

Epilogue

Next Christmas

“Ladies and gentlemen, Devin Delaney!”

I walked up to the dais, feeling intimidated and wishing Andy was there. It’s not like I was a stranger to speech-making; I’d won two Golden Globes, after all. Not to tout my own credentials; I’m just saying that this speech made me more nervous than having to accept my first award.

Andy should have been there. It was absolutely pouring rain in New York, and so it was icy in Boston, and the flight he was working, which was supposed to have landed with plenty of time for him to make it to this charity dinner, had been delayed. He’d texted me that the flight was about to take off about five minutes before I was called up to talk, so I was optimistic he’d make it to the cocktail party being thrown in my honor later in the evening, but I could do a cocktail party. I wasn’t sure I could get up in front of three hundred strangers and talk about myself.

The dinner was a fundraiser for a charity that worked with LGBT youth. I had almost turned them down when they asked me to be their keynote speaker, but Andy had talked me into it. I had never aspired to be an activist, but now that I was out of the closet, it didn’t feel like I had much choice. I wanted to spend the rest of my life with Andy by my side, and I could only do that if I was open about it.

The audience was going nuts as I walked to the podium, which gave me enough time to take a deep breath and gather my thoughts.

When the commotion died down, I stepped up to the microphone.

“Good evening.” I looked around the room. They’d dimmed the lights in the hotel ballroom enough that I couldn’t see the audience very well. That was probably for the best. I pulled out my notes. I’d actually written this whole speech out and let Andy read it and make changes twice, and I’d tried to memorize it the way I did lines in a movie, but things were different when it was personal.

“I imagine most of you here know my story,” I said, “but here’s the short version. I’ve known I’m gay since I was about thirteen. I’ve known I wanted to be an actor since long before

that. When I was growing up in the eighties and nineties, these two things seemed incompatible. There were no out gay actors for me to look up to, or if there were, they were relegated to minor parts. When my first movie hit theaters, marriage equality was still a dream. So I made choices. I'm not proud of all of them. Some of them may have been the wrong choices. I dated women. I lied. I did these things in the interest of keeping my career thriving, and it did thrive."

I saw a few nods in the audience. This was a friendly group, all LGBT people and allies, but this was still incredibly hard to say.

"I regret the lies," I said. "Lying is like a spider web, I think. It catches you, and the harder you try to extricate yourself, the more you get entangled. And I lied to everyone. I lied to my family, I lied to the public, I lied to my girlfriend, I lied to myself. The more lies I told, the worse it got, the more miserable I was. And then last Thanksgiving, I got snowed in at LaGuardia during that huge blizzard?" I waited for the murmurs of familiarity. "What could have been the worst Thanksgiving ever became the best because I met a man named Andy at the airport who is the greatest guy I've ever gotten to know. Falling in love with him made me want things to be different, not just for myself, but for anyone trapped in a similar situation."

I took a deep breath and looked down at my notes. I was about halfway through the speech. I wanted to run screaming off the stage, but I gripped the edge of the podium to steady myself and kept going.

"It's sad that it took me accidentally finding a happy relationship to want to change my life. I should have wanted something different for myself all along, but I felt like I wasn't worthy." I had to read this part. I couldn't look at the audience. "I came out last year for Andy, because he deserved to be with someone who wouldn't hide him in a closet. But I also came out for myself, because I was tired of the lies, and they were slowly killing me. And now I'm happier than I've ever been."

I paused to move on to the next bit, but the ballroom erupted in applause. I looked up and saw a sea of dimly lit smiling faces. I couldn't help but smile back.

"It's been a good year," I said when the roar died down. "Well, not all of it has been great. I've gotten some hate mail, stuff so vile I don't even want to repeat it. My agent dropped me. I've lost parts I was up for. My mother was mad at me for a long time. I thought it was

because I was gay, but she was actually angry that I'd come out on the Internet before talking to her." That was true. My mother had come around quickly once we'd had an honest conversation. She wasn't very comfortable with the gay thing, but she'd come to terms with it. She loved me no matter what, she said. And she found Andy adorable. "But for the most part, the support I've gotten from friends and family and fans has been amazing. Being able to take Andy to movie premieres and award shows and hold his hand on the red carpet has been wonderful. And now that I can be honest, I don't have that cloud of fear that I'll be discovered constantly hanging over my head anymore."

There was more applause. So this was not going so badly. I was still glad I was almost finished.

"I never wanted to be an activist," I went on, "but I can't help but think about all the kids sitting at home wondering if there's something wrong with them or thinking they aren't worthy of love. My coming out was selfish, and I will admit that. I did it so that I could be with the man I love. But maybe a happy side effect is all those kids who will see me and think, 'Hey, if it's okay for Devin Delaney to be gay, maybe it's okay for me, too.'" I took a deep breath. "I want to tell those kids that yes, it is okay. Be who you are. Find your own happiness. Don't let the hateful people in our society bring you down."

The applause was raucous and enthusiastic. I smiled.

I finished up, though. I had to cut out the end of the speech and improvise this part. "Andy's flight was delayed, so he's not here right now, and I kind of feel like I left my right arm at home. But I wanted to thank you all for welcoming me today, and if my presence here helped raise more money for this great organization, then I'm glad I could help in a small way. Thank you."

The applause followed me back to my seat, which was between Andy's empty chair and my new agent, a woman named Lori who was a much better fit for me than my old agent had been. She rubbed my arm and congratulated me on the speech.

The night carried on. There were two other speakers that I only half listened to. The time that I expected Andy to land came and went without a text message.

I wondered if he'd go home to change first. Back in February, I bought an apartment on the Upper East Side and moved Andy into it, all the while getting an earful about how he wanted to pay rent or at least be a contributing member of the household in some way. It took some bargaining. I mean, really, he didn't even have to work; I could continue to support both of us until we were old and gray even if I never made another movie. But I understood he needed to keep working for his own sanity. So I paid for the apartment, but we split everything else, and we got a nice place to live that was convenient to LaGuardia out of the deal.

I didn't make the decision to move to New York lightly, but honestly, I'd always kind of hated LA. After almost a year in New York, I was glad to be living in place that had seasons, for one thing. New York also had less artifice, less smog, and fewer people trying to crowd me to get my autograph. I did get asked to sign things if I sat still in a restaurant long enough, and I got my picture taken by hidden paparazzi plenty—Andy did, too—but for the most part, people left me alone in a way they hadn't when I lived in LA. I went to fewer industry parties, but I got to go to the Met Gala with Andy, and that was a better trade-off because it had been so much fun to dress up and gawk at fashion with him. Really, the only downside to the move was that a movie shoot could take me away from Andy for weeks at a time, and I still had to go to LA so often that I kept an apartment there.

He came with me as often as was feasible. He worked fewer hours now than he had when we met, because he didn't need the money he'd earned from working extra shifts. He typically only worked three days a week. That meant he could tag along to LA when I had to go for meetings, he came with me to the Oscars, and I dragged him to two movie premieres. His face was well-known enough now that gossip websites posted photos of us with captions calling him by his full name. He hated that. I knew he mourned his privacy and anonymity, but he told me it was worth it to be with me.

Basically, I thought about him nonstop through the whole rest of the dinner and told my tablemates about him even though they probably wanted to hear about my next film. Eventually, I explained that *Red Skies*, the Civil War movie I'd had a small but significant part in, would be out the following spring, and I was indeed playing a gay soldier who was married to the film's protagonist but in love with another soldier. There was no onscreen hanky-panky, not even a kiss, just a lot of longing glances. I had asked Andy what he would have thought about me

kissing another man in a movie, and he admitted he'd probably be wild with jealousy—more so than when he saw me kiss women—but he'd understand it was part of the job.

It was strange how the media portrayed me now. Websites combed through my backlist of films and looked at every relationship I'd ever had. One website had put up a post called “We knew all along” that included a lot of photos of me goofing around with my male friends when I was in my twenties as “evidence” I'd been into dudes. I'd been paired with men I'd never even met and it was reported that we'd been in secret relationships. The gossip drove Andy nuts, but he was a good sport about it. Mostly I just tried to ignore it.

Finally dinner ended, and many of the guests drifted away. A small number of invited guests were herded over to a sectioned-off part of the hotel bar for cocktails. I still hadn't heard from Andy and was getting worried. I tried calling, but it went to voice mail. I went so far as to excuse myself from the festivities to check headlines on my phone. No news of plane crashes, so hopefully he was alive, at least. But where the hell was he?

I made small talk with the other guests and tried to accept compliments on my speech without getting too bashful about it. Some guy hit on me, and I tried to let him down gently.

And then, finally, Andy walked into the bar.

He'd recently bleached his hair white blond, a look I wasn't completely sure I was on board with, but he looked good now in neatly creased gray trousers and a bright red sweater. His cheeks were pink, presumably from the cold outside. He looked fantastic. It was all I could do not to run across the bar to greet him.

He spotted me after a moment and smiled as we made eye contact. I beckoned for him to enter the roped-off area. He did by gracefully ducking under the velvet ropes.

And then he was in my arms, exactly where he belonged, and I hugged him tightly, as if I hadn't seen him in weeks, even though I'd woken up beside him that morning.

Andy being Andy, he hugged me back just as tight.

“How did it go?” he asked as he pulled away.

“It went well, I think. I didn't flub the speech too badly.”

“I’m so sorry I got delayed. I had to change at the airport, then I had trouble getting a cab, and traffic is just awful right now.”

“It’s okay,” I said, taking his hand. “You’re here now.”

I led him around and introduced him to people. A number of my friends had scored invites to the cocktail hour, so this crowd was friendlier and more familiar to me than the dinner had been. Andy had met most of my close friends, but there were a few people there he hadn’t met yet.

Eventually I surreptitiously had the bartender pour some champagne, and I turned to Andy.

“There was one part of the speech I had to change since you weren’t there,” I said.

“Oh?”

“It’s hard to sing your praises if you’re not listening.”

“Sing them anyway.” He grinned.

“Well.” I took my notes out of my pocket. “This is what I was going to say. It was a last-minute addition, by the way, so you didn’t see this in any of my drafts.”

“Uh-oh,” said Andy, though he smiled.

People had started to gather around us.

From the speech, I read, “I want to introduce you all to Andrew Weston, the best thing that ever happened to me.” I gestured toward Andy. “This is the part where you’d stand up and be embarrassed.”

“Har har,” he said, looking at me warily.

Back to the speech: “He’s completely changed my life. He helped me see the light when I was lost in the dark. He’s made me happier than I ever imagined I could be. He hasn’t just made me want to be a better man, he’s made me a better man.”

I paused to look at Andy, who was staring at me. There were tears in his eyes.

“This is cheesy as hell,” I said, “but I love him in a way that makes me want to shout it from the rooftops. Instead, I want to say in front of all of you that this is the man I want to spend the rest of my life with.” I reached into my pocket.

“You didn’t,” Andy gasped, covering his mouth with his fingers.

“Not yet,” I said. “I will now, though. Hey, Andy?” I got down on one knee as I pulled the box out of my pocket. “Will you marry me?”

The box contained two simple platinum bands I’d picked out at a jewelry store staffed by a completely starstruck saleswoman. When I told her I wanted to propose to my boyfriend, she grinned widely and said, “I’ve got just the thing.” And these were just the engagement rings; Andy was in big trouble when we had to pick out the official wedding rings.

If he said yes. I’d been so confident he would, but now doubt was drifting in as he continued to just stand there and stare at me.

His brow was furrowed. “You were going to ask me that in front of a ballroom full of people?”

“If you had been there, yeah.”

He scratched his head. “You’ve come a long way in a year.”

“Um, Andy? Sweetie? Love of my life? You going to answer my question or are you just going to stand there?”

“Oh,” he said, looking puzzled. “Oh! Oh, Devin. Yes! Of course I will!”

I don’t know who moved first, but soon we were hugging tightly again and he kissed me and somehow I managed to put enough distance between us to slip a ring on his finger. People around us clapped.

Andy hugged me again. “I can’t believe this is my life,” he whispered close to my ear. “I mean, *the* Devin Delaney just asked me to marry him.”

“I love you.”

“I love you, too. So much. I would have said yes if you’d asked us in the privacy of our own apartment and I would have said yes if you’d asked in front of a stadium full of people.”

“I’m so glad,” I said. “Merry Christmas, Andy.”

He tightened his hug around me. “Merry Christmas.”