

The Return

By

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INT. HAYWOOD HOME - DAY

Pictures of THOMAS JAMES "TJ" HAYWOOD (20s) in the service along with other patriotic decorations adorn the walls of the modest home.

Enter TJ, crewcutted and clean-shaven with a heavy tan. He looks around the house and breathes in the smell. He smiles.

A knock on the door. TJ answers.

In the doorway stands BRANDON (20s). They laugh and share an enthusiastic embrace.

BRANDON

Man, it is so good to see you!

TJ

You too! You look just the same.

BRANDON

Yeah, well, I don't have your tan but I have managed to keep up the good looks.

TJ

Yeah you have. Come on in.

TJ yells down the hall to his wife, BETH.

TJ

Hey, babe, Brandon's here.

BETH

(from the bedroom)

Be out in a minute.

Brandon walks around the room looking at the decorations.

BRANDON

So you survived, huh? What was it like?

TJ lets out a sigh and sits down on the couch.

BRANDON

Hey, man, if you're not ready to talk about it...

TJ

No, it's OK. I need to.

Brandon sits down next to him.

BRANDON

Take your time.

TJ takes in a deep breath.

TJ

You remember when we were like twelve and we went on that scout campout and got lost?

BRANDON

How could I forget?

TJ

Being out there all alone, just hoping that everyone hasn't somehow forgotten about you?

BRANDON

Man, that sucked. I can only imagine what it must be like as a grown man, knowing what we know now.

TJ

Yeah, but it's like a thousand times worse. Surrounded by people who just can't wait to get you backed into a corner. Then they just wait, and wait, and wait, just so that you suffer even more thinking about it. Waiting for just the right moment. Waiting for you to slip up just a little. You don't know how hard it was to hold on to that hope.

BRANDON

But you did hold on.

TJ

I had to. Giving in wasn't an option. Like we were taught in basic training, man, you never give up. You do your best because it will all be over soon and you want to be proud. You want to feel like you did your best.

TJ's expression turns somber.

TJ (CONT'D)
But then you see one of your
buddies lose it, go crazy.

BRANDON
Who?

TJ
Thompson. We were cornered big
time, man, but we were doing
good. We were holding. And then...

TJ buries his face in his hands.

Brandon puts his hand on TJ's shoulder.

BRANDON
Hey man. But you're home now.
You're back with your wife. You've
got a son on the way.

TJ nods and wipes his tears away.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
And friends who love you.

TJ looks at Brandon and they embrace.

Beth walks out and sees them.

BETH
Oh, come on. You were on a weekend
retreat.

TJ
You don't know what it was like! My
co-workers and I don't get along!

TJ turns back and buries his head in Brandon's shoulder.
Brandon strokes TJ's hair, looks at Beth and motions for her
to go.

Beth looks back at Brandon and mouths:

BETH
You two are gay.

Brandon looks at his hand and stops stroking TJ's hair.