

Patrick at Home

by Richard J. Rosendall

Bay Windows

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When my African boyfriend Patrick arrived in Washington last month on his first visit to America, his top priority was to find a gym. He had gone too long without working out, and it was driving him crazy. So I took him to the YMCA two blocks south of my apartment. *Our* apartment, that is. After twenty-two years of living alone, my familiar frames of reference are shifting.

Patrick's workout made us late for "Night Out at the Nationals" at RFK Stadium, which happened to be that evening, so we missed the Gay Men's Chorus singing the National Anthem and longtime community leader Cornelius Baker throwing out the first pitch. D.C. City Council member Carol Schwartz walked through the upper deck greeting the gay fans, and clapped when I pointed Patrick out to her from 15 rows up. Patrick felt a bit awkward at all the attention, but there were a lot of introductions to make that week.

It's odd to have been involved with someone for six years without any of my friends or colleagues having a chance to meet him. That's a byproduct of our particular variety of binational relationship. Patrick's passport until recently marked him as a refugee living in Belgium, and he required a visa to visit this country, which the consulate declined to issue. When he obtained a regular Belgian passport, it meant he could come here for a change instead of my going there.

He loved it here. We had dinner with friends from GLAA, so he got to meet gay rights pioneer Frank Kameny. Another evening we attended a fundraiser for D.C. Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, who talked to him about the State Department's Diversity Immigrant Visa program (popularly known, especially to scam artists, as the Green Card Lottery). At that party he met a few dozen of DC's leading African American LGBT activists, which he was eager to do. My friend Carlene Cheatam beamed at Patrick and said to him, "We thought he was making you up!"

We visited some Washington landmarks and did a lot of shopping. His fondness for what he calls the "American style" of wearing pants that are too big for him prompted me to joke, "If I were your mother and I saw you dressed like that, I would not let you out of this house." At the end of the day he spent time on his laptop in the living room while I worked on my PC in the bedroom. Wanting to ask me something, he would call "My Ricky" in his French African accent. That's even nicer in person than over the phone.

Patrick says contentedly that we are an "old couple." This means, among other things, that he didn't mind my not joining him on his tour of Washington's gay nightlife: the Fireplace, Bachelor's Mill, Delta Elite, and a few more whose names he didn't know.

Someone at Eleanor's party asked Patrick how often we've crossed the ocean to be together, and when he got the answer said, "That's not enough." No, indeed. Basic expenses, including legal ones, have taken priority over vacations. Plenty of people with deeper pockets have vied for Patrick's affections, but I alone give him my assistance simply because it is what I owe him as his partner. He laughs at how possessive his European suitors are despite his refusals, and tells me, "But you are the owner." (He is unaware of the terrible associations "owner" has to American ears. He means of course that I own his heart.) "Jealousy is a devil," he says, as wise as he is beautiful.

In the mornings after Patrick was out late, he slept in while I rose early. I should have snapped a picture of him like that. You don't really get used to sleeping next to someone when you are only together for a week at a time. It is sweet when your lover affectionately wraps himself around you during the night, but it is also sleep-depriving when you are not used to it. It takes time to become habituated to another person's breathing and movements beside you. Ironically, the barriers to our being together make me look forward all the more to getting accustomed to him.

On Sunday evening we had seafood dinner with several of my siblings and other family members. Patrick was delighted to meet them and to see us chattering away together. I told him as we walked back to the Metro afterwards that I looked forward to his reciprocating someday by taking me to dinner with his family. Alas, that is not likely to happen. Those in his family who don't want to kill him for being gay still do not want to discuss it, much less be confronted with his American boyfriend. In light of what he has been through, my family's welcome meant a great deal.

A coworker asked if I could live with Patrick on a permanent basis. I said yes. Some things are worth the necessary adjustments. One thing we will need to do is upgrade the kitchen, since he cooks a lot more than I.

It is useless trying to explain why you love someone. For me, Patrick is like manna from heaven. I look at this man who has made himself at home in my life, and wonder how anyone could expect me to do anything else but marry him.

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