



Kane's Kiss

Josh Aterovis

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A Killian Kendall Expanded Universe Story

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Cover Design: Josh Aterovis

"You know who's hot?"

"Who?"

"Tara Wetzel."

"Tara Pretzel? Really?"

"Yeah. Totally. Why? You don't think she's hot?"

"Uh, no. That's why I call her Tara Pretzel."

"Fine. Who do you think is hot then?"

"Anna Bergdorf."

"Anna? Anna, uh... Anna..." Kyle glanced back at me. "Hey, Kane, what's a food that sounds like Bergdorf?"

I caught Ty's eye and we both cracked up at the lame conversation our friends Kyle and Danny were having.

We were skateboarding down a quiet street where we were mostly left alone. In some parts of town, the police would hassle us—not because we did anything wrong, but because skateboards didn't fit with the town's vision of its precious, Victorian charm.

"I'm pretty sure there isn't any food that sounds like Bergdorf, Kyle," I told him.

He grinned good-naturedly and shrugged. "Okay, but I still say Tara is hotter. I'd make a pretzel with her."

We all laughed this time.

Kyle and Danny were always comparing girls they thought were hot. They had this weird rivalry that could spark hours of debate over who was more "hittable." Sometimes Ty and I joined in, but mostly we just let them go at it.

I kicked my board up onto the curb and grinded for a short distance.

"Nice," Ty commented from behind me.

I grinned. "Thanks."

I loved it when someone complimented my board skills. I knew I was pretty good. Maybe not the best of our little group, but up there. I popped an ollie just to grandstand a bit more.

"Is Kane showing off again?" Danny asked without looking back.

"You know it," Ty snorted.

"Nah, you ain't seen nuthin' yet. *This* is showing off."

I jumped onto the curb again for another grind, but failed to notice the hole where a big chunk of concrete was missing. The front truck of my board dipped into it, and suddenly I was airborne.

I hit the ground hard, knocking the air out of my lungs. I lay there without moving, too stunned to even roll over.

Danny and Kyle started howling with laughter, but didn't bother to stop and see if I was hurt.

"Yeah, you're right. That was some serious air you caught!" Kyle called over his shoulder.

Ty skidded to a halt, kicked his board up, and caught it by the front truck. He walked over to where I was lying, dropped it to the ground, and sat on the deck. He was fighting a grin of his own, the corners of his lips twitching almost uncontrollably.

"You okay?"

I groaned and slowly rolled over onto my back.

"Am I alive?"

"Nope. Definitely dead."

"Good."

Ty laughed. "Dude, Kyle's right. That was some serious air."

"Shut up, Ty."

His smile faded. "You hurt?"

"I dunno yet. Am I bleeding?"

He scanned down my body. "Uh, your knee looks kinda banged up. You might need a Band-Aid."

I pushed myself onto my elbows to inspect the damage. He was right. My knee seemed to be bleeding profusely. Come to think of it, it was stinging pretty badly, too.

I groaned once more. "I live all the way on the other fucking side of town."

"My house is only like a street over. Want to go there and clean it up?"

I'd never been to Ty's house. He was the only one who never invited the rest of us to his place. In fact, I didn't know much about Ty at all. Since we'd never talked about anything personal, I had to admit I was more than a little curious.

"Your parents won't mind?"

He rolled his eyes. "Not if they don't find out."

"They won't be there?"

"No. Dad's almost never home. Come on."

He stood up and held out a hand to pull me to my feet. I accepted it, but standing was still a painful process. My knee was really hurting by then.

We limped our way to Ty's. Well, I limped while he carried both our skateboards.

His house turned out to be a rundown rancher badly in need of power washing. The concrete walkway was cracked and the flower beds were overgrown with weeds.

"Mi casa es tu casa," Ty muttered as he unlocked the front door.

The inside matched the exterior. Everything was worn and slightly shabby. Not giving me much time to look around, Ty started off quickly down a hallway.

I assumed I was supposed to follow and hobbled along after him. "So your parents work?"

He paused in the dim hallway and glanced back at me over his shoulder. "Why all the interest in my parents?"

"Um, I dunno. Sorry. I was just making conversation."

He shrugged and started walking again, finally turning into a doorway. When I caught up, I saw a cramped bathroom where he was rummaging through the medicine cabinet. He pulled out a box of bandages and a bottle of hydrogen peroxide, then turned to me.

"Okay. You'd better sit."

The toilet didn't look entirely sanitary, so I opted for the side of the tub.

Ty squatted down and inspected my knee a little more closely. He made a face.

"That bad?" I asked.

"It's got dirt and shit in it."

"Shit?"

He laughed. "Not literally, dumbass. Like little pebbles and stuff."

"Oh. Whew. I thought I was gonna get gangrene and have to cut my leg off or something."

"Still might."

"Thanks for the encouragement, Ty. Such a fucking ray of sunshine."

He grinned as he poured some of the hydrogen peroxide onto a clean washcloth. "I try. This is probably going to sting."

"Yeah, I figured." I gripped the edge of the tub tightly and clenched my teeth as he began to clean the wound.

After he got most of the dirt out, he poured a little more hydrogen peroxide on the cut. "It's so cool how it fizzes like that."

"Yeah, so cool."

He glanced up at me with an amused expression. "Sorry. Let's get you bandaged." He pulled out the biggest Band-Aid in the box and carefully applied it to my knee. "There. All done."

I looked down. "It's not covered."

"I don't have any Band-Aids big enough. Want me to use two?"

"Nah. It's okay. Thanks for fixing me up."

"No problem." He started putting the stuff away.

I got to my feet, wincing at the pain.

He caught my expression in the mirror as he shut the cabinet door. "Want some pain killers?"

"Yeah, that would be nice, actually."

He grabbed a bottle out of the cabinet and shook a couple of pills into his hand. "Here. I'll get you a soda." He gave me the pills and took off again.

I didn't want to wait around in the bathroom, so I limped down the hall in the direction he'd gone. I found him in the kitchen with his head in an almost-empty

refrigerator. He stood up and seemed to be surprised to find me there. He quickly shut the fridge door. "Oh, uh, we seem to be out of soda."

"It's okay. I can take them without anything." I popped the pills into my mouth and swallowed.

Ty grimaced. "How the hell do you do that?"

"You build up spit and just gulp."

He shuddered and made a disgusted face. "You probably aren't ready to walk home, so you wanna watch TV or something?"

I shrugged. "Sure. Why not?"

We went back to the living room and sat next to each other on the couch. Using an oversized remote, Ty turned on the large TV. It was probably the newest thing they owned. He started flipping through the channels before settling on some awful dating show.

"You like this one?" he asked.

"It's fine. Saturday afternoons don't offer much in the way of decent TV viewing."

Ty chuckled. "Amen to that."

While he watched the show, I looked around the room. I couldn't help noticing the utter lack of family photos. Actually, the room was pretty much void of anything even halfway personal.

Ty noticed me looking around. "It's not much. Sorry."

I turned to him in surprise. "What? Why are you sorry?"

"The place. It's not much, I know."

I rolled my eyes. "Who cares? It's not bad. I was just looking for embarrassing photos of you as a kid."

He laughed. "Those are hidden away, safe from prying eyes."

"Aw, damn. They're always so much fun. It's just like what the hell were my parents thinking, dressing me like that?"

He laughed again, then quickly sobered up. "Hey, I didn't mean to snap at you earlier about my parents."

"It's okay. I guess I was being nosy."

"Nah, you were only asking the normal questions. I just don't like answering them."

"Oh. Sorry."

"You didn't know."

We went back to watching the program. An uncomfortable silence built up between us. I was feeling extremely awkward and wondering how to break the ice when Ty spoke up again. "My mom's in jail."

"Oh." What are you supposed to say when someone tells you something like that? He said it so matter-of-factly that I had no idea how to respond. Luckily, he didn't seem to expect me to.

He went on, his eyes never leaving the TV screen, "Long story. My dad works two jobs, supposedly to support us, but we sure don't see much benefit. Or see him, for that matter. I don't remember the last time I saw him. Maybe a couple of weeks ago. He gave me the money for rent. I have an older sister, but I don't even know if she still lives here. She's always moving in with her latest boyfriend until things go bad, then she runs home until the next one comes along. I try to stay out of trouble and away from home. I don't want to end up like them."

If I'd thought I didn't know what to say before, now I was even more lost. Still, I felt I owed him some sort of personal revelation as well. "My older brother was murdered."

He glanced over at me. "Yeah. I remember."

We went back to watching the show. I wasn't really paying attention, thinking instead about what Ty had told me. It was a lot to process. I knew I'd been through a lot, but he had it much worse. At least my dad was there for me. My mom, too, even though I didn't live with her anymore.

Suddenly, I realized the show had moved on from the first couple and was now focusing on two guys who were clearly a couple. I glanced at Ty out of the corner of my eye, trying to gauge his reaction. I wasn't gay, but most of my family was, and after our little bonding experience, I hoped Ty wouldn't turn out to be some kind of

homophobe. He'd been over to my house a few times, but I couldn't remember if he'd met my dad or his boyfriend Steve. Of course, everybody at school knew Killian was my brother, but that didn't necessarily mean anything.

"Hey, isn't your brother gay?" he asked casually.

I relaxed slightly. He didn't sound like it bothered him. "Killian? Yeah."

"He started that Rainbow Alliance club with his boyfriend, right? That jock?"

"Asher Davis."

"Right, right. So why do you guys have different last names?"

"He's not my real brother."

"So he's, like, adopted?"

"Something like that."

"But you're not related?"

"No."

"Gotcha."

He was quiet for a bit, then, "I heard rumors that your dad is gay, too."

Where was this going?

"Yeah, he is."

"So does he, like, have a boyfriend, too?"

"Oh, um, yeah. His name is Steve. He lives with us."

Ty glanced over at me. "Really? What's that like?"

I shrugged. "No different from any other family, really. My bio brother was gay, too."

"The one who was killed?"

"Yeah."

"Damn. That's a lot of gay guys in one house."

"Yeah, but I'm used to it. It's not a big deal."

He fell silent again and turned his gaze back to the TV. A commercial for an at-home pregnancy test came on.

"Do you ever wonder if you are?" Ty asked out of the blue.

I knew what he was asking, but I decided to play dumb. "Pregnant? Well, there was this one time, but I peed

on the little stick and the minus sign thingy came up. Close call, though."

Ty rolled his eyes. "Gay. Do you ever wonder if you might be gay?"

"Why would I wonder that?"

"I mean, your dad's gay, your real brother was gay, your new brother is gay, your dad's boyfriend is gay—"

"I'd hope so, or my dad would be very disappointed."

"I'm just saying, that's a whole lot of gay."

"It's not contagious."

"I'm just saying..."

I sighed. "I questioned it for, like, a minute, but not anymore. I'm straight. I like girls."

"So, you're sure?"

"Yes, Ty. I'm sure. Why? Are you afraid I'm going to hit on you?"

"No! It's nothing like that, I swear. I guess I'm just...curious."

"Bi-curious?"

"I just mean I've never known any gay guys before, at least that I knew of."

"You still don't. But if you really want to, you should come to the Rainbow Alliance some time."

"Don't you have to be gay to go to that?"

"No. It's for allies too."

"Allies?"

"You know, straight people who support queer people."

"Oh. Is that why you go?"

"Yeah. And also because I'm the president." I laughed.

He spun his head to face me. "You're the president?"

"Yeah, I took over after my brother and his ex graduated."

"How come you never mentioned it?"

I shrugged. "It never came up. Not like it's a secret or anything. It's public knowledge. Anybody can look up who the president is."

He fell quiet again for a few minutes, then, "How do you know?"

"How do I know what?"

"How do you know you're not gay?"

"How do *you* know you're not?"

He looked down at his lap. "I... don't." His voice was barely audible.

"Oh." Suddenly, all his interest made sense. "So you..."

He glanced over at me. "Look, don't tell anybody. Okay?"

"I wouldn't."

He nodded slightly. "Thanks."

I waited a few seconds, but he didn't seem to be offering up any more. "So?"

"What?"

"Are you?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe. I kind of like this guy..."

"Does he know?"

"Nope."

"Why don't you tell him?"

"Why would I?"

"Maybe he's gay, too."

"He's not."

"How do you know?"

"I asked him."

"You asked him?"

"Yep."

"And he didn't catch on?"

"Apparently not."

I replayed our conversation, and suddenly it hit me.

"Oh!"

Ty grinned. "Damn, Kane. Sometimes you can be really slow."

"You like me?"

He shrugged again. "Fuck lot of good it'll do me."

We went back to watching the show, or at least pretending to watch. I don't think either of us was actually paying attention to it anymore.

After a few minutes, Ty turned toward me again.

"So, you're, like, absolutely positive?"

I groaned. "Jesus, Ty. Yes. Do I need to hook up with a girl right here in your living room to prove it?"

The corner of his mouth curled into a smirk. "I mean... I wouldn't stop you."

I laughed. "Pervert. Shut up."

I turned back to the TV, but Ty wasn't done.

"You ever kissed a guy?"

"No."

"Then how do you know for sure?"

I raised an eyebrow. "Have *you* ever kissed a girl?"

"Yeah. I've done more than kiss a girl."

"Oh."

He shrugged. "It was fine. Just didn't really do much for me, you know? I've always kind of wondered what it would be like to kiss a guy."

"Well, I'm sure you can find someone to try with. Like I said, come to a Rainbow Alliance meeting. You'd probably meet someone there."

"Right. Like I'm just gonna walk in and start kissing people."

"I didn't say start *making out* with strangers."

"I don't even know for sure if I'm gay. Maybe I'm just, what'd you call it...bi-curious?"

I rolled my eyes. "Don't say that out loud. That's, like, a porn term."

"You watch gay porn?"

"No!" I answered too fast. "I mean—yeah. Once. Back when I was figuring stuff out."

Ty leaned in slightly. "And you're *sure* you're not even a little bi?"

“Yes. I’m a hundred percent sure. What do you want me to do, kiss you or something?”

His eyes lit up. “Yes!”

“I wasn’t serious.”

“Why not? It’s not a big deal. You’d just be helping out your confused, possibly-closeted friend.”

“You’re just trying to get in my pants.”

He snorted. “Nope. I just want to know what it’s like.”

“I’m not gay.”

“Yeah, we’ve covered that. I’m not asking you to marry me or anything. Just one kiss.”

I felt my face getting warm. My brain was doing cartwheels.

What *would* one kiss hurt? If I was so sure of myself, it shouldn’t matter. It didn’t make me gay. And even if it did — so what? I loved my dad and Steve. Killian. I’d loved Seth, too. If I was serious about supporting people like them, why wouldn’t I help a friend figure things out?

I let out a slow breath. “Okay. One kiss.”

Ty blinked. “Wait, really?”

I smiled. “Sure. Why not?”

He suddenly looked unsure. “Uh...how?”

I raised an eyebrow. “You’ve kissed before, right?”

“Yeah, I just—”

I leaned in and gave him a quick kiss. Just a brush of lips. His were softer than I expected. When I pulled back, he looked like I’d just short-circuited his brain.

Then his expression shifted to disappointment.

“That’s it? I didn’t even get time to think.”

“Oh, so now you want to make out?”

“I want a real kiss.”

I turned to face him. “Fine. But this time, you have to make the first move. And you better buy me dinner after.”

He didn't laugh. He looked nervous again, like this actually meant something. Just when I thought he'd back out, he leaned in slowly.

This time, the kiss lingered. When I felt his hands start to slide around my back, I gently pulled away.

His eyes opened slowly, dazed. Then he glanced down — and immediately grabbed a throw pillow to cover his lap.

I fought not to laugh. "So...how was it?"

He looked up, eyes wide. "I'm gay."

That did it. I burst out laughing.

He tried to glare at me, but gave in and started laughing too.

After we calmed down, he said, more softly,

"Thanks."

"It was nothing."

"It was my first kiss with a guy. Doesn't feel like 'nothing' to me."

"Fair. So how'd I do?"

He smirked. "You were...okay."

"Okay? If okay is boner-inducing then I guess you'd bust in your pants with a really *good* kiss."

He sputtered and threw a pillow at me. We both cracked up again.

Then he asked, "How was it for you? Did you feel anything?"

There was hope in his voice, and I hated disappointing him.

I shook my head gently. "Sorry, man. Felt like kissing my cousin. I'm definitely straight."

He sighed but smiled. "Yeah, I figured. Not like this is *Heartstopper* or something."

"You watched *Heartstopper*?"

He froze. "What? No!"

"Yeah, you're definitely gay."

He laughed and tossed another pillow at me. "I think it's time for you to go home. You up for walking on that bum leg?"

I stood carefully. "I think so. I could still out-trick you on a skateboard."

"In your dreams, Connelly."

"Nah, I'm in *your* dreams, remember?"

He groaned as he grabbed our boards and handed me mine. "Man, I never should've told you."

"Are you walking me home?"

"Somebody has to. You clearly can't be trusted alone."

We stepped outside. I waited while he locked the door, then we started the walk back.

After a few quiet blocks, he said, "We're good, right?"

I stopped. "Why wouldn't we be?"

"I just...I don't want things to be weird. You're my best friend."

I clasped my hands and fluttered my eyelashes.

"Oh, Ty! BFFs forever!"

He didn't laugh, so I dropped the act. "You're my best friend too. We're cool."

"You sure?"

"Positive. Honestly, I feel like we're *better* friends now. You patched me up, we got real with each other, and, hey — you had your tongue in my mouth."

He grinned. "Yeah, I guess I did, didn't I?"

"Maybe don't mention that part to Kyle and Danny, though. We'd never hear the end of it."

"Oh trust me," he said. "They will never hear about it from me."

We started walking again. After a moment, I said, "You should stay for dinner."

"Huh?"

"When we get to my house. I know I said you owe me dinner, but I'll take a rain check."

"You sure your dad won't care?"

"He loves having people over. And you'll get to meet some real-life gay people." I waggled my eyebrows.

"I dunno."

"Don't worry. I won't tell them about you. Although, you can if you want to."

Ty hesitated, then nodded. "Okay. Maybe I will."

We walked the rest of the way in comfortable silence, the kind that only comes when you've said all the important stuff already. The sun was low in the sky by the time my house came into view, casting long shadows across the pavement. As we reached the front steps, Ty glanced over at me, a quiet smile playing on his lips.

"Thanks again," he said.

I bumped his shoulder with mine. "Anytime."

And I meant it. Because somehow, in the span of one strange afternoon, a scabbed-up knee and a single awkward kiss had turned into something bigger — an unexpected step into honesty, into trust, into a new level of friendship that doesn't flinch when things get messy. Whatever happened next, I knew we were good. Maybe even better than good. We were real.

Best friends forever.

About the Author

Josh Aterovis is the award-winning author of multiple LGBTQ+ novels blending mystery, romance, suspense, and the supernatural, including seven novels and multiple short stories in the acclaimed Killian Kendall Mysteries series. His work explores themes of identity, chosen family, grief, healing, and queer resilience, often centering flawed but deeply human characters navigating extraordinary circumstances. Known for emotionally grounded storytelling and vivid atmosphere, Josh's books have earned a devoted readership among fans of queer fiction and genre-bending narratives.

In addition to his work as a novelist, Josh is an immersive theater creator and producer with Submersive Productions in Baltimore, Maryland, where he develops original, site-specific experiences that blur the line between audience and performer. His storytelling across both page and stage is driven by a passion for creating meaningful, transformative experiences that invite audiences to connect, reflect, and imagine new possibilities.

Learn more at joshaterovis.com or submersive.org.