

(Author's note: This is story number seven in the Pennsylvania series but actually it could be a stand-alone... This comes right after "Still Falls The Rain." My friend Dovy Blacque said, "I like this series but I'm a fan of first times and you've never written their first time." Of course she was right. How could I have neglected their first time? What the hell is wrong with me? So I told her I would write it but it couldn't just be ANY first time, it had to be combined with some interesting idea and when it came along I'd write it. And then juxiantang came into my life, all sparkly with enthusiasm (which I completely and wholeheartedly reflect,) and mentioned something to me about an old, obscure Ray Sharkey movie which I've never seen, and an idea, and I ran with it. Thanks to juxiantang for the spark of idea. This story was rollicking fun to write. It's sexy in a fun way, and of course they do it, but not explicit.)

FIRST SNOW

by

Natasha Solten

...bewildered kisses like a crowd of stars..."

--Odysseus Elytis

Since they had become lovers, Vinnie and Sonny had never actually spent a winter together. The first winter they knew each other, they were becoming best friends. By the second winter, Sonny was in prison. By their third, finally, they were living together.

Storms had become a sort of symbol for their relationship. As winter approached, and snow came, things seemed to be getting better.

While the thunder and lightning of summer and early autumn brought nightmares, snowfall always brought back the memory of their first time together. Now, only days before Christmas, the white ice surrounded their house two to three feet thick with drifts under the eaves and out by the road topping at four and five feet.

Sonny stared out the front window at the white sky, at the white-robed trees, at the hillocks and slopes in the front yard.

He recalled another, distant snowy day.

His mind wandered back...back... But this time it was a good memory and there was a small smile on his lips as he stared out at the clean, pure frost of the outside world and remembered.

*

Their first night together in Sonny's bed, back in Atlantic City, had been in early fall.

The day before that magical night a strange, pre-winter storm had passed over the city leaving odd white snow banks in the middle of September streets and avenues, on the steps of the Royal Diamond, on the shoulders of Vinnie's wool blazer and in the gentle curves of his thick, dark hair.

Vinnie was waiting on the boardwalk for Sonny's limo. When the driver pulled up with Sonny alone in the back, Sonny couldn't take his eyes off him. Vinnie was mesmerizing. Always. While it was truly Vinnie's wit and personality he'd fallen for, he couldn't pretend not to notice, simply, the inherent attractiveness of the man. Caught off-guard in the sudden swirls of a freezing freak storm without his umbrella, Vinnie was dark beauty incarnate in a whirling world of white.

This was a pivotal moment for them. Within an hour, they were due to attend a fight. Both of them had made crucial bets.

Sonny opened the door. Vinnie got in, snowflakes flying around him, dancing in the air, some of them landing on Sonny's face, in his own hair, on his arms.

Vinnie let out a whoosh of air, a huge exhaled breath. He was shaking. He turned and looked at Sonny with his lips pressed taut as if he were either trying not to smile or not to frown. But his wide blue eyes twinkled. And whether he was shaking from the cold, or nerves, Sonny couldn't tell.

He sort of hoped it was a little of both. Because it delighted him that Vinnie might be a little nervous about what they were headed for, what was at stake. That would be a good thing, because then Sonny wouldn't have to be nervous alone.

Vinnie rubbed snow-damp palms against his thighs, inhaled through clenched teeth. He glanced sideways again at Sonny, eyebrows raised. Sonny suppressed a smile, mostly unsuccessfully.

They had been doing this a lot lately, communicating without words. But today was different. There were no words. The bets were set as of late the previous night. They had even put what they were betting in writing, their shaky signatures lining the bottom of hastily written out demands, and what each had agreed to.

Yeah, they had been drunk.

Very drunk.

Tequila early in the evening. Vodka later.

Sonny remembered them laughing about their crazy idea until they fell off the couch and onto the floor. Sonny had said drunkenly, “Remember, I didn’t put a gun to your head or anything.”

Vinnie had replied, “As if you’d have to threaten me?”

And Sonny had said, “Lines three and four are non-negotiable.” He had had a lot of trouble pronouncing that last word around his Vodka-soaked tongue.

“Lines three and four are my personal favorites.” Vinnie’d practically dissolved into more low, drunken chuckles. He was already flat on his back on the floor of his suite. His shirt was partially unbuttoned. Sonny’s eyes kept going to that last button, staring at it from where he sat on the floor half-leaning, half- slumped against the seat of the couch.

He held tight to the pen and the papers. “I’d file these with my lawyer first thing tomorrow...but then there’s line seven.”

Vinnie sobered momentarily, his sleepy eyes watching Sonny, moving slowly up and down his form. For a second, Sonny couldn’t breathe.

“Yeah, line seven,” Vinnie said softly. Then his eyes flickered and shifted away.

“So we just have to trust each other.” Line number seven. Lucky number seven. Life and death number seven.

It read: The nature of this bet can never be divulged (Vinnie’s word) to the outside world for any purpose under the sun.

Vinnie frowned. Then he slowly rolled onto his side toward Sonny, his arm under his head.

Sonny raised his chin, staring down at him. “And number eight.”

The participants of this bet must honor the outcome whether drunk or sober.

Maybe a few words were misspelled. Maybe the language was silly. Maybe they had no idea what the fuck they were doing.

Vinnie started laughing again. “Are we gonna wake up tomorrow in the nuthouse?”

Sonny grinned, kicking out at him from where he sat on the floor. “I hope not.”

Vinnie looked, well, so good, so wonderful. Was he dreaming? He couldn’t believe the guy was actually agreeing to this. Because his side of the bet was the crazy side. Vinnie’s side was, well, strictly mundane; he stood to win ten thousand dollars. But Sonny, well, if he won...

And he started laughing again until his stomach hurt, until he couldn't breathe, until the thought of what he could win consumed him, sobered him, made him start to shake.

This morning, half hung-over, Vinnie had come to him looking sheepish, almost apologetic.

Sonny's heart skipped. Vinnie had come to stop the bet. He was sure of it. And to save face, he was going to have to let him.

Vinnie stood in front of Sonny's glass desk, hands behind his back staring over Sonny's head at the vast skyline of Atlantic City. Sonny waited for the expected rebuff.

Vinnie said, "What time do you want to meet?"

"Huh?"

"For the fight?" His eyes slid slowly down, hesitantly meeting Sonny's.

Sonny just stared at him.

Vinnie bit his lower lip. Then he clamped down on a smile. He brought forth a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket. "We have a bet, remember? Signed and everything."

Sonny acted nonchalant although he was anything but. "Oh that. Yep. Almost forgot. Three o'clock, okay? I'll bring the limo by the Marine."

*

Now they drove through snow-slicked streets, headed for the arena. Sonny got out two beers from the limo's refrigerator, handing one to Vinnie.

"Thanks." Vinnie's fingers lingered too long on Sonny's when he took it. Or was that just his imagination? He couldn't be sure but he was starting to think Vinnie might be hoping to lose their bet.

Or maybe it was he who was afraid to win?

His stomach tightened at the thought.

The limo pulled up to the front doors.

They got out into swirling white wind. Sonny watched as Vinnie's hair was whipped into a frenzy, clumps of wild darkness becoming part of the wind itself. Vinnie's cheeks and lips were pink from the cold. They ran for the entrance.

Snow tumbled off them in the foyer. Tickets were taken. They were led to front row seats.

Vinnie said suddenly, "I want to make this official."

Sonny eyed him. His hair had settled into rich, thick tangles against his forehead and ears. It was astonishing, actually, how Vinnie could come in from a windstorm and still look as if he'd just had a hundred dollar cut and style. "What do you mean?" Sonny asked.

"Well, since we're betting, we need tickets. Mine for Hodges. Yours for McGill."

Sonny stood up and got out his wallet.

Vinnie cut him off with his hand. "Nah, I got it." And he walked away to the betting window.

When he came back, he held up the two tickets, then pocketed them. Their eyes met hastily, then glanced away. Sonny's skin prickled.

The fight they bet on was the second one of the day. So they both had to sit, veritably sweating, through the first.

When their fight finally started it seemed odd to Sonny that they were both rather subdued. Usually they came to the fights all filled with spit and vinegar, yelling at the boxers, waving their arms, practically jumping up and down. But for this one they both just sat, side by side, saying nothing, doing nothing.

When it was over, Sonny turned to Vinnie. "Well," he said.

"Well," Vinnie replied.

Sonny smiled. It was over. Done. Their silly little bet. Why was he still shaking? "Congratulations," he said to Vinnie. "Hodges won. You're ten thousand dollars richer."

Vinnie nodded once, lips pressed tight. There was chaos and commotion around them, but it seemed distant to Sonny, faraway. There was nothing but Vinnie beside him right now, and a strange feeling of loss.

Then Vinnie reached into his breast-coat pocket, pulling out the tickets. He handed one to Sonny. It said, in black letters across the middle, HODGES.

Sonny said, "This is yours."

"No," Vinnie said softly. Sonny almost couldn't hear him. "It's yours. You won."

Vinnie held the second ticket down. Sonny reached for it. “Gimme that!” He pried it from Vinnie’s hand. It, too, said, “Hodges.”

Vinnie turned to him with a closed-mouth grin. “Looks like we both won.”

“Why you...” He stopped, throat suddenly all rough and swollen as he realized what Vinnie had done. What Vinnie was still doing.

Vinnie’s eyes glistened. He leaned toward Sonny until Sonny could smell the spice of him, the sweetness. He said softly in his ear, “C’mon, Sonny. Time to collect.” He touched him lightly on the arm. The heat of it was like fire.

There was, simply, nothing else left to do. Sonny followed him out of the arena.

*

Sonny decided he hadn’t quite drunk enough. In the limo, he offered Vinnie another beer.

Vinnie shook his head.

Deciding to give Vinnie an “out,” a chance to change his mind if he wanted, he said, “Wanna go to a bar?”

Vinnie shook his head.

“Wanna go to the gym?”

Vinnie shook his head.

“Wanna go for dinner?”

“Shush!” Vinnie turned toward him. He took a deep breath, looking Sonny over. “I want to go home. That’s what I want.” And there was a hint of desperation there, a hitch, a wince.

Inwardly thrilled, yet strangely hesitant – wasn’t this what he’d wanted? -- Sonny said very quietly, “Yeah, okay.”

The limo dropped them off in the garage. Silently, they took the elevator up, up to Sonny’s penthouse. There were mirrors all over the elevator walls and Sonny kept looking down, trying to avoid them. It was as if Vinnie was everywhere, all around him, dark, shiny, compelling. Encompassing. It was overwhelming.

The doors opened and Sonny entered his front room, starting to take off his jacket. His hands were still shaking. Whatever Vinnie wanted to do, Sonny decided, bet or no bet,

he would let Vinnie call the shots. But first, he wanted more to drink. He dropped his jacket on a nearby chaise.

Without looking to see if Vinnie followed, he turned for the kitchen but he never completed the turn as hands fell on his shoulders, clasping him, pulling him around. Before he knew what was happening, Vinnie was up against him pushing him to the wall, leaning into his face, lips almost touching his but...not quite. Vinnie said, "Don't do this to me. Don't walk away."

Sonny felt himself start to melt as he met those fervent blue eyes. An ache started in the center of his chest. Fear was instantly replaced by the most incessant longing he'd ever felt. Earnestly, "I won't." And lost his breath as Vinnie's lips met his. Sonny's arms quickly came around him. This. It had been what he'd wanted for awhile now, but it was such a dangerous game; he hadn't been quite sure that Vinnie felt the same. Even after Vinnie had shown him the tickets. Even after Vinnie had refused drinks, the gym, and for Christ's sake *food*.

Now there was no question. Vinnie's kiss spun him in his own skin until he was dizzy, floating, coming apart. For long moments, his mind couldn't believe it was real.

This was no longer just a game. What the fuck was happening?

Sonny's bet no longer seemed so silly.

Number one. *Winner gets to know the loser better.*

He decided, when Vinnie finally pulled back for air, that he could cross that one off right away.

Breathing hard as if he'd been running, Sonny said, "Follow me. Unless you just want to fall to the floor right here, right now."

Vinnie grinned, just as breathless. Sonny grabbed his arm, then, and pulled him across the living room and down the hall.

Once in the bedroom, Vinnie immediately sat down on the big, soft bed, then fell back. Sonny turned on a low lamp and sat beside him. Fuck he was a gorgeous guy! What was Sonny thinking? This was his best friend. The sweetest, kindest, strongest, smartest... Fuck! He decided he *must* be crazy. But he didn't care. He wanted him. Christ he wanted him.

Number two. *Winner gets the clothes off the loser's back.*

Vinnie had already shrugged out of his jacket. Now Sonny leaned over him and slowly undid his tie.

Vinnie watched him, eyes hooded. "I guess you get them all," he said quietly.

"Don't worry," Sonny replied in a whisper. "I'll loan them back to you later." He leaned down and kissed him. Fuck...how could it be that kissing Vinnie made the whole room spin?

He fumbled with the tie and shirt, finally getting them off. Then he ran his hands up Vinnie's strong, naked chest and nearly came undone. Vinnie was kicking off his shoes now, grabbing for him. Sonny let him pull him down, roll him over. The feeling of Vinnie now on top of him was so heady he couldn't think. Then Vinnie was undoing his shirt, kissing every spot of flesh he next exposed as he went down the line button by button. Sonny clasped his shoulders tightly, drawing sharp breaths.

Was this really happening? Right now?

All the buttons were undone. Sonny started to lift up to take his arms out of his shirt, but Vinnie was already starting on another button, and then a zipper.

Sonny sat up grabbing his shoulders. He felt completely out of control. "Hey," he said gently. "Not so fast."

Vinnie smiled at him, coming up, pushing him back down. "Sorry. I must be outta my mind."

Sonny started to laugh, pulling him down for another kiss. Then he turned his head, catching more air. "I just can't think around you, and I want to get it right. The bet."

"Oh yeah, that," Vinnie said softly. "Number three. Loser does everything the winner tells him to do."

"Yeah. Don't forget that," Sonny breathed.

Vinnie lowered his head, chuckling quietly into Sonny's neck. His mouth was firm against the skin there, intimate, warm. The sensation made all the muscles in Sonny's body tighten in sheer anticipation, encompassing arousal.

Vinnie was in his arms, bare chest to bare chest. He could barely wrap his mind around that. Anything more right now, and he was sure he'd probably die. He had the amusing/paranoid thought that if Patrice even suspected, he could have hired Vinnie for this sole purpose. He could just hear the conversation:

Vinnie: "How do you want it done?"

Patrice: "Just put your arms around him, maybe whisper something sweet into his ear. That should do it. It'll be a quick death."

Sonny groaned. Vinnie licked up Sonny's jawline to his mouth, devouring him again. Sonny kissed back, his hands coming up, cupping the sides of Vinnie's head. His fingers combed that soft black hair, like dark water running through his hands. It was lovely. It was absolutely miraculous...that hair.

For a long time, it seemed, they just kissed, neither of them going for more. It could've been because they were completely satisfied where they were. More likely, Sonny thought, it was because neither was brave enough take the next step.

Finally Sonny pushed at Vinnie. "Lie back," he said. Vinnie did, half laughing. He was so intoxicating to gaze at. Sonny thought, *What am I gonna do with him?*

But he already had ideas. And he wasn't going to let fear of the unknown stop him now. Just because he'd never done it with a guy didn't mean he didn't know what Vinnie would most certainly like. It was instinct. His own body knew what it wanted. Time had already proven they were more alike than not.

So, simply, he'd worship this beautiful guy he'd invited to his bed. What else could he do? He was on the edge himself, but he forced himself to take his time. He ran his hands over Vinnie's chest, down his sides. He kissed the skin of his shoulders, his arms, his stomach, until Vinnie was squirming, moaning. Slowly, he pushed away Vinnie's trousers leaving him, and all that shimmery olive skin, clad in white briefs...and nothing else. His hand strayed.

Vinnie gasped.

He glanced at Vinnie's face, gauging reaction, and saw something that made him hesitate, made him unsure. Vinnie's mouth trembled. His eyes flitted all over the room and he was blinking fast.

Sonny touched his shoulder, leaned down. "Hey. What?"

Vinnie mumbled something.

"What?"

"The bet," he said clearer. His brows were lowered. He looked like he'd been caught stealing candy. "It never said...we never said this wouldn't be just...casual." He gulped. "Cause this isn't..."

Sonny leaned back a little, schooling his features. His mind cried out: *Vinnie did NOT just say what I think he said.* But he knew what he had heard, and he smiled at him reassuringly...all the while the voices in his head were screaming: *Do you want to go there? Do you REALLY want to go there?*

Yes.

And the words tumbled out of his mouth. “Vincenzo, when has *anything* we’ve ever done together been casual?”

Vinnie smiled through what looked like a bout of nausea.

“You want me to stop?”

He shook his head, his eyes holding steady on Sonny’s. Then he reached up, grabbed Sonny’s shoulders and pulled him down. “Are we crazy?”

“Maybe.” Sonny chuckled low. His lungs quivered. He kissed Vinnie softly, feeling new surges of pleasure shoot through his whole body, and when Vinnie pushed his head up for more, Sonny pulled back a little, keeping it slow, gentle, until his whole body tingled and, he guessed, hoped, Vinnie’s was, too.

Vinnie caught on quick, surged up to meet him, but did not pull or tug or push or insist. They danced around each other, mouths, hands, almost shy, unquestionably reverent. And then Sonny realized he wasn’t even thinking. There was no plan. Just lips. Just hands. Just heat. And a slow peeling away of layers and years... Old ideas: gone. Old fears. Old behaviors. Old beliefs. Disappeared. Vanished. Conquered.

This had never happened to him before. He barely remembered the last remnants of his old self being tossed aside...silk trousers, satin boxers, tough roles, fears of rejection, of ridicule, of personal failure.

They moved like one person. Vinnie’s hands were all over him and nothing...nothing felt wrong or weird or strange. He ran his hand up the back of Vinnie’s thigh, up, up and Vinnie was urging him closer, mouth on his chest, lips gently exploring. Their bodies hardened, melted, fused. The whole outside world had ceased to exist and, fuck all, they were outright making love.

Nothing else mattered... mouths, hands urging, caressing, kissing, licking. The room filled with the sounds of heavy breathing, hitching moans.

Sonny came twice without even thinking about it...and he was quite aware that Vinnie had, too.

Catching their breaths on sweat-soaked, smooth sheets, heads together on the same pillow, Vinnie whispered, “Number four: if the winner isn’t completely satisfied, do-over.”

Sonny laughed, his forehead pressed to Vinnie’s jaw. Vinnie entwined their legs, pulled him close, rolled over until he was half on top of him.

Sonny said, “Number five: If a do-over, winner gets to state when and where.”

“You’re not completely satisfied?” Vinnie’s blue eyes were twinkling.

Sonny took a deep breath. “I can’t be sure unless...”

“We have to try again, then.” Vinnie’s grin settled on his lips like the sweetest of all desserts.

All Sonny could think as Vinnie’s body met his, as he became unable to distinguish where he left off and Vinnie began, was: *Wonderful. Wonderful. And again, wonderful.**

It took a whole month before he even had the remotest thought that maybe, just maybe, he’d made a huge mistake.

And eight months after that before he and Vinnie came back together the way things should have always been, the way they were meant to be. Attuned. Complimentary. A perfect, natural fit.

It was as if they were designed to be together, but everything had conspired to get in their way.

Number six: No matter what happens, both winner and loser never ever ever stop being friends.

Vinnie’s hand had been shaking when he’d written that one down exactly as Sonny dictated it.

Vinnie’s passion: there were no words. Sonny had never expected so much. The true surprise for him had not been the fact that Vincent Terranova was a cop. It was the fact that Vinnie had actually wanted him. Wanted *him*. Unflinching. Desperate. And with a secret agony that Sonny mirrored, something he’d never shared with another human being for as long as he had lived.

That first night, underneath the city’s muted sounds and the crispness of streetlight reflected off fresh, cold snow, they both became winners.

*

Now, Sonny lowered his eyes, turned away from the window as he heard a soft step. Vinnie walked into the room holding a manila envelope. “Hey,” he said, “look what I just found.”

Sonny frowned in question.

And Vinnie pulled, out of the envelope, their old hand-written bets.

Sonny's jaw dropped.

Vinnie shrugged. "They were in my closet all this time, in my old overcoat pocket. I completely forgot they were there. I never wear that coat anymore."

Sonny blinked. Swayed.

"What?" The smile on Vinnie's face masked a tinge of confusion.

Sonny just laughed weakly, then said, "I think I have to sit down."

Vinnie chuckled. "I think we should have them framed, don't you?"

Sonny fell back onto the couch, still chuckling. "Fuck yeah." He stared at Vinnie who met his eyes with a sparkle in his own. "Ya know something?"

Vinnie shook his head.

"You, my friend, have always had such perfect fucking timing."

Vinnie tilted his head. "About everything?"

"Yeah. Everything."

Vinnie laughed, came around to the back of the couch, leaned down and kissed Sonny on the lips. He straightened up and turned, saying, "Yeah, I am gonna have these framed. In gold." Then he walked out of the room whistling.

*

- -- *Wonderful. Wonderful. And again, wonderful.* Stolen from Steve Martin, *L.A. Story*.

(And for those who are sticklers for detail...)

Sonny's Bet

- 1) **Winner gets to know the loser better.**
- 2) **Winner gets the clothes off the loser's back.**
- 3) **Loser does everything the winner tells him to do.**
- 4) **If the winner isn't completely satisfied, do-over.**
- 5) **If a do-over, winner gets to state when and where.**
- 6) **No matter what happens, both winner and loser never ever ever stop being friends.**
- 7) **The nature of this bet can never be divulged to the outside world for any purpose under the sun.**
- 8) **The participants of this bet must honor the outcome whether drunk or sober.**

signed: Vinnie Terranova, Sonny Steelgrave