

A TASTE OF YOU

By

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CHAPTER ONE

Giancarlo eyed the plate of antipasti sitting on his desk, then the jacket on the hanger next to the office door. Although his personal shopper assured him the trim style suited him, it didn't allow for any extra pounds. Guests at the restaurant Ransom expected perfection. In Carlo's mind, this included the appearance of its co-owner and manager, not just the food and service.

He glanced back at the innocuous looking plate of food, wondering if he could tip it into the trash without anyone noticing. He had skipped shift meal in favor of running through his last-minute checklist *again*, and, when he finally made it back to the office, the platter had been waiting for him. Most days it would have been welcome, but today he was hyper-aware of the extra couple pounds he had added in the last few months and the new suit. Today wasn't just another day.

None of that stopped his mouth from watering at the thought of the food, though. Almost all the ingredients came from Ransom's kitchen, but none of the bite-sized temptations on his desk were from the restaurant's menu: salmon on toast points with *crème fraîche* and capers, a ramekin of his favorite almond-stuffed olives, sweet peppers with Hector's special marinade, *insalada caprese* on skewers, and the *pièce de résistance*—a tiny, elegant cream puff.

Every item had been prepared to Ransom's exacting standards. But, unlike anything a

guest would ever see, the plating was designed for snacking while he worked, not astounding the eye with artistic presentation. Nothing had been chosen to take him on a complex culinary journey where each dish built on the flavor profile of the last. Instead, each item had one thing in common. The plate on his desk represented a sampler of his favorite snacks.

His staff was pampering him.

He gave in and popped a piece of prosciutto-wrapped melon into his mouth. As soon as he swallowed it, his stomach growled. Okay. He was hungry. Plus, he shouldn't risk offending Hector by trashing his marinated peppers.

Before he knew it, only the cream puff remained. He wasn't really hungry any more, and it definitely wasn't on the diet. He also couldn't skip it. He didn't *want* to skip it.

The cream puff would never be on Ransom's dessert menu. No matter how well executed, there was no way to turn the delicate bite of pastry into something arty enough to suit Ransom's image. Grace, Ransom's pastry chef, made them only on special occasions. She constantly experimented with new flavor combinations, and he would be expected to comment on her latest effort. A treat and a game all rolled into one.

He picked up the little ball and inhaled, looking for the first clue. The fresh tang of citrus hit him first, followed by a more subtle hint of aromatic spice. Not ginger or nutmeg, something with a slight floral bouquet. Cardamom. Definitely. Now the citrus—not orange or lemon. Lime? The filling had a beautiful blush tint, but that didn't mean anything. Grace had been known to cheat and color it.

Time for a taste, and he would get only one chance. The whole pastry barely made a bite. He let the delicate morsel dissolve slowly on his tongue, enjoying the cool cream and trying to nail down that elusive citrus flavor. He had a good palate, but, among the crew at Ransom, that was like saying he could breathe air. Garrett won this game every time, but Carlo was going to have to guess.

Garrett.

He tried to ignore the way the name slid into conscious thought despite his efforts to banish it.

Chef Garrett Ransom would be back in the house tonight after months of filming his hit reality show, *Ransom Me*, in California. The show pitted culinary students against each other in a tough cooking competition mentored and judged by Garrett. At the end of the season, the winner received tuition for his or her final year of culinary school and a spot in a top restaurant upon graduation. *Ransom Me* had made Garrett a household name.

On Garrett's first night back, VIPs would pack the restaurant. His fans always seemed to know the exact date the chef would be back, even before Carlo did.

Of course, Ransom dealt with VIPs every night. The butterflies in his stomach, the triple list checking, and the constant edgy anticipation all had to do with Garrett coming home.

Enough loitering in the office. The pastry had been a good distraction, but now Carlo needed to concentrate on getting ready for the first seating. He should be out front.

He got up and put on the jacket, then took a moment to check his appearance in the mirror installed for exactly that purpose. The jacket felt snug but not enough to mar the clean lines. Hair styled, tie neatly knotted. He was ready.

He picked up the empty plate to drop off in the dish room and headed for the front of the house. He almost ran right into Grace when he stepped out of the office.

"You ate. Good."

Grace, who looked nothing like her name, was easily the largest person on the staff. Over six feet tall, with warm milk-chocolate skin, a robustly generous figure, and hair that looked like she cut it with a weed-whacker, she looked more like a linebacker than the top pastry chef in the city. Carlo wondered if she had been stationed back here to make sure the plate came out empty.

She nodded at the dish. "What did you think?"

“Cardamom and lime make a beautiful combination.” He made it a statement. No points if she found out he had guessed.

“HMMMMM.” When her eyes sparkled like that, you didn’t notice the weed-whacked hair. “You think I should have gone with a different lime?”

Madonn’. “No, the, uh, key lime was perfect.”

She flashed a triumphant grin. “Gotcha, boss. Blood lime. Had to make promises I have no intention of keeping to get them, too.”

“Ah, that’s where the color came from. I thought you cheated. Well, it took my mind off....things. You save one?”

“Yeah, yeah. I saved one for Chef. I’ll fill it when he gets here.” She sighed when Carlo glanced behind her at the clock on the wall. “Make another round if you have to, but we’re ready.”

“Jacket tonight, Grace.”

“Awww, boss, no one sees me.” Then, when he didn’t answer, “Fine, fine. Go on with you. I’ll have it on before service.”

He didn’t intrude behind the line, where the chefs were finishing their final prep, but watched from the service side. After a few minutes, Hector ambled over.

“Best line crew we’ve ever had. Most of them have worked with him before, and the ones who haven’t are steady.”

Carlo wanted to say a dozen things to that, but none of them would change anything. He would just be harassing Hector. At this point, smooth tempers took precedence. He contented himself with, “I’m sure they’ll be fine,” before moving on.

His critical eye hit every surface as he strolled through Ransom’s empty dining room. Polished wood floors and darker, lacquered wood tabletops glowed under soft, recessed lighting. No stuffy starched white tablecloths at Ransom. Garrett had the kind of aversion to white

tablecloths that most people reserved for scrubbing toilets or cleaning out grease traps.

He ran his finger along a piece of trim, checking for dust as he made his way toward the bar. He resisted looking at his watch, a gift from Garrett, who tended to be extravagant at Christmas. Garret's words drifted into memory.

“You should have a watch that's as anal about keeping time as you are, Carlo. I know a watch is a boring present. You can take it back if you don't like it.”

Boring. As if everyone wore watches that cost more than the average car. But he hadn't taken it back, had barely taken it off his wrist. He knew he was compulsive about time, but he didn't consult his watch now, despite the almost painful urge to do so.

He knew the time. Prep was done, the shift meal over, and, in just a few minutes, the first guests would walk through the doors. He'd done the calculations in his head a million times. Start with the time Garrett's flight landed, add in collecting luggage, getting a car back into the city, a stop at home to drop off luggage and freshen up. No matter how much he padded the times, the conclusion was obvious.

Garrett was late.

Of course, Garrett was compulsively late. But first day back? Usually he couldn't wait to get back into the kitchen. Ransom was home, after all. The restaurant was their baby, and Garrett and Carlo lavished as much attention on it as if it were an actual child.

Usually Carlo would pick up Garrett at the airport and they would come straight here. Garrett would talk non-stop, upset everyone's routine by taking back over the kitchen and trying to change half the menu on the fly, reduce at least one of the junior chefs to tears, and generally make a nuisance of himself. Ransom, which Carlo had spent months grooming to run more efficiently than the precision timepiece on his wrist, would be thrown into pandemonium.

No doubt about it, Garrett coming home was a pain in the butt on multiple levels.

Carlo finished his inspection of the dining room and made his way to the bar, where Andi

waited for him. Ransom's maître d' had her tablet out to check off her own pre-opening list. Andi ran through any outliers with Giancarlo nightly as a formality. She could handle everything on her own, but tonight their routine soothed him.

He listened with one ear while she went down the list. As expected, nothing needed his personal attention. He nodded in all the right places, approved her decisions, and tried not to fret as the hands of the clock over the bar inched onward.

He was Garrett's emergency contact. So Garrett was okay, right? He had to be okay.

He was just late. And he hadn't bothered to notify anyone of his new schedule because he was Garrett.

Carlo should have insisted on picking him up. Then their routine wouldn't be off like this.

He started at Andi's hand on his arm.

"Giancarlo?" Shit.

"Sorry." He managed a smile. "You were saying?"

"We're ready. Relax. Everything is in better shape than he left it."

"Of course."

Of course. So calm. Smooth. Professional. No trace of Brooklyn. You could take the boy out of Brooklyn. Maybe you couldn't take Brooklyn out of the boy, but you could certainly iron out the accent.

Of course. Andi didn't buy it, but they didn't have the type of relationship where he spilled his guts to an employee right before a busy shift. Her fingers tightened almost imperceptibly before she dropped her hand away from his arm.

"Hector has everything under control in the kitchen?"

"Of course." She echoed his words solemnly, but he caught the glint in her eye. She knew he had already been through the kitchen twice in the past hour, not counting the last stroll-by, which had surely tried even Hector's vaunted patience.

He huffed out a laugh, and Andi smiled back. Some of the tension edged out of his body. Garrett would be here when he got here. Andi opened her mouth to say something else, probably poke him more about his nerves, but then she stopped as her eyes focused behind him.

A zing of electricity snaked up his spine, and he knew, before Andi lifted her chin in a little heads-up warning, before he turned around, before Andi pasted on the special smile she saved just for these situations. He knew because energy hummed through the air, and suddenly Ransom came alive in a way he could never achieve on his own.

Garrett was home.

Giancarlo felt faint, realized he had stopped breathing, and took a deliberate breath before he turned around. Steady. Not too rushed. Not too eager. He was still miffed. Garrett was late, damn him. And not even a text or a phone call.

All the beauty of Ransom faded around him as his vision tunneled down to Garrett. The California sun had kissed his hair a lighter shade of blond and brushed a hint of golden color into his skin so that he glowed, a bronze angel, as he stood in the soft lights of the restaurant.

Screw “not too eager.” His legs must have moved, but Giancarlo couldn't have said how he got from Point A to Point B. He knew only that Garrett was home, and they were together again. They were doing their usual greeting, a mash-up of a bro-hug and a more European double-cheek air kiss. And how had two gay men come up with something so awkward?

Or maybe it wasn't awkward to anyone but Carlo because he didn't want the bro-hug or “air kisses.” He wanted to sweep Garrett into his arms and soul kiss him until they were both dizzy and panting. He wanted the real damn thing.

Instead, he held himself awkwardly rigid while he leaned in to welcome his best friend home—upper half only on the hug so an indiscrete brush of thigh wouldn't reveal exactly how happy he was to see his business partner. He inhaled carefully on the second kiss, and his knees nearly buckled. Garrett was the only chef he knew who never seemed to smell like his kitchen.

No fish. No beef. No spices. Never in a million years the fry station. Garrett smelled sweet—warm cookies, vanilla, and sugar—like he should have been the pastry chef instead of Grace. The aroma always blindsided Giancarlo. Garrett wasn't known for sweet. The scent was a secret thing. The Garrett no one knew but him.

“Carlo.” Garrett’s fingers brushed his jaw as he pulled back, just a touch, and then he stepped away. “You look well. New suit?”

Carlo shrugged, not trusting himself to speak yet. Up close, he took inventory of Garrett. He was thinner, but that was normal after months of shooting his show in Los Angeles. Carlo was never sure if it was the pressure of the show or the image that caused the weight loss, but Garrett came home hollowed out every time. Today, the tiny lines around his eyes and mouth looked deeper, too. Not something Carlo could point out. Garrett looked tired and stressed, even more than he usually did after he wrapped the show.

“How was your flight?” So trite. Not what he wanted to say at all. But he couldn't say the things he wanted. *What have you done to yourself? Where have you been all day? Have you missed me?*

“The usual,” Garrett said dismissively. “I can't tell you how glad I am to be back.”

The words sounded sincere, but his gaze slid away without meeting Carlo's.

The tension that had eased when Garrett walked through the door settled back into Carlo's shoulders and neck. He tried to tell himself he was overreacting. So Garrett had some new drama going on. So what? Life with Garrett contained inevitable drama. Eventually he would tell Carlo whatever had him in a twist, and they would work it out like they always did.

He suppressed the disloyal thought that it would have been nice to save the drama for Day Two back in the city.

“Well,” he said, “we are certainly glad to have you back. Hector is looking forward to seeing what new items you have planned for this season's menu.”

That last bit stretched the truth—at least one of the new dishes was sure to take hours to master to Garrett’s satisfaction and drive Hector right up the wall. But flattery never hurt with Garrett, and Carlo figured it would serve him better in the long run than giving vent to his hurt feelings. Especially now. He snuck a look at his watch. They were *seriously* out of time for reunions.

And, speak of the devil, behind Garrett a sunbeam shafted across the wall as the outside door opened, letting someone else into Ransom’s foyer. A customer had arrived even earlier than usual for the first seating.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Andi heading for the door. Before she got halfway there, the new arrival strolled around the dividing wall that separated the foyer from the main dining room.

Not an early guest, Giancarlo realized. The newcomer wore jeans and T-shirt and had a hot dog in one hand. He made a beeline for Garrett, who had turned to see what was going on. Before Andi could intercept the guy, he whipped out his phone and snapped a picture of Giancarlo and Garrett as they stood side-by-side.

Stupid tourist. Carlo was not in the mood to deal with an uninvited interloper, but he maintained a polite smile. Andi would eject him soon enough, and she would be a lot politer about it than he could be right now.

“Oh god. You’re actually eating a street dog.” Disgust dripped from Garrett’s voice.

“What? I told you I was going across the street to get one. It’s New York City. It’s mandatory.”

And, Holy Mother, could this day get any better? The cocky punk with the camera and tight bod was neither an early diner nor a tourist. He was here with Garrett.

First. Day. Back.

“Matt, come meet Giancarlo.”

Garrett gestured him over, and Andi shifted course to follow behind, eyeing the guy like he might steal the flatware.

The kid stuffed his phone back in his pocket and stuck out a hand. “Matt Armstrong. Pleasure. Garrett talks about you all the time. It’s an honor to finally meet you.”

So he had manners. When Matt tacked on a winsome smile, Carlo had to admit he was cute. That smile probably opened a lot of doors. What worried him was he couldn’t return the compliment. Garrett had never mentioned Matt at all.

The kid got more points when he greeted Andi by name, adding, “Of course I recognize New York’s most famous maître d’.”

Andi accepted the compliment graciously, but Giancarlo could tell she was as pissed as he was because who the hell was this guy and why hadn’t Garrett told them to expect an extra person?

Not that it was unusual for Garrett to spring surprise guests on them. Carlo and Andi had rearranged seatings last minute more times than he could count to accommodate Garrett’s celebrity friends, producers, lovers, you name it, during a fully-booked dinner service. They always got the full show. VIP treatment at the door, Andi would make a production of seating them despite the lack of reservation, Garrett would come out of the kitchen to greet them at their table, make them something special off the menu....“Celebrity Chef” was Garrett’s favorite game.

No one ever saw behind the curtain, though. He didn’t let friends stroll in off the street with him pre-service. So what made Matt Armstrong so special?

They did the polite chitchat for a few minutes. Yes, Matt came from California originally; yes, he surfed, but he didn’t have much time for it these days. He’d spent some time bumming around Europe, but this was his first time in New York, which was why he had to have the hot dog.

“I know it’s crazy, but, hey, New York City? It *had* to be the first thing I ate.”

Garrett rolled his eyes at this, but Matt just laughed. Despite himself, Carlo found himself starting to like Matt. He had a sense of humor and wasn’t afraid to be silly around Garrett.

He liked him, in fact, right up until the moment the kid slid his hand down Garrett’s arm.

“So, Garrett, can I see the kitchen now?”

The kitchen. And that touch, just a little too familiar, said everything. Carlo’s smile stayed firmly in place, despite the blood pounding in his ears and the sweat he could feel breaking out along his forehead.

Matt and Garrett were lovers. And that would be fine because Garrett changed lovers more often than his specials, but...

“Andi, Matt is a chef, and I promised him he could play in the kitchen. You can introduce him to Hector, can’t you?”

“Of course.” Andi slid into her maître d’ voice, rich and cool as heavy cream, but, when her gaze met Carlo’s, the expression in her eyes wasn’t calm at all.

“Come on back, Matt. Hector loves to meet a new chef.”

Hector did love talking shop with other chefs. He might not consider having one sprung on him right before service a huge thrill. Thank goodness they had Hector. A more temperamental chef wouldn’t stand the disruption. Carlo watched Andi and Matt until they disappeared into the kitchen. As long as he was focused on Hector’s reaction, he didn’t have to deal with his own.

Garrett had brought one of his boyfriends to Ransom, not to sit in the dining room and be treated to The Chef Garrett Ransom Show, but to “play” in the kitchen. Garrett hadn’t come straight to Ransom when he got off his flight because he had been with Matt. None of Garrett’s boyfriends had ever come before Ransom. Until now.

Carlo turned to Garrett and did the expected thing. “So, tell me about Matt.”

The words cost him. When Garrett's eyes slid away again and he changed the subject, Carlo let him. And, when a new bar of sunlight announced the arrival of the first actual guests, he greeted their arrival with relief.

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2 *a.m.* The digital clock next to his bed added the extra minute silently. Garrett stared up at the ceiling. He was still on West Coast time, and his body insisted 11 p.m. was ridiculously early to be in bed.

The apartment was completely silent, not even the whisper of the central air disturbed him. There were cars somewhere down below, people, the city that never slept. Up here, none of it intruded. He could be in space, floating alone above the earth. He strained his ears listening, trying to find a connection to the city around him.

Matt was out there somewhere enjoying the nightlife, so at least Garrett had the apartment to himself. Facing another human when he walked in his own door tonight would have pushed all his buttons. Now he wondered which would be worse—the awkwardness of Matt bringing another man home or the inevitable expectations if he didn't.

Matt was a good kid, Garrett reminded himself. Garrett couldn't blame Matt that his presence had become a massive irritant over the last few days. Today's constant togetherness had been the worst. Garrett had suffered through the flight, settling Matt into his rarely used guestroom, the whole bloody day. Sharing Ransom's kitchen with Matt had actually been easier than expected. It just hadn't been the homecoming he wanted.

He hadn't realized how much he had missed Carlo until he spent their first evening back together avoiding him.

God forbid he had a relationship he didn't fuck up.

So far Carlo was his single biggest success story in the relationship department. His partner attributed this to the fact that they had never slept together. But, hell, there were tons of people Garrett hadn't slept with. All of them pretty much hated him on extended acquaintance. Why had Carlo stuck?

He sighed into the darkness.

Tomorrow, he wouldn't be able to put off telling Carlo what he'd done.

CHAPTER TWO

Carlo hesitated in front of Garrett's door, key in hand. Normally he gave a courtesy knock and let himself in. But normally he didn't have to worry about one of Garrett's boyfriends being in residence. Garrett didn't encourage sleeping over. Just one more way Matt was "special."

Garrett had called and asked him over for lunch, so they were up and dressed, right? The logic didn't help. He couldn't shake the image of walking in on Garrett and Matt. His normally latent imagination put together an unwelcome full-color collage of all the things he might find them doing together. He stuck the key back into his pocket and knocked.

The door swung open almost immediately, and he was faced with Matt, fully dressed, thank god, and with an expensive-looking camera hanging around his neck. Carlo forced a smile. The kid looked way too relaxed and happy this morning. *Don't go there*. But of course it was too late.

If his own smile looked forced, Matt didn't seem to notice.

"Hey, Carlo—come on in. He's starting to fret about lunch being ruined."

Carlo. His nickname on Matt's lips grated, and he tried to push back the irritation.

"Nice camera. Lunch picture-worthy?"

"Nah, I'm headed out. I'm sure you and Garrett have stuff to catch up on. I'm going sightseeing while I have the chance. It'll only be my first time once, right?"

Giancarlo agreed it was a nice day for sightseeing and tried not to reveal how happy the prospect of *not* eating lunch with Matt made him while he got the kid out the door.

He turned back into the apartment and headed toward the kitchen, where Garrett had

appeared in the doorway.

“He’s great, huh?”

What was he supposed to say to that?

“He seems nice.”

Sorry, but he just couldn’t gush over Garrett’s latest crush. Up close, Garrett didn’t look nearly as relaxed and happy as Matt.

Carlo frowned at him. “Still jet-lagged?”

“Couldn’t sleep.”

Garrett’s insomnia was back.

“You take a pill?”

“You know I don’t like taking them.”

“You don’t like being a zombie the next day, either, and you look like shit. Take the damn pill tonight if you need it.”

Garrett flashed him a grin that erased all the lines on his face and lit up his blue eyes so he looked like the devil he was. “Yes, mother.”

For a second, it was like old times, just the two of them. Carlo reached out and ruffled Garrett’s hair because it would annoy him, and because he couldn’t live another minute without touching him.

Garrett laughed and swatted his hand away. “Go sit at the table. I got you something special for lunch.”

Carlo stopped dead in the doorway. “In the dining room?” Like a guest?

Just like that, the camaraderie died. Carlo was as at home in Garrett’s kitchen as his own. They had lunch at the island in the kitchen—not sitting at the dining room table.

“We need to go over some stuff for Ransom.” Garrett’s voice floated out of the kitchen. “I thought it would be more comfortable at the table.”

They were having a business meeting? Not that they didn't have them, only they were usually less formal about it. Especially Garrett, whose idea of a business meeting consisted of rattling off whatever new ideas were in his head at random. Then Carlo did his job and made those things happen. Garrett needed the freedom to be the big-picture creative end of things. He didn't interrupt lunch with "going over stuff." He just spouted it out when the mood hit him.

Carlo looked at the table. Garrett's tablet sat at one end. His fingers itched to pick it up and snoop, but he resisted. Whatever this was, it was Garrett's show.

Garrett came out with a bottle of red wine, which he poured into the two glasses already on the table. The wine was a blend Carlo wasn't familiar with, so that told him nothing.

He returned with two plates, putting Carlo's down with an air of smug expectation.

Carlo stared down at his plate. "You made me a meatball sub?"

"Not exactly made." Garrett sat across from him. "I got it from that little shit-hole window in Brooklyn."

"Joe's? In Brooklyn? You went to Brooklyn?" He glared across the table at Garrett, suddenly afraid of what the innocuous-looking sub might mean. "Am I dying?"

"Of course I didn't go. Why would I do that? I got it delivered. Your nephew bilked me out of a fortune to bring it up here."

"From Joe's? In Brooklyn?"

"Why not? It's your favorite, isn't it?"

Maybe, but it certainly wasn't Garrett's. Garrett was as likely to order a meatball sub from a hole-in-the wall place in Brooklyn as a hot dog from a street vendor. Carlo looked across the table at Garrett's plate, which contained the same ingredients in a radically altered form. Thin slices of meatballs fanned across the plate framed by a smear of sauce. The bread had been sliced and toasted into thin crostini. Garrett had added his own tapenade. It looked delicious, but....

"That's ridiculous." Carlo pointed at the arty little plate. "Why can't you just eat a damn

sub like a normal person?”

“I’m not normal. Normal is boring. And you’re not dying. Eat your sub. It took me half an hour to make them understand how to pack everything so the bread wouldn’t get soggy, and now it’s going to be cold *and* soggy before you take the first bite.”

Carlo could have told him that it wouldn’t matter if the bread got soggy. Therein lay the beauty of a Joe’s meatball sub. You could leave half of it in the fridge overnight, and it would still be just as drool-inducing the next morning, soggy bread or no. And you could eat it standing in front of the fridge in your shorts. It didn’t require plating.

But, whatever the reason, Garrett had made a special effort. He had not only gotten the very thing that Carlo would want for lunch, he had assembled it with his own hands, and, *ah*, Carlo’s eyes rolled back and he thought he might have moaned. Maybe he was going to have to revisit his stance on the bread and the cold sub. Whatever Garrett had done while assembling and warming it....

Or maybe it just tasted better because Garrett had made it special for him. A thing Garrett would never make for himself. Yeah, Carlo was that pathetic because that could be it. He took another bite and let all the flavors have a party in his mouth. He followed it up with a sip of the wine, which got kinky with the sausage and red sauce and set off another explosion of flavor.

He came up for air when the sandwich had been reduced to a few drops of sauce on the plate.

Garrett’s plate was mostly untouched.

“What? You went to all that trouble slicing and dicing, and you’re not going to eat it?”

Garrett took a fussy bite of the meat. “The meatball is actually pretty good. Maybe a tad salty.”

“Fine. I give up. I don’t know what you have against regular food.”

“I could make a better one.”

“No. Don’t. Please, just don’t even.” Because he was sure Garrett could make a better one. Except the meatball would probably be the size of a pea. He would serve it in a spoon or some shit and call it an amuse bouche. It would be delicious. Real meatball subs everywhere would curl up and die of shame. He loved Garrett, god help him, and Garrett was a freaking genius in the kitchen, but he drove Carlo up a wall sometime with his quirks. Turning every damn thing he ate into a work of art was the best and worst of them.

Well. Not the worst. The worst was the never-ending string of men. Until Matt.

Matt, who was completely unlike the flashy, preening men Garrett usually had in tow. Matt, who really was a chef, as in his last job was at *Yes?* in L.A., which put him somewhere in the same league as Garrett. In fact, judging by his performance in the kitchen last night, he might give Garrett a run for his money in a few years. They were both young, talented, successful, hot. They were so fucking made for each other.

Now he was totally off task and depressed as well.

He set his napkin beside his plate and leaned back in his chair, trying to look relaxed.

“All right,” he said. “What’s up?”

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