

## Family Matters ©

By Rebecka Beauchamp-Hole

Alexander Rose was filled with pride when his mother, Maria, gave him his Granny's ring. She opened the faded velvet box to reveal the diamond in a white gold setting while his father, Christopher—the man of the house—clapped him on the shoulder and said, “Now you'll just have to get yourself a girl, son.”

Alex nodded stiffly, and his mother exclaimed, “Oh, what's going on between you and Emma? You two would look so cute together.”

“Mama, I can't date Emma, we're just friends. It would be weird.”

“Well, I'm sure you'll find someone, but it had better be soon or all the good-looking ones will be taken.” His father laughed, while his mother smiled, and Alex got out of there as fast as he could.

Alex couldn't tell them he *was* dating someone. He just knew they wouldn't approve.

Over the next couple of years, Alex graduated as valedictorian of his year, making his mother and father very proud. He moved into a trendy little flat in Vancouver. Every time he came home for Thanksgiving or Christmas his mother would check behind him before closing the door, looking for a girl to be following him. Eventually Alex stopped going home.

After living on his own for about two and a half years—Alex went back. Bringing his fiancée with him. “Mama, Papa, this is Parker. I thought he could join us for dinner.”

“Of course he can!” Maria said, rushing to set another place at the table. Parker glanced at Alex, who urged him forward with a smile.

Dinner was going well until Parker asked for the salt. Maria passed it to him when she noticed the ring.

“Alexander Christopher Rose! What is Granny’s ring doing on the finger of thi . . . this—”

Alex’s father dropped his fork and knife with a clatter against his wife’s good china plates. His face was turning steadily redder as he grabbed Parker’s hand and bent it until his wrist almost snapped to get a better look at the ring. He snatched it off his finger.

“Get out,” he growled, and Parker bolted for the door. Alex stood to go after him. “No, Alexander, you sit.”

He did.

“How dare you shame your grandmother like that. Putting her ring on the finger of a faggot.”

“Father . . .”

“Do not call me Father!” he roared, his rage overflowing.

“But I’m still your son.”

“Not likely, your mother must have screwed some other man. No son of mine would turn out to be a fag. Get out, this house is no longer a home of yours. I don’t want to see or hear from you again.”

Alex stormed out of the house and into the night. He threw himself into the driver’s seat of the car. Parker hardly had time to close the passenger door before Alex reversed out of the driveway and started flying through the backroads of his hometown. Too fast, and too erratically to be safe. More than once Parker begged for him to slow down, to pull over, and let him drive. Alex snarled at him to shut up, and Parker gripped the handle above the door and closed his eyes as his knuckles turned white.

Alex saw the flash of headlights, felt the car twist as metal ground against metal. Parker’s scream reverberated off the windows of the car as the world careened out of control around him. Then the world stopped. Alex gripped Parker’s hand. It went cold long before he heard the sirens.



The neighbourhood grew up around Mr. and Mrs. Rose. Grown children left for several years, returning to visit as newlyweds—the young women’s bellies bulging with babies. Couples were welcomed into the loving arms of parents, smiling and laughing together as the women exchanged pregnancy horror stories and the men drank beer and shared stories of wives driven crazy by hormones. Months later they would return, with little swathed bundles that giggled and cried. Grandparents would fuss and coo over the bundles as little hands reached out to them.

Christopher and Maria Rose saw what they were missing. Boxes of toys stacked neatly in the corner of houses when they went to visit. The ladies exchanged stories of their grandchildren at knitting group while Maria listened, knitting her husband socks while tiny baby socks took form all around her. Christopher struggled with his fishing line as his friends taught their grandsons to cast off the dock. He remembered teaching his son the same thing, and how after a summer of not catching anything, his little Alex caught a fish bigger than he was. But that had been a long time ago, and he no longer had a little Alex.

When the Roses returned to their house, they noticed the absence of toys. The silence that deafened rather than the piercing shrieks of grandchildren. Most of all, they noticed how empty the house was with Alex’s bedroom long since converted into an office.

That summer, Alex’s old friend Emma stopped by with her two children, Laney and Zain. Laney was almost four, and her brother was just three months old. Laney investigated the house, which seemed unfriendly, with lace doilies on side tables and expensive glass figurines perched on every surface. Laney was confused. There wasn’t a crayon in sight, and she wasn’t allowed to play with the glass elephant. A few hours went by. Laney had been contented with a few toys from Emma’s bag and Zain had fallen asleep, with the Roses

letting Emma put him down on their bed.

“Emma, how did you meet your husband? In Toronto at school?” Maria asked, setting down a tray of tea and cookies. Maria was thinking about many years ago when Alex would bring Emma over after school, and Maria would let them have cookies before dinner—if— they finished all their homework.

“It’s a rather long story, how my husband and I got together.” Emma responded taking the cup of tea Christopher handed her. She smiled, looking down into the cup. “You were always so kind to me. After my parents’ divorce, my friendship with Alex and your kindness really saved me.”

The air in the room became thick at the mention of Alex. Christopher swallowed, and Maria’s eyes filled with tears.

“My husband was engaged once before, while I was still living in Toronto. He was from around here and we knew each other growing up. They were driving back to Nanaimo after visiting his family and there was an accident. His fiancé didn’t survive.” Emma paused to take a sip of her tea. “He called me the next day—we had stayed in contact—I had just graduated, so I flew back. I stayed to help him arrange the funeral.”

“What about their families? Didn’t they help?” Christopher asked. Maria had a single tear running down her cheek. Both she and Christopher had heard about a similar accident involving their own son. Still enraged by the news of their son’s homosexuality, they hadn’t reached out, and they had never heard from him. The guilt still plagued them seven years later.

Emma shook her head. “They weren’t close. I ended up staying in Vancouver. I got a job teaching English in one of the high schools. It allowed me to help my husband recover emotionally from the loss of his fiancé, and slowly our friendship changed.” Emma sipped her tea while the Roses retreated into their own thoughts.

The Roses were so caught up in their thoughts that they almost missed the crunching of tires in the driveway. Quickly, Zain was snuggled into his car seat and Laney's feet were tucked into Velcro-fastened sneakers.

"Shouldn't your husband help you with these two?" Maria asked as Emma lifted her bag and Zain to leave.

"Well, he wasn't sure if he should."

"What do you mean?" Christopher asked.

"My husband Alexander wasn't sure he would be welcome here," Emma said.

Maria and Christopher watched as their son stepped from the car after he parked in the driveway, ready to help his wife buckle their children in. Maria swayed on her feet at the sight of her son. Christopher just stood there. Laney threw her arms around his legs in a hug before running out the door.

"Goodbye, Mr. and Mrs. Rose. I'm sure we'll see you again soon," Emma called over her shoulder as she walked to the car, with Laney running ahead of her into her father's outstretched arms.