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Incurable Romantic

Zachary Before *Mata Hari*

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In *Every Breath You Take*, we meet Zachary Hall for the first time when he is about to enter the bar Mata Hari. He mentions that his friend Fred dared him to go to a gay bar once he reached Washington, DC, because Zachary was afraid to visit one in his home town of Ogden, Utah. Here is an exclusive scene from Zachary's last evening in Ogden.

EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE **Chapter 0.5**

Zachary pulled into the driveway of his buddy Fred's house. He debated whether to go to the front door – which would require talking to Fred's mother – or just wait for his friend to come outside. His manners got the better of him so he switched off the ignition.

Sure enough, Fred's mother answered the door. Her unnaturally red hair was on the frizzy side, a cigarette dangled from one hand, and her housecoat was missing a button. He gave her a big grin.

"Hi, Mrs. Hansen. I'm picking up Fred for some pizza."

"Well of course you are," Mrs. Hansen gushed, and Zachary could hear slurred edges to her words. As she pulled him into a hug Zachary coughed when the smell of her cigarette went up his nose. "I can't believe it," she sighed. "Leaving Ogden, heading to Washington. It seems like it was just yesterday when you and Freddy were running around the back yard like you were Power Rangers."

Zachary pulled back from the hug to escape the odor of smoke and sour wine rising from her housecoat, but not the hug. Mrs. Hansen had always been free with the affection and snacks when he was young, and had never minded sharing a few beers with Zachary and Fred when they were in high school. “Don’t tell Martha,” she’d always say. Like Zachary ever would have told his strict parents that he had a drink with his best friend’s mother.

A surge of affection and nostalgia washed over him. “Remember that Halloween when you tried to make a Red Power Ranger costume for Fred and it split right down the seat?” he asked.

Mrs. Hansen guffawed as she tugged him through the front door and closed it behind him. “Lord but he pitched a fit that night that he was going to miss trick or treating. I had to use safety pins to keep him from mooning the neighborhood because he was going back out no matter what!”

Fred came down the stairs in time to hear his mother’s comment. “Sure, yuk it up,” he called. “I nearly caught pneumonia from the updraft.”

Zachary shook his head fondly at his friend. Fred was shorter than him by several inches, and stocky where Zachary was lean. His thick glasses flashed his mock-indignation at his mother. His hair always seemed to need a cut and he tended to wear baggy button-down shirts because he thought they hid his slight belly better.

Mrs. Hansen ignored her son. To Zachary, she said, “Well, I know you don’t want to spend your last night reminiscing with me. If I don’t see you again before you leave, you be safe. Hear?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Zachary answered. “I’ll be back to visit my folks anyway, I’m sure, and I’ll fill you in then.” She gave another warm hug goodbye as she returned to the living room and her TV program.

Fred tugged Zachary’s arm. “Come upstairs for a minute before we head out.” Zachary followed him up the carpeted staircase and down the hall to the bedroom where he had spent countless hours over the years. Nostalgia hit him again as he remembered playing Dungeons and Dragons in Fred’s room, along with their other good friend Frank. Weekend marathon viewings of Doctor Who when he slept over. Then later, furtive glances at gay porn websites while keeping one eye on the door in case Mrs. Hansen popped in without warning, as she often did.

Fred had a browser open on his computer and he pushed Zachary down into his desk chair before leaning over his shoulder to work the keyboard. “Look,

this is a list of the gay bars I can find in DC. I figured you wouldn't want to risk searching your computer at home."

Zachary felt himself blushing. "I know. I should just get over it and come out already."

"Hey, I'm not giving you shit. I know what your parents can be like." He bussed a kiss on Zachary's cheek. "Anyway, look. JR's seems to be a popular one. And this one..." he pointed with his mouse, "Town Danceboutique. It's got something on Fridays called Bear Happy Hour."

Fred was practically bouncing on his feet because he was so excited. Zachary just felt trepidation. "You'd fit in better with the bears than I would," he mumbled.

"It's not like they're going to eat you," Fred said with an edge of exasperation. Then he grinned wickedly. "Well, unless you *want* them to eat you."

"What's this one?" Zachary asked as he pointed at the screen. "'Mata Hari.' That's an interesting name for a bar." They read the short description together. "Upscale piano bar. Now that sounds more like my speed."

"Do you want me to print this list out for you?" Fred asked, but Zachary shook his head.

"My parents might find it. I'll just look up the bars again on my phone when I get settled in Washington."

Fred sat on the edge of his bed and sighed as Zachary rotated in the desk chair to face him. "I can't believe you're finally getting out of here. I wish I were coming with you."

"I know, buddy. You can come for a visit whenever you want." Truth was, he was really going to miss Fred, the friend his parents barely tolerated because of his free-spirited mother and his tendency to draw Zachary into trouble. If his parents only knew the kinds of things he did with Fred and sometimes with Frank, too, on weekends when the house was otherwise empty.

The three of them had been friends all through junior high and high school and had gone to college together. Having two friends who were gay – well, Frank was probably bi but he was too shy to approach a boy *or* a girl so it was all theoretical – meant Zachary had begun experimenting with them while they were still in school. When all three of them moved back in with their parents in Ogden after college, and with no other outlets, they kept up the casual sexing. Luckily none of the three ever seemed to get their feelings involved. What they had was

friendship with the rare benefits those few times they were able to find a quiet place to scratch an itch.

Still, there was a comfort to their arrangement. Fred was really good in bed, though that might have been Zachary's limited experience. He could suck dick for what seemed like hours, just getting Zachary or Frank worked up and close to coming then backing off, over and over. And he loved to eat ass, which was something Zachary had been squeamish about right up to the point that Fred swiped his tongue from taint to hole.

"I know that look," Fred said.

Zachary grinned at him. "I wish we had time for one more go. You know, one for the road."

Fred came over and ran his knuckles roughly over Zachary's hair, just to piss him off. "Me too, bud. Well, maybe I can swing vacation time from the store and come visit you in DC soon."

"I'd like that."

"But look, Zachary. You've got to take the lead now."

"What do you mean?"

"When I come out east, I'm going to expect you to be an expert on all the gay bars. And the bath houses. And the strip clubs. *Whatever* there is, I want you to be ready to show them to me!"

Zachary looked at his feet. "I'll try, but ..."

"No excuses," Fred said sternly. "You get out there as soon as you can, get a drink at a real gay bar, find yourself a stranger and have some loud, raunchy sex you can tell me all about the next day!" When Zachary laughed awkwardly, Fred put a hand on his shoulder. "I double-dog dare you. Twenty bucks says you won't make it to a gay bar your first month in DC."

Zachary stood and folded his friend into a hug. "Okay, you're on. I can't say I'll go home with a hot guy, but I'll make myself go to one of the bars at least. Probably this Mata Hari place. So keep your twenty bucks safe because you'll be sending it to me soon."

"Excellent. Have a big adventure and tell me all about it. Now let's go get some pizza."

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Check out [Every Breath You Take](#) to see Zachary find not only a hot man at Mata Hari, but unexpected danger.