to give your elevator pitch?"

I saw Darren gulp. He was an effusive guy, or at least he had been when I'd known him, but he was never comfortable giving presentations.

"Tea is one of the oldest beverages known to man, and one of the most versatile," he said. "But Americans have been slow to realize that. My company, DiversiTea, provides custom blends for upscale restaurants that complement the entrées and the desserts, as well as training wait staff on what to recommend."

Interesting. Darren and I were in the same market, though coming at it from different angles.

"Eddie?" Sweet asked.

"Like Darren, my company, Cockteals, aims at the higher-end restaurant market with custom tea blends used as the basis for high-end cocktails. I want to take my product line and introduce it to the consumer market."

"I want to do that too," Darren added.

"And that's why you're both here," Sweet said. "I'll be honest with you. There isn't room in my portfolio for two companies based in the same product. I love both your ideas and your enthusiasm, but I can't invest in both of you. And honestly, on your own, neither of you is strong enough. But if you work together—"

"No," Darren said.

"Absolutely not," I said, before I had the chance to think it through. There was no way I was going to be able to work with Darren.

Sweet shrugged. "Then our time here is done. I wish you both good luck."

And that was it. All that time struggling to make a connection with him, and Darren Carter had screwed the pooch in less than a minute.

## Over My Head

Eddie Fucking Gonzalez. Who'd have thought that he'd show up in Miami? Why wasn't he still some up-and-coming shark on Wall Street? And what the fuck was he doing with a tea business?

"We should talk," he said, as we walked out of Phil Sweet's office.

"About what? About how you just destroyed the last five years of my life?"

"Hey, you're the one who said no first," Eddie said.

I swallowed hard. He was right. I'd had a knee-jerk reaction to seeing him again. To how hot he still looked, his biceps bulging out of his short-sleeved shirt, the silky coating of dark hair on his arms, the faint hint of a five-o'clock shadow that reminded me how much I loved it when he rubbed his chin against my dick.

"I'll buy you a drink," Eddie said. "The Holding Company is one of my clients and they use my mixers in their Tea-Tinis."

"Holy shit. That's your business?" I asked as we walked outside. It was January and the digital readout on the clock tower said the temperature was seventy-two degrees. That reminded me of one more reason why I'd left the cold and damp of Portland to move to Florida. That, and following Phil Sweet like an eager puppy waiting for a handout.

Eddie nodded. "You've had one?"

"I love those," I admitted. "Have you eaten at the Holding Company?"

"Yeah, I had dinner there a week ago." It was like a light bulb went on over Eddie's head. "Holy shit. I had a green hibiscus tea with dessert that was awesome. Was that your mix?"

I nodded. "I guess we do have something to talk about."

I was supposed to meet my boyfriend for dinner, but I texted him that some complications had come up with the deal, and I had to meet with someone to work things out. I said I'd explain later, though I wasn't sure I'd cough up that Eddie and I had been lovers in college. Parker was a good guy, and he wouldn't care, but I wasn't ready to get into any drama until I knew what was going to happen with the business deal.

Eddie and I stepped out onto Lincoln Road, past a beauty store specializing in mascara, concealer, and beehive wigs for drag queens. Next door was a restaurant run by Argentine immigrants featuring kosher vegan cuisine for the Orthodox Jewish women pushing strollers and trailed by little boys with curls hanging in front of their ears.

"Tell me about your business," I said to Eddie as we walked to the Holding Company.

"It all comes back to you," Eddie said, surprising me. "You and the tea."

When I was in high school, I did a class project on the Japanese tea ceremony, and that spurred my interest in different kinds of tea. By the time I met Eddie senior year, I had a shelf full of varieties of tea, a couple of types of infusers, and a big glass teapot. I used to experiment, mixing green, white, or black tea with different herbs and spices, and I remembered how excited I was to share my latest creation with Eddie, usually after a round of hot sex.

"Yeah, blame it on me," I said lightly.

"I do. When I got to New York, I missed all the tea you used to make, so I went looking for it. One night I was fooling around, and I poured some bourbon into a cup of Earl Grey. It was like this door opened, you know?"

"I know," I said.

The restaurants along Lincoln Road had overtaken the center median, the only distinction between them the color of the big café umbrellas and the shape of the tables.

Maroon umbrellas shaded square wooden tables; dark green protected round tables with white cloths, yellow over long communal wooden tables and hard chairs that kept patrons from lingering too long.

The traffic enforcement cops rode modified stand-up scooters. The cross streets were filled with lumbering tour buses and handicap-access vans, low-slung convertibles and tiny European imports.

"I got obsessed, figuring out how to mix different kinds of tea with rum or bourbon or vodka or tequila," Eddie said. "My fridge filled up with containers of simple syrup in all different tea flavors. When I went out drinking with guys from work, I'd carry a thermos with me with one of the syrups. I'd order a shot of something and make my own drink."

"This is while you were working on Wall Street?"

"Yeah, I was a financial analyst. Learned a shitload about what makes a company tick. Earned a lot of money, which I socked away."

We approached the restaurant, and both of us reached to hold the door open for the other. Oh yeah, I remembered. That had been our dynamic in college—both of us wrestling to be the alpha male in the relationship. Because I liked to bottom for Eddie, he thought that meant he was in charge of everything—which pissed me off royally.

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Want to know what happens next?

<http://www.loose-id.com/love-on-the-boil.html>