

## Finn and Marcus Learn Patience

Alice Winters

\*Please don't share.

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Finn

“Death is upon us,” Marcus says as he sinks down in his seat like he’s trying his hand at becoming a puddle.

“It’s really not,” I say as I look for a place to park the car.

“I would rather rats nibble on my toes,” he declares.

“Well... yeah, rats are cute with their little whiskers and tiny hands so I can see that,” I say.

“I’d rather face down a bull.”

“I’m pretty sure you’d win against a bull,” I say as I finally find a parking spot. I feel like we’re a mile away, but the city center is always the busiest this time of day. I turn to Marcus and smile. “Ready?”

He slowly turns to look at me. The biggest brooding look he’s ever brooded on his face. “Does it *look* like I’m ready?”

“Yep. Let’s go,” I say as I get out and head down the street with Marcus sulking by my side. The sun is shining down on us and there’s just enough breeze to make it not too hot. “It’s such a nice day out. How could you possibly be this miserable? You get to spend it with me.”

That lessens the brood just a little. “I do enjoy being with you. I just... think it’s ridiculous we’re rushing early to get Claude a pair of shoes.”

“It’s for his birthday!” I remind him. Claude mentioned that he wanted this certain pair of shoes that were supposedly limited edition or something equally ridiculous. But since he and Alexei were out of town doing something for Brooks, he wouldn’t be able to get them and was quite

devastated. So Alexei made up a plan that the three of us would pitch in together to buy Claude these horribly hideous shoes.

“We’ll be in and out, and you will have the whole rest of the day to recover,” I say as I turn the corner only to realize that I clearly don’t know the definition of “in and out” because there’s a massive line stretched out along the sidewalk for what has to be a block.

“This... must be the wrong spot,” I say with a nervous laugh as I pull out my phone to check the address. When I see that we are most definitely close to the place, I step up to the woman in front of me.

“What’s this line for?”

She gasps and grabs her chest. “You... you don’t know? This is the line for the limited and rare exclusive Lyvoe Ve Grant runners.”

“So... just a pair of shoes. This is the line for the shoes?” Marcus asks.

She looks offended until she gets a look at Marcus’s brooding and then she looks a bit timid. “Um... shoes. Yes.”

Marcus slowly turns to look at me. “We’ll go to Walmart and grab him the absolutely ugliest pair of shoes known to mankind. We’ll buy some glue and some glitter and just toss it on, and he’ll never be able to tell the difference,” Marcus decides.

“I don’t think that’ll work,” I say.

“No, it will,” he assures me. “I promise.”

Even though I’d love to leave right this minute, I shake my head. “I’m going to... wait in line for a bit to see if it moves.”

“No! I’ll show you! I’ll be right back!” he says and zoom he goes.

I watch him disappear around the corner, rather confused but Marcus is gonna do Marcus. Instead, I text Alexei.

Me: You alone?

Alexei: Yes. I told Claude to fuck off. What do you want?

Me: These shoes... there's an insane line of people waiting for them.

Alexei: What? They're fucking ugly. Who would even want them?

Me: The guy you're in love with.

Alexei: Don't talk to me.

Me: I'm waiting in a line in the blistering heat to buy these damn shoes. I'd be careful what you have to say.

Alexei: Only the first hundred get a pair, too. Are you in the first hundred?

I look up at the massive line.

Me: Fuck.

Alexei: Maybe they'll come through and tell you, you know? Cut it off at one hundred?

Me: And how do we know they'll even have his size?

Alexei: I guess you tell them the information and they ship them made specially or some shit.

Me: This is ridiculous.

Alexei: I know... but Claude bought me a fucking *horse*.

Me: Where's my horse?

Alexei: I'll let you brush her.

I sigh and stick my phone back in my pocket before realizing I'm ridiculously bored without Marcus here and pull it back out. I don't have to wait long; Marcus is back within fifteen minutes holding up the absolutely ugliest pair of shoes I've ever seen in my life. He's taken the most grandma looking pair of shoes he could find and glued fake flowers all over them before coating them in pink spray glitter.

"Here are the prestigious... Lyvo... ooo shoes," he says with this teeny little smile, like he's proud of himself.

“Marcus... you have... outdone yourself,” I say with a beaming smile to complement his.

He’s proud. He thinks I’m actually going to go along with this. Does this man have any idea of the atrocity he’s committed? “Come along, then, Finn.”

I stay rooted to the ground.

“Finn?” Marcus says, looking concerned. “I got the shoes.”

“Those are horrible.”

His smile falls. “But they look just like something Claude would like, so it’s fine.”

I grab Marcus’s arm and tug him in. “Claude literally risked his life for me. He nearly died for me. We can wait in this line and get him a pair of shoes.”

Marcus sighs, clearly defeated and horrified by this fact. “I feel dead inside,” he says as he hugs his DIY shoes to his chest like he’s actually hurt.

“So, Alexei said only the first one hundred people get to put their name down for them. Can you see how many people are ahead of us?”

“Sure,” he says as he hurries off, probably hopeful we’re past the hundred-person mark. He isn’t gone long before returning with a beaming smile on his face. “We are one hundred and sixty-ninth.”

“Sixty-ninth, eh?”

We snicker like teenagers before I remember that that means our chances of getting these stupid shoes are next to none.

“Welp. Guess we can go.”

“Yeah, but it’s not like every one of those people will get the shoes, right? Like some might be friends or family who came along for support, right?”

Marcus shrugs then leans right up in the space of the woman in front of us. “Are those your family?” he asks, but he’s annoyed which means he’s brooding and his terrifying aura is leaking out.

The woman grabs her family into her arms, pins them close to her chest, and goes, “You can cut if you promise you won’t eat them!”

“Oh, nice,” Marcus says as he drags me in front of the woman.

I’m so horrified that I’m not sure I’ll ever be able to look Marcus in the eyes again. “Oh... my... *god*. Marcus, we can’t just *cut*.”

He looks highly offended. “We didn’t. She literally just said we could get in front of her,” he says as he smiles at the woman who gives him a rather terrified thumbs up. “Now we’re one hundred and sixty-sixth.”

“Please don’t threaten anyone else,” I say.

“I would never,” he says as he looms over the man in front of him. Literally *looms*. The man’s head slowly, ever so slowly, turns to look at what might be going on behind him. His eyes get *huge* as he looks at the ancient vampire looming over him.

“W-W-W-W-W-W-Would you like in front of me?” he asks.

“Would I ever,” Marcus says as he drags me in front of the next guy and his three friends.

“Marcus! Stop!” I beg. “We can’t do this. We have to go back.”

Marcus leans over so we’re a little more eye to eye before setting a hand on each shoulder. “Think of Claude saving your life. You owe him these shoes.”

“I do but I also don’t think we should be threatening people to get in front of them,” I say.

Marcus sighs so loudly and dramatically that the woman in front doesn’t even ask, she just steps behind us.

“Dammit, Marcus!”

Marcus sighs again, in case I didn't hear the first sigh that literally traumatized a woman. "Fine, I won't threaten any more of them." He whips out his badge as he looks at the next guy. "VRC, is that marijuana I smell on you?" He takes a big whiff of him. "It sure is."

The young man's eyes are so wide I'm surprised they haven't dried out. He hasn't even blinked yet, just stared. His friend or girlfriend reaches out and pushes him forward. "Take him, not me!" she cries.

"I'll take neither of you if you let us in front of you so my senses don't have to be traumatized by your weed stench."

"Go!" the man says, and suddenly we're moving ahead again.

Oh.

My.

God.

This can't be happening. This can't be real.

"Marcus, you can't use your authority to get us ahead in line!"

He grins at me. "I've already moved us up like sixteen places," he says, and I realize he's having fun. This is like a fucking game at this point.

"No badge. No vampire mojo," I order.

He holds up the only thing he has left.

The gaudy shoes he made. He leans into the space of the guy in front of us. "These are exclusive, never before seen Marcú Tennis Shoes," Marcus says, trying his absolute hardest to make it sound fancy but for some fucking reason, the man in front of him is hooked.

"They're gorgeous," he breathes.

"And they are yours for the simple cost of letting us in front of you and your group."

"Of course!" he says as he takes the shoes while Marcus marches us up another four spots.

I'm staring at the man who I love in disbelief now. "What... what are you doing?" I hiss.

He gives me the most innocent look the villainous man can muster. "I'm just doing what you said. Ma'am?"

The woman turns to look.

"If I take my shirt off, can we go ahead of you?"

The woman's expression instantly lights up. "You sure can, honey," she purrs as I watch the love of my life do a striptease for a woman none of us know in a line for shoes from hell. But she's laughing with her friends and having a good ol' time and before I know it Marcus gets us into the one hundredth and one spot.

"So?" I ask with my arms folded over my chest.

Marcus is thinking. He's run out of things he's "allowed" to do and is clearly uncertain. "Oh my god. I have a brilliant idea. Finn, take off your leg."

I stare at the man in horror. "No."

"There is no way these people will keep you waiting if you do. Come on."

"I'm not taking off my leg!"

Marcus stares at me. "Don't you care about Claude at all? He saved your life, after all. Without him... your sister could have been killed. Artie would have been slain. And still you... you refuse to do this one simple task?"

I stare at the absolutely horrible excuse for a man. "You... you will pay for this," I say as I lean against him and pull my pants up enough that I can release the lock on my prosthesis and pull it off. "Now what?"

Marcus gasps. "Oh my god, this vicious woman just tore this man's leg clean off!" Marcus yells as he waves my leg around. With the padding

and shoe on, it does sort of look like a real leg.

The thing about humans is that even if they looked at the situation and brained through it, when a menacing as hell vampire is standing right there shouting that someone's leg has been torn off, people panic.

And run.

Marcus just smiles, scoops me up and carries me to the front of the line where only one person is left standing.

“DeGray?” Marcus asks in surprise.

Bentley turns to look at us and then around at the chaos. “Should've guessed that you're the reason there are only two of us left in line.”

I just decide to hide in Marcus's arms so I don't have to be forced to face this horror. “There's no place like home.”

“What are you doing here?” Marcus asks.

“Claude paid me to get in line early to get him these ugly shoes. What about you?”

That snaps me out of it. “Wait! No, we're supposed to get it for him for his birthday!” I say. “He was going to be all excited.”

“Oh... I've been here since five AM,” Bentley says.

“That's stupid, you should have just harassed everyone like I did. We got here like...” Marcus looks at his watch. “Thirty minutes ago, and we're already second in line.”

Bentley shakes his head. “I'll just tell Claude some crazed vampire scared everyone off, and I didn't manage to get him a pair,” he says as he waves at us and heads off.

When the store manager comes to let the line in, he looks rather confused when it's just me and Marcus standing there but welcomes us in anyway.

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Alexei excitedly holds the box out to Claude who is like a child in a candy shop. He seems to absolutely love making us all get together so he can torture us as a group. And since it was his birthday, he insisted he dress us for it. I gave in and let him dress me, but Marcus wore his blackest clothes because he's in "mourning" (even though it's also his birthday) and I'm pretty sure Alexei joined in—whether it was planned or not, I'm not sure.

"This is from all of us," Alexei says.

"Aww! Is it a heart because mine just exploded from how cute that is!" Claude says as he excitedly pulls the ribbon. He does it so slowly that I can tell Marcus is ready to rip it open for him. But he just stays back and watches as Claude reveals the absolute ugliest shoes I've ever seen. Literally the ones Marcus made were ten times nicer and I would rather walk a thousand miles barefoot than wear those.

"Oh. My. Heavens. ABOVE! I love all of you. You're all the greatest people in the world," Claude says as he drags us all in for a huge hug. "By any chance were you the crazed vampire who destroyed the grand opening?"

"Nah, not me," Marcus says.

"Of course not," Claude says, planting a big kiss on his cheek before kissing Alexei and trying to kiss me. Marcus smashes him away from me, and as the two threaten each other, I find that I wouldn't want it any other way.