

A Lombardi

Parts 7 & 8

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VII

Xanthochroids attract attention. Most likely it is the simple shock of their uncommonness. There were Jean Harlow, Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield, perhaps not all natural blondes, but all quite pale as well. There was the ad slogan for hair coloring – “is it true blondes have more fun?” There were the Picts in northern Britain that the Romans could never quite conquer, perhaps from the shock of their pale white skin painted blue in battle and their light blond hair. Walt also thought that men were hunters— both for food and sex— so it was a man thing. Whether a man liked gals or guys, girls or boys, blond haired pale humans caught ones eye. Even if experience, like Walt’s own as his intellect often reminded him, taught a man that a brown haired warm skinned beauty was more delightful in reality and remembrance, blond haired pale humans caught ones eye. Billy had caught his eye that first day at the harbor with the camera, and the sex later was instant, easy, exciting and remarkable, but Walt still knew that his feelings for Tony were deeper. In his heart he knew it was bullshit, that only coincidence yielded up a wild blond boy for fun and sex, and that the gods controlled his emotional response to the more quiet and shy boy who happened to be dark. All these contradictory thoughts are useless, Walt thought, they fill your head when you are not doing anything. Waiting was not doing anything, but what could he do? Go out and look for Tony? He didn’t even know his last name. There was no mail when Walt got home from work that evening, but he sat down as if he were about to open mail anyway. Once again he didn’t feel like cooking anything. Perhaps he should just go out to eat, but what if Tony came scratching at his door. Scratching at his door? Scratching at his door! Walt jumped up and the door flung open.

“Tony!”

“Hi, Walt— whatcha doing?”

“Actually, I was just thinking about you,” Walt grinned.

“Uh-oh,” Tony smiled back. “Actually, I was thinking about you, too. I mean I wanted to ask you something.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, like are you doing anything tomorrow night?”

“Yes, I have a hot date,” Walt said with a straight face, adding with a grin, “with Tony!”

“Oh, ha ha,” Tony laughed, relaxing a bit from his moment of tension, “no, really, can I come over and cook dinner for you— and me, just the two of us? Tomorrow night?”

“That would be great, you do know how to cook?”

“Yes,” Tony sighed, hand on hip.

“And your parents approve?”

“They’re going to Atlantic City for an overnight— some Bar Association thing. They think I’m ordering in a pizza, watching TV and going straight to bed.” When Walt didn’t answer, Tony anxiously added, “Oh come on! Please?”

“Okay,” Walt acquiesced, trying to reign in his joy, “six o’clock?”

“Six o’clock!” Tony stepped back, about to jump off the porch, but turned around and pushed a plastic bag he had been holding into Walt’s chest. “Put this in your refrigerator— not the freezer! And don’t peek!” He handed Walt the plastic bag.

“I won’t peek,” Walt quietly spoke, gently asking, “Tony?”

“What?”

“Can I ask you your whole name?”

“Sure— it’s Tony... er... Anthony Lombardi,” he shyly but positively beamed, “why?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Walt searched for a way to tell the truth without spoiling anything, “It’s just that whenever I think about you, well, it seemed strange not knowing.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” Tony replied, “what’s your last name?”

“Königsberg.”

“That’s German for Kings’ mountain.”

“You know German?” Walt was surprised.

“And Italian and Latin and a little French.”

“You’re amazing.”

“Wait’ll ya taste dinner tomorrow!” Tony laughed, “Gotta go! Six o’clock!”

“Six o’clock!” Walt laughed. Tony jumped off the porch and run-skip-jumped down the road, spinning around with a smile and a wave every few feet for a while until he disappeared around the corner. What joy, Walt thought, and what a bringer of joy. He must be a god.

VIII

Six o’clock brought Tony, right on time. Walt stood on his porch, and if waiting could ever be called impetuous, that would describe Walt, for although he stood nearly motionless, his heart was racing. Tony bounded up the steps with a large shopping bag filled with goodies for the feast he planned, and another bag he set on the porch, stooping over near the door. Walt greeted him with his arm around the boy’s shoulders as his dreamboy straightened up. With a hug and a “Hi, Tony!,” he quickly ushered Tony inside.

“Hi Walt,” the boy responded, turning back to be sure the door was shut, “I brought everything I need, ’cause I wasn’t sure what spices and stuff you had.”

“What do you need? Maybe I can help?” Walt offered.

“Yeah, let’s start!” Tony agreed, heading for the kitchen, since he knew the way. “Actually, I started this afternoon, grinding the meat, since I thought you might not have a meat grinder, and to get a head start, so we don’t eat at midnight or something!” He began unpacking his shopping bag, placing a wide, long-handled slotted spoon on the kitchen counter, followed by a big clear plastic bag with what looked like raw meatloaf in it, a can of chicken stock, a jar of capers, a few small onion-like things, perhaps shallots, three large raw potatoes, a small bag of white flour, and another bag of white breadcrumbs. “You got that bag from yesterday?”

“Sure,” Walt said, stepping over to the refrigerator and retrieving the bag Tony had handed him the previous evening. “Can I open it?”

“Sure!”

Walt opened the bag and took out a pound of butter, a pint of heavy cream, about half a pound of fresh asparagus spears, and two lemons.

“There’s another bag on the porch,” Tony explained, “that I was kinda chicken to bring in. Can you get it?”

“Okay.” Walt jumped up.

“But be careful, it’s glass, okay? And oh yeah…” Tony looked around the kitchen, “pots?”

Walt just pointed to the left of where Tony stood, and Tony spun around, opening the lower cabinet door.

“Cool! I can use some of these?”

“Use ’em all,” Walt laughed, adding, “just don’t burn anything, like your fingers!” Tony stood up, hand on hip, grinning.

“I know how to cook!” he said, smiling from ear to ear.

“Okay,” Walt agreed joyfully, silently amazed at the happy comfort and good humored ease with which they each seemed to fit the other. He turned toward the living room and the bag on the porch.

“It’s some glasses and glass bottles, careful!” Tony called after him, “and don’t peek!”

“Okay!” Walt called back. He retrieved the sack of glass stuff and didn’t peek, gingerly carrying it in to Tony. “I do have glasses,” he insisted.

“It’s special glasses and stuff that goes with…” he waved his arm over the foodstuffs and pots like he was sprinkling fairy dust or blessing it all, “everything!”

“Can I help?”

Tony looked around with his sweet smile. “Would you mind peeling these potatoes?”

“Not at all! All three of ’em?” Walt took the three and got a potato peeler out of the drawer, stepping over to the sink.

“Yeah, sure. If there’s any left, you can have left-overs!” Tony bent down peering into the pot cabinet. Removing a large pot to boil the spuds, he saw an asparagus pot, the tall narrow kind. “Oh wow, cool! You’ve got an asparagus pot! Most people don’t have one.”

“I don’t use it too often,” Walt admitted over the hiss of water and clicks of skinning the brown coats off the subterranean tubers. Tony nudged him aside from Walt’s left adjacency facing the sink, to fill two pots with a certain quantity of water from the flowing stream. Vanishing daylight dimly glowed from the window facing them, catching Tony’s eye with grinning glints magically starlike. Walt felt the spell of this slender sylphidine boy, bewitched by the warm comfort of his natural nearness. Something was

happening here, Walt knew it. This wasn't just dinner. He patted the peeled potatoes with a paper towel, placing them on the cutting board. "Want me to cut these or slice 'em?"

"Yeah, about one inch cubes would be good, I'm gonna mash 'em."

"I have an electric beater that runs on batteries," Walt suggested, "no cord to get in the way."

"Cool," Tony answered, picking up the spuds and dropping them into the pot of water already boiling on the stove. Every one of the four burners had a pot, the asparagus in the narrow tall one, the potatoes in another, the chicken stock on a front burner, and about a cup of butter melting in a fourth, small pot.

Walt stood watching Tony from behind for just a few seconds, he still felt amazed that this beautiful boy actually sought his friendship. Young master Lombardi wore those white shorts again today, with that white Izod Lacoste shirt. So slender, so sexy, so sweet. "I guess I should set the table," Walt announced. He didn't want to be caught staring at Tony's little round buns, although he couldn't really say what Tony's reaction would be. Something was happening here.

"Yeah, this won't be too long," Tony agreed, although he insisted, "but use your best china, if you have some."

"Oh yeah?" Walt teased, stepping over to the overhead cabinet to the left of the sink and opening it. "You mean this plastic plate isn't good enough?" He lightly banged the plastic Boontonware plate on the counter with a grin.

Tony returned the grin with his sarcastic, hand on hip, head tilted feigned insouciance. "You have china," he giggled, "I bet!" He dumped some flour into the melted butter, making a roux, then smiled at Walt again.

"How'd you know?!" Walt laughingly quizzed the boy, "What makes you think I don't just eat pizza and burgers and sandwiches off paper plates and get the Boontonware out for the occasional meatloaf?"

"Haa ha," Tony turned back to his cooking, adding, "I know."

"What... do you know," Walt chuckled, "that I have some Royal Doulton, or Wedgewood, or maybe you think I have some Bing and Grøndahl, maybe some Rosenthal hidden away..." he broke off laughing. Tony turned hand on hip again.

"Well my guess is..." he half sniggered himself, "since you are attracted to an all white ensemble, you probably have some fine thin all white porcelain, and it's most likely

German, but not Rosenthal,” he grinned an aside, “too ostentatious... no, it must be Meissen, no! No it must be Tirschenreuth!”

Walt’s jaw dropped, but he was still nearly laughing, as was Tony, and the teen smile enchanted Walt. “Did you see some hanging around out of place, or did somebody tell you? Was Billy casing the joint?” he laughed.

“No!” he slyly turned back to his cookery. “Actually,” he still chuckled slightly himself, “I saw some in that cabinet,” he nodded to his left, “while you were peeling the potatoes.”

“Mmm hmm,” Walt agreed, although adding with a note of sarcasm, “all white ensemble indeed!”

Changing the subject, but still with jollity, Tony asked, “Exactly how many times has Billy been here anyway?”

“Well,” Walt began, “you left him here that night he got punched in the eye, and when I went back in after you left, uh, he had gotten a beer out of the fridge and... well, I let him drink it against my own better judgment, but he was cool, and he kinda knew I thought he was good lookin’ and all, but he likes girls, so... anyway, he and his brother... Bobby, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah, they were walking by one weekend after that night, and I was trying to start my lawnmower with no luck, so they both said Billy could start it, and he did, so he mowed my lawn and I paid him, and I gave some extra money for a pizza that night because their father only left them hot dogs, so... that’s all except one night, a weeknight, he stopped by for a short time just ’cause he was going by looking for this girl Gail that he thought was hanging out, but he never found her, then he left.”

“Yeah, that’s his girlfriend,” Tony said, then turning from his cooking momentarily, added, “you didn’t try to get him naked did you?”

Walt returned the boy’s sweet smile. “I don’t tear the clothes off boys, if I remember correctly, that was your idea the night we looked at the slides... I just took your socks off. I didn’t even touch you where you said not to...”

“I know,” Tony turned back to his cooking, “I shouldn’t have said that... that night.”

“No, no,” Walt disagreed, “you have a right to go slow or just not do what you’re not ready for or just don’t want. Nobody should push you into something so... personal.”

“Thanks.”

“Is this what tonight’s dinner is about? Did you want to talk about this kind of stuff?”

“After dinner,” Tony turned his little boy type smile, so chameleon, toward Walt, “can you mash these potatoes now? They’re done.”

Walt jumped up from the table, where he had been sitting during their talk, after having set out the Tirschenreuth porcelain china plates and the stainless flatware. No silver for Walt, all that tarnish and polishing. He brought the pot over the sink and poured the water off, then grabbed the electric beater, mashing away as Tony added some butter, then retrieved a small peppermill from his plastic bag. It was white pepper, which Tony ground over the spuds, then dashed in some butter and splashed in the remaining heavy cream that had not been put into the sauce he appeared to make from the ladle or so of the broth and some roux and lemon, into which Walt saw him dump the jar of capers. Tony also liberally salted the mash and Walt blended it all in. Tony drained off the small remaining amount of hot water in the asparagus pot, carefully holding back the spears with a spoon. He then placed them on each of the two plates. He slathered them with the now nearly melted butter until they glistened, then spooned out a large helping of mashed potatoes covering about a third of each plate. Walt finished licking the beaters off and sat down. With a slotted spoon, Tony served onto each plate four of the medium sized meatballs.

“What kind of meatballs are these?” Walt asked.

“They’re not meatballs, they’re dumplings, because they’re made with white flour and white breadcrumbs, and then poached. It’s ground veal, with diced shallots,” Tony explained, “and now when I add the sauce, we can call them by their right name, which is Königsberg Klopse.” He smiled broadly, having spoken the name of the dish, knowing that it was Walt’s last name also. Walt smiled back at him, and knew he needn’t say more. It was understood. So sweet. Such a charming boy. And so sexy! Tony ladled out a small portion of the sauce over Walt’s dumplings. “Here, taste the sauce, tell me if you want some on your potatoes, too.”

Walt sampled the white sauce. “Mmm! Lay it on me!” Tony turned the spoon in the warm sauce, then removed it from the pot with only a coating rather than a spoonful. He plunged the spoon’s back with a swirling motion into the potatoes, creating a perfect crater for receipt of sauce, which he then poured in till it overflowed, then covered the dumplings as well. He did the same to his plate.

“Do you mind if I lick the spoon?” Tony asked.

“Go ahead! I licked the beaters.”

“I saw that,” Tony laughed, licking, then grabbing the glasses he had brought, and the wine, which looked rather like champagne.

“What is that?” Walt wondered aloud.

“It’s a German white wine, a Riesling, but it’s sparkling like champagne. Can you open it? I always have trouble with the cork flying across the room!” He handed Walt the bottle, whose label read Henckell Trocken.

“Sure,” he agreed as he removed the foil and the birdcage. He walked over to the sink, just in case. When the pressure applied by his thumbs seemed to set the cork in motion, he covered it with his hand, gently twisting the mushroom topped cork. “Pop!” The wine announced itself, but did not spill over, just a fine mist like cold steam flowed out of the bottle. “You’re not trying to get us drunk, I hope!”

“No, it’s a light wine,” Tony insisted, “it just goes with this meal, I think.”

“I really shouldn’t be serving a minor an alcoholic beverage,” Walt confessed conspiratorially.

“You’re not,” Tony pointed out with a pixie grin, “I’m serving you!”

“Okay,” Walt handed Tony the bottle and the boy poured.

“Let’s eat!” Tony enthused, and seated smiling at each other, they both dug in. Walt broke a piece of a dumpling off and scooped it up with some sauce and a caper.

“Oh Tony! This is delicious! You really can cook!” Walt congratulated Tony, raising his glass to salute the boy and his culinary artistry. Tony raised his glass in return, and they sipped the bubbly. “Mmm! You were right, this is a delightful wine! A perfect accompaniment, bright, sweet, but not gaudy. God! Listen to me. I sound like some idiot snob.”

“Nah! Don’t say that,” Tony insisted, “you’re just the kind of friend I need right now, you’re so cool to put up with me and my dumb questions.”

“There’s no dumb questions Tony,” Walt promised, “and if my answers aren’t dumb, it’s only because they were forged in the pain of living through those same unanswered questions myself.”

“Really?” Tony seemed surprised. “Was school hard for you, I mean not the subjects, but the people, the kids?”

“I guess,” Walt replied, “let’s see, in grade school, I remember I had two friends in second grade, one friend in third grade, in fourth grade no boy friends, but two girl friends, in fifth grade my only real friend was my teacher, and in sixth grade I fell in love with another boy, but he never knew it, or me. Then he moved away as soon as summer began. I went by his house because I was determined to make friends with him, and his house was empty with a For Sale sign on the lawn.”

“That’s so sad,” Tony commiserated, “what about junior high and high school?”

“Mmm! Tony! This asparagus is just perfect! How did you get so good in the kitchen?”

“Oh, that’s from when I got a bad flu that became pneumonia, like two years ago just before Christmas,” Tony explained, with pauses for eating, “so I was home and I watched these cooking shows on PBS. ... Mostly it was this guy called The Frugal Gourmet, he was the best, and there were a couple others, like Jacques Pepin, ... but the Frug was on every day the whole two weeks before Christmas. Then my parents had a cook for a while, when they both were on this big case in New York, ... so they hired Maria to cook and she was really good. She let me help out and I learned a lot of things better by actually doing them, ... instead of just watching ’em on TV. ... Actually, there were four of us with pneumonia from that flu.” Walt just ate and listened to, and watched, Tony. He couldn’t interrupt. The boy was on a delightful roll. “It was goin’ around. We had to take an afterschool make-up class and pass the tests after we got back in January. Billy had it, too. ... That’s how we became friends, I helped him study after school. ... ’Cause he’s from the other side of town, behind Main Street. The wrong side of the tracks!”

Walt responded to the obvious mirth in Tony’s last exclamation. With a chuckle he asked, “The wrong side of the tracks?”

“Yeah, there used to be railroad tracks behind the stores on Main Street, and a lumber yard, but now it’s all houses.”

“You weren’t friends before that?”

“Nah,” Tony pointed out, “they have a different grade school over there, so Billy went there and Kieran, Kevin and me went over here. ... So when we got to junior high, he stuck to his crowd and we stuck with ours. But he remembered me from that flu thing, so we reconnected.” Tony scooped up some mashed and sauce, and dribbled a bit on his chin. He quickly wiped it off with his finger and licked the digit, then cleaned his finger and chin with his napkin. He grinned an embarrassed smile as Walt handed him a fresh paper napkin. “Thanks,” he beamed, then changed the subject. “You never said about high school, did you have friends there?”

“Oh... no,” Walt responded, “high school was the worst. I couldn’t wait to get out of New Jersey. I only applied to colleges in Florida, and I got accepted to all of them. So I

picked the one I thought would be easiest. I had friends there. College is a whole new world, you'll love it."

"There's more potatoes, want some?"

"Oh... no thanks Tony," Walt said, "Everything was truly delicious, magnificent!"

After finishing the wine, Tony helped Walt with the dishes before they adjourned to the living room. Walt was so happy to have such a wonderful relationship with Tony, that he almost didn't care how it would unfold that evening. Almost.

★

*Part 9 & 10 soon,
but more Wolfie next!*