

(Author's note: Wiseguy. Sonny/Vinnie. Rating: Well, this one is downright explicit "I'm so fucking in love with you" love-sex, so "yo-ho" choose yer poison sticker...I like the skull and crossbones ☠☠☠ warning myself. This is the fifth story in what I am now calling my "Pennsylvania Series." The first four, in order {and on my natashasolten livejournal} are "I Know You Really Love me," "New Beginnings," "One Summer Day," and "Trouble, Thy Name Is Steelgrave." Since I am having so much fun in this series, two more stories are already forthcoming, one tackling, finally, their first time in flashback.)

PANIC

by

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*I am stolen by
hooded eyes, cold hands...*

The storm came suddenly in the night, crashing against the roof, the windows, knocking down trees, making car alarms go off. Rain didn't just patter. It slashed. It pounded. It roared.

It woke Vinnie from a sound sleep. He rolled over only to find the other half of the bed empty and cold. Then he heard a sound.

He looked over toward the far wall by the bathroom door, squinting. It was very dark, but he made out a hunched shadow, heard a hiss.

He turned on the lamp, jumped out of the bed and knelt before the shadow. "Sonny?" He reached out, touching him on the bare arm. Sonny's skin was clammy and cold. He was shivering. He was drawing sharp breaths with a hissing sound that was almost frightening. His knees were bent, pressed tight to his chest. His teeth chattered from cold. He wore nothing, didn't even have a blanket for warmth.

Vinnie chastised himself for forgetting to turn on the heat last night. They had known a storm was coming.

He grabbed him by the shoulders trying to pull him up.

Sonny pushed him away. "Leave me alone," he muttered. "God, why can't you just leave me the hell alone."

Vinnie ignored the order. He pulled harder, lifting. "You're freezing. Get up."

Sonny fell weakly toward him, then allowed himself to be half-lifted to his feet. Vinnie led him into the bathroom and turned on the shower to hot, pushing him in. His own tank and shorts got wet, but he didn't care. He held Sonny up until the steam rose and finally he stopped shivering.

When Sonny seemed calmer, he pulled him out and wrapped him in a big towel. He said nothing. Sonny said nothing.

Then Vinnie stripped off his wet clothing and dried himself.

When he got Sonny back into bed he pushed him down. Sonny rolled onto his stomach. Vinnie moved until he was half on top of him, his chest against Sonny's back. Sonny said, "I'm flying away into pieces. I can't stop it."

The storm crashed against the window. Sonny shuddered.

Vinnie said, "I'll hold everything together. Go to sleep." He pressed harder with his weight, the way Sonny had told him to in the past. It was the only way, sometimes, Sonny could come back, relax, get back to sleep. With Vinnie on top of him, he said, his body started to feel solid again; he needed the weight, the grounding of that weight.

"You let them get me," he mumbled.

Whoever "them" was this time, Vinnie didn't know, but he was pretty sure it was cops. It was almost always cops pounding on the doors to Sonny's serenity, his sanity.

"Nobody's coming through me. I got your back," Vinnie said.

"Christ! Fuck! What am I saying? What's *wrong* with me!" he groaned into the pillow.

"It'll pass. It'll pass. Just relax."

In two months, Sonny had had about four of these episodes. They usually lasted less than half an hour. They always came in the middle of the night. Once Vinnie woke to the sound of sirens and realized they had set Sonny off. The other times it seemed to be just nightmares. Every time, Sonny tried to push him away. When he was coherent, Sonny described the attacks as uncontrollable, sheer terror. With that terror came shooting pain in his back and chest, a feeling like he was literally dying, and he couldn't think, his thoughts flying in a thousand different directions.

They had discussed him seeing that doctor he'd seen in the emergency room again.

Sonny had refused. "They'll want to give me stuff. Drugs. They make you into a zombie." He'd grimaced, and added, "They make you impotent."

"We don't know that," Vinnie had argued.

But Sonny brushed him off.

Now he held him tight and Sonny's breathing finally returned to normal. After awhile, Sonny slept. Vinnie eased up but still kept his arms around him. Then he slept, too.

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He tried to bring it up again the next morning. "What would it hurt to talk to a doctor?"

"They'll make me see a shrink. I don't want to see no shrink."

"But just to find out options...you don't have to do anything they say. You'd just ask..."

"I said no," Sonny said grouchy. He was wearing a heavy sweater over jeans. He put on his coat. Vinnie watched him walk outside. From the front window, he watched Sonny go into the garage, come back with a rake, and start piling leaves. The yard was a mess, still damp from the storm. The temp was cold. Sonny's breath made little clouds of white against the air.

He thought about going out to help him. Instead, he made a fire in the front room. He put water on to boil, got out tea, hot chocolate.

Every few minutes he went to the window. Now Sonny was gathering up leaves into a plastic trash bag. There were too many. Sudden wind gusts were blowing them away as fast as he could gather them. He'd only finished one small area. There would be more rain tonight, maybe even snow. Sonny's work was a waste of time.

Sonny pushed himself like that when he was stressed. He still hadn't gained back the weight he'd lost in prison. But Vinnie liked him wiry, ornery, hard-edged; Sonny had a fantastic body, naturally bronze skin, tight fighter muscles. His skin was like silk, smooth, fine, with all that heat and energy just bursting under the surface, the wonderful conflagration that was Sonny. Sometimes he couldn't stop touching him. But he still worried.

Sonny had always been hyper. He moved. His body moved almost all the time. Even if he was sitting, he would bounce a knee, or drum fingers on his stomach. The energy that kept him fired, kept him brilliant and daring and alive had to go somewhere. But that same energy burned calories like crazy. And kept Sonny's nerves taut, on edge. Vinnie needed to get him to relax more.

He'd mellowed in prison, had not broken. Vinnie was glad for that. But ever since that stint where the cops burst through their front door and Sonny had flashed back to the Rialto, then passed out, he'd become more nervous, especially around loud noises. The panic attacks, although few, were frightening to both of them because sometimes Sonny would black out for a few seconds, or hallucinate. It was strange, to say the least.

All Vinnie wanted to do was fix it but he didn't know how. He knew the attacks embarrassed Sonny and he never wanted Sonny to feel awkward or unsure around him. So he handled it all matter of factly, pretending it was no big deal, but still bringing up the doctor every once in awhile.

Vinnie thought if Sonny didn't go, he might. Just to ask questions. And Sonny would never have to know.

Now Vinnie waited in the warm front room. He grabbed a novel, lay down on the couch and started to read. It was one of those lazy, cold autumn days when all you want to do is read by a fire. It was paradise, actually, but what would have made it better was if Sonny was beside him, wearing those hated but cute reading glasses, scanning the financial news and drinking hot chocolate. He wanted Sonny beside him laughing at his own witticisms, talking with that tough tone of his even if the subject was about Coke versus Pepsi. He wanted him lying there on the other end of the couch, rubbing his foot against Vinnie's thigh and then pretending he hadn't done a thing. He wanted that sly squint, that upturned chin, that playful smile edging the corners of his mouth that clued Vinnie into so much. Simply, he wanted him.

He heard the front door open, then close. Heard a jacket unzip and get hung on a hook by the door. Heard footsteps go tramping off into the other room, water running.

When Sonny came into the living room, he plopped down into a chair beside the couch. It was still before noon, but he had a drink in his hand and it wasn't hot chocolate or tea. It was orange and it looked like something Sonny would've fixed for himself in their Atlantic City past when he was antsy, or trying to get Vinnie to get drunk with him so he could forget his day, his life.

Sonny threw him a challenging smile. "This is nice," he said with an almost accusing tone.

"I love days like this," Vinnie replied quietly.

A little sarcastically, "Yeah. A little grope by the fire, some popcorn..."

Vinnie turned a page in his book, ignoring him. He hated when Sonny's tone got defensive like this. He knew the past night was bothering him, but he didn't want to make more out of it. He was not going to let himself be pushed even though Sonny's insecurities were doing a very good job of it. He didn't like how it made him react...saying things he regretted to a man who was way too vulnerable for his own good...always had been. He didn't like how it could make him want to grab Sonny physically, almost as if he wanted to lash out. Vinnie had never felt any physical urge to lash out with any of his lovers in the past. But none of his lovers had ever been male, or a Steelgrave. Strangely, whenever Sonny had pushed him too far in that direction, and Vinnie had pushed back, Sonny had always melted under him, never fought back. The only time Sonny had ever fought him for real, after the first day they'd met, was in the Rialto. As had happened a few times, if Vinnie reached for him, pushed, shoved, grabbed, held down, Sonny would go still and just look at him as if Vinnie was doing exactly what he'd wanted him to in the first place. As if Vinnie was giving him a gift. Sonny's hands would stroke his back, or cup his face. And then Vinnie would back off, Sonny would kiss him, Vinnie would let him and that was that.

Vinnie only now just realized it was sort of a kink of Sonny's, being pushed, being held down.

Christ, this guy had already almost been the death of him more times than he could count. What in the hell was he going to do with him?

That besotted, mischievous soul. He couldn't love him more for it.

Vinnie let out a short laugh.

Sonny said, "Reading a funny novel?"

Vinnie shook his head. Then he looked over the top edge of his book. "How come you didn't make me one of those?" He stared at Sonny's drink.

Sonny's eyebrows rose. "You want one?"

Vinnie shrugged.

Sonny got up, sat down next to him almost on top of his feet, leaned over and said, "Here. You can have mine." He handed Vinnie the glass.

Vinnie didn't want it. But he took it anyway and drank some. Actually, it was quite good. "So's the yard all finished?"

Sonny rolled his eyes. "Yeah. Thanks to all your help."

"It's cold out there." Vinnie made the obvious excuse.

"Yeah, tell me about it." He laid his hand on Vinnie's wrist. It was freezing.

"Jesus! Go by the fire. Get warm"

"I'm warm right here."

Vinnie grimaced. "That is the worst line I've ever heard."

Sonny laughed. Finally. "You don't get out much, do you?"

Vinnie joined in the laugh. "I got enough on my plate to handle right here."

Sonny sobered at that, grabbed for the glass. Vinnie handed it to him. He took a big swallow. Then he just sat very still...a rarity for Sonny...and stared at the crackling flames in the stone fireplace.

Vinnie's knees were bent. Sonny sat very close to them. Vinnie stuck his sock-clad toes under Sonny's thigh, wiggling them a little, then reached for the drink. Without looking at him, Sonny handed it back over. There was only a little left. He downed it.

Seemingly out of the blue, Sonny asked, "Did you ever want to get married...you know, have a family?"

Vinnie closed the book and rested it against his chest. Sonny was still staring at the gold, waving flames. "Maybe the thought crossed my mind," Vinnie hedged. "But there wasn't anyone...."

"Theresa was going to be a marriage of convenience, you know. She knew that."

“I know. You told me. Back then.”

Sonny nodded. “But I wasn’t being fair.”

Vinnie waited for him to elaborate.

“To you,” he finally added.

“But you told me. And you told her.”

“Well, I didn’t tell her about you.”

Vinnie shrugged. Of course he knew that. That would’ve been way too hard for Sonny. And too dangerous. Hell, it was hard for Vinnie to talk about the two of them with anyone...including Frank.

Sonny leaned his forehead into his hands. “Well, it was a big deal. I don’t know what I was stupidly thinking...that I’d keep you on the side?” He frowned. “And you’d go for that?”

Vinnie kicked him in the thigh with his toes. “Quit it. It’s a moot point now anyway.” Then he held out the glass. “Go make us a couple more of these.”

Sonny turned slowly, almost in a daze. He took the glass, got up and went into the kitchen.

Vinnie lay back, closed his eyes and chewed on his lower lip. Today was one of those days when Sonny was feeling guilty again, feeling that maybe Vinnie had given up more than he had. It was a strange competition with him. He didn’t like that Vinnie had lost so much, that both of them had. Who would like it? In his strange mood, maybe he’d beg for Vinnie’s temper, beg him to push him, hold him down. It was not punishment, Vinnie finally decided, but Sonny’s way of alleviating responsibility for wanting what, in his harsh world, he should never have wanted in the first place.

At that thought, Vinnie’s mind quipped, *You have your hands full, sportshoes.*

Just then, Sonny came back with two orange drinks in tall glasses. He handed one to Vinnie. He was grinning. Much to Vinnie’s great relief.

“Getting slowly drunk by a fire on a rainy day. When have I ever done that?” Sonny quipped.

“I’m glad we can do this,” Vinnie replied quietly.

“We used to get drunk together on your couch in your suite.”

“That was different.”

“Maybe. I just liked being with you. Back then I hadn’t really thought about why.”

Vinnie’s thoughts went back. “Me, either, but I liked the attention.”

“Well, it wasn’t hurting your job....”

“But I wasn’t thinking about the job, Sonny. I was just thinking that I honestly liked you...you, not what you did, but you. It surprised me...that I could feel that way.”

“Yeah.” Sonny’s tone lowered. “Surprise, surprise.”

Vinnie kicked him in the thigh again.

Sonny turned and stared at him. “It occur to you that we were never really meant to meet?”

Slowly, Vinnie shook his head, said: “Then again, maybe we were meant to meet. Maybe it was all meant.”

“I don’t know what I believe.”

“Hmm.” Vinnie took a drink and it went down slow and warming even though it was cold. “This is good.”

“Well, I saw all the tea and hot chocolate set out,” Sonny said. “That’s all fine, too, at the right time.”

Vinnie smiled at him.

Sonny leaned heavier on Vinnie’s bent knees, then put his arm around them, leaning it against Vinnie’s stomach. He absently gripped the edge of Vinnie’s sweater, then let go, then gripped it again. Then he said, “Thanks.”

“For what?”

Sonny looked at him over the knees, brown eyes almost wistful. “Everything.”

Vinnie flashed on last night, made a sour face.

Sonny took another drink. Stared back at the roaring flames.

Vinnie wondered what he was thinking. So often, Vinnie would look back at the past and see himself only as the undercover agent, doing what needed to be done, and Sonny being so friendly, so generous. And Vinnie realized how strange it was that a man he had thought he would secretly hate and pretend to like ended up the other way around...the man he secretly loved. If Sonny reviewed the past, playing it back now with all the insights, the lens through which Vinnie was and always had been a Fed, that it was the cop laughing at all his jokes, befriending him, letting him confide in him, then it had to be hell. Vinnie didn’t like that they had that between them, that past with the lies, that past with the new lens that created a kind of canyon between what they did and what really was being played out in those times together. And those times included so many good times. It was so hard to think about it all. So hard.

“So often, I forgot my real job when I was around you,” Vinnie murmured.

Sonny's eyes narrowed. "No, you didn't. You're better than that."

"But...I did."

"Tell yourself that, then."

"I'm telling you."

"Why?"

"Because I hate thinking about the past and imagining what you see now when you think about it."

Sonny tightened his arm around Vinnie's bent legs.

"I didn't fake...."

"Jesus, I know! Vinnie!"

Vinnie let out an exasperated sigh.

"You wanna know what I see?" Sonny asked. "I see a guy who came in to do a job and then decided somehow, some way, *insanely*, that I was worth saving. So he gave up everything to do that. Do we have to talk about this anymore?"

"But Sonny, what if I told you I wasn't sure...until...until the last minute?"

"Who's ever sure one hundred percent about anything in life? Huh?"

"Okay..."

"Even after our first night together...Jesus...I didn't know what hit me, but who can be sure even then? Even if it was the best...Hell...I never pictured us like this...I didn't dare. I was supposta get married. Who can make rational decisions when their world is turned upside-down? I thought we were being crazy...nuts...ya know?"

Vinnie was starting to smile watching him. He liked when Sonny talked about "them." Just "them" together, the two of them.

Sonny took another swig of his drink. He pushed against Vinnie's knees with his body. "What if I told you I had regrets, but then again I have no regrets. Would you even get what I mean?"

"Completely," Vinnie replied without even thinking. "I don't think there's another soul in the whole world who would understand that in this situation."

"Well, I get it, and you get it. And that's all that matters. 'Cause no one can share what we've been through."

Vinnie lifted his drink. "Damn, what's in this anyway?"

“Vodka.”

“I thought so. No wonder. You know Vodka makes me maudlin.”

Sonny laughed. “No. I did *not* know that.”

“Well, now you do.” And he took another drink.

Sonny pushed against his knees more. Vinnie stretched them out as Sonny brought his legs up, curled on his side, his back pressed against the back of the couch. He set his drink on the floor. His upper body slid down until his head rested against Vinnie’s stomach. Vinnie stretched out straight, his legs balanced on the couch edge to the side of Sonny’s curled body. Sonny’s free arm rested against his hip. Vinnie set his drink down; the book fell to the side. He lay his hand alongside Sonny’s head, stroking.

Okay, so maybe Sonny wasn’t in the mood to push him.

They stayed that way for about half an hour, not speaking. Finally, the fire began to die.

Vinnie shifted his legs to the floor, avoiding the half-full glasses. “I gotta fix the fire,” he whispered.

Sonny groaned and moved to curl tighter into himself. His eyes were closed.

Vinnie got up and put more wood on the fire, building it up, poking at half-burnt logs. He went back to the couch, picked up the two drinks and set them on the table. He looked at Sonny whose eyes were still shut, hands curled tight against his chest. Then he sat down by Sonny’s head, lifted it a little until Sonny’s head rested against his chest. Vinnie lifted his legs, turning more on his back, his own head resting on a throw pillow, and stuck his sock-clad feet under Sonny’s thigh.

Lethargically, Sonny opened his eyes, squirmed a little further up. Vinnie bent his head and their lips met. It was a soft kiss, taking its time to let them just feel the intimacy that turned from almost casual to overwhelmingly heart-stopping. Vinnie felt his whole body respond. It always did that with Sonny. It was beyond his control. His arms moved tight around Sonny’s back. Sonny’s arms were around him as well, and Sonny was propped against the couch back, half on top of him kissing gently, letting up, then starting it all over again.

Now Sonny’s hand was in his hair. He let up, and Vinnie opened his eyes to meet Sonny’s hazy brown stare.

“Hmm. Vodka. Makes you maudlin. Makes me feel all warm and funny,” he whispered.

Vinnie smiled and Sonny kissed him again, this time licking lightly until Vinnie let his mouth part slightly and suck gently on his lower lip.

Sonny’s tongue delved deeper. Slow. Warm. Velvet.

Jesus he was a good kisser. There was something about Sonny's kisses that was so affectionate. Reverent yet powerful at the same instant.

Vinnie got lost in their kissing every time. Sonny was enigmatic. If it was up to him, he'd make love with Sonny night and day, never let up. But of course one had to eat, and live a life... pretending he didn't just want him, and nothing else, all the time. It seemed like when they were together nothing else mattered. Nothing in all the world compared to the feeling of this man in his arms, the weight of him, the heat, the drumming life force. Sonny, since the first time he met him, made him feel more alive than he'd ever known. This was the pulsing universe he inhabited now. A universe he had conquered. Everything else was a side dish, the trimmings. But it was all good, as long as Sonny was beside him...at the movies, in the grocery store, looking for real estate for the business they'd now decided to put on hold until after the winter.

Sonny's fingers whispered through his hair, brushing his scalp. He let up, nuzzling against the side of Vinnie's head, whispering, "How come I can never get enough of you?"

Vinnie felt all his muscles tighten against Sonny. He started to arch.

Sonny said softly, "Now, now...."

But all Vinnie wanted to do was flip him, tear at his clothes, grab him, hold him, bite, kiss, lick, suck...he wanted so badly to be inside him. But he couldn't move. If he followed instinct, he'd dump them both off the narrow couch.

Helplessly, he tried to relax. Sonny was laughing at him. "I know you too well. You wanna get up, tackle me?"

Vinnie murmured, "Can't until the room stops spinning."

"But don't you want me...?" Sonny asked teasingly.

Vinnie grabbed at the back of Sonny's head, pulling him down hard for another kiss.

Sonny chuckled against him, tongue exploring again, soft still...even as Vinnie pulled him close, pressed down hard on the back of his neck. But Sonny seemed almost not to notice as his mouth pushed fleshily against Vinnie's, as he licked and kissed, sucking at Vinnie's lips, dominating in this arena...at least for now.

Vinnie tried to calm himself. Sonny kissed soft, then demanding, then soft again. But calm wasn't working, even though he was an adult, even though he should be able to control himself in a mature, dignified way. He was 31, not 17 anymore.

But then Sonny was Sonny. It didn't make any sense. He arched his body again, wanting to fly up, grab, hold, devour.

Sonny had him by the shoulders. "What would you do if I ever tied you down? You'd come unglued, I think," he said, grinning.

Vinnie squeezed his eyes shut. Sonny was holding him with his weight; it should've been all he could want and it was exhilarating. But all he could think was: *I could so easily take him.* Then, another, more evil voice: *Take him. Take him!*

He held him tighter, thinking if he rolled him, pushed him too hard, Sonny would fall, maybe hit his head on the coffee table. That would end worlds. So he stayed on his back, trying not to squirm, and Sonny kept kissing him on the mouth, the throat, the eyelids.

All their clothes were still in place. No flesh touched flesh except for lips on lips, hands in hair.

It was amazing to feel the zing in his veins, the surges of pleasure. The fire crackled and spat nearby. The wind blew against the window. And Sonny, in his pure and graceful way, kept loving him into the folds of the couch. Paradise.

Finally, Vinnie could not keep his one hand from delving low, underneath Sonny's waistband, palm encountering a ripe curve of ass, silken, taut but soft, pliant. His body surged.

He heard rain suddenly patter the window, a quick cloudburst.

Sonny groaned into his mouth as Vinnie pressed lightly, squeezed tight flesh. Sonny pushed up a little. "Son of a bitch." He got his knees under him and started to undo the top button of his jeans.

Vinnie laughed. "What're *you* doing? You think this is leading anywhere?"

Sonny slammed his chest against him, saying, "Nope." Laughing. "Just alleviating a little pressure."

"Pressure?" Vinnie chuckled. "Where?"

Sonny lifted up again, reached between them, grabbing Vinnie's fly...and more. "There." He kissed him again, deep with the tongue, and rubbed his hand against Vinnie's still clothed crotch. Vinnie felt like he was going to explode. Sonny's palm cupped his balls, held them, caressed them against the denim.

He wanted Sonny so bad he couldn't see straight. He pushed his body up. Sonny said, "You want more you're gonna have to make a trip upstairs for the lube. Otherwise..." Sonny crawled down Vinnie's chest, undid his jeans. He shoved them down, as Vinnie lifted up, underwear and all.

Vinnie felt himself exposed now and flushed hard not from embarrassment, but from outright, intense arousal. "Christ!" He inhaled through clenched teeth.

Sonny went down on his knees between Vinnie's legs, started to lick him delicately up the hard shaft. Vinnie felt the trickle of liquid leak from the aching head of his penis. Sonny licked him there, then softly began to suck just the tip, his tongue moving strong along the underside back and forth.

Vinnie whimpered. His hips moved and he pushed his buttocks down to hold back from thrusting. Sonny put both hands against his hipbones, holding him down, sucking a little harder. Then he let up, cupped, then laved

the tight balls. By the time he moved over his cock again, Vinnie was practically sobbing. Sonny moved his lips around him, then sucked deep. Vinnie was breathing hard, trying not to scream.

Sonny's mouth was like a hot, wet sheath. He suckled while his tongue moved, tantalizing him. He ached. He tingled. He surged. Sonny's mouth was so perfect, so loving. He could never recall having had it better....

He gasped. Sonny moved his hands from Vinnie's hips and brought them underneath him, encouraging him to thrust now, push up. Sonny was ready for him, Vinnie knew, but he still held back. Pleasure was racing, raging through him. Sonny's tongue teased him in just the right place. The stimulation was too much. Sonny's fingers clutched his buttocks, pulling him close and that was when Vinnie exploded. He felt the tip of his cock jut against the roof of Sonny's mouth. Sonny suckled as he pulsed and felt the explosion come again, push out of him, overflow onto the base of his penis. He cried out. "Sonny!" Grabbed his shoulders. Sonny licked him. His hands came up and petted him, soothing him. He kissed his balls again, then the tip of his still quivering cock, then his belly. He lifted his head, looked Vinnie straight in the eyes. He had the most sobering expression.

Sonny said, "I say..." his voice very serious, "let's do *this* for the rest of the day."

Vinnie sobbed and laughed at the same time, grabbing him, pulling him up, kissing him.

More rain tried to shatter the window. They moved against each other. Vinnie pushed Sonny's jeans off him, then started running his hands all over him, his back, his tight buttocks, the backs of his thighs. Finally, he managed to turn them until he could move down, treat Sonny to a little adventure, a little tongue-teasing of his own.

Sonny's cock was like candy to Vinnie. He slurped him up like he was dessert. And that was what Sonny was to him, dessert after dessert. Sweet, hard but yielding. Oh yes, he'd have him before the end of the day. He surely would. Even if he had to crawl upstairs for the lube. Because he knew Sonny wanted him that way, as badly as Vinnie wanted to be inside him. It was always like that: Vinnie on top. Vinnie knew Sonny would have it no other way, not because they refused to do it in reverse, but only because, so far, this was how they both preferred it. Vinnie inside that warmth, Sonny's muscles taking him in, encouraging, wanting the power of it, to feel the strength, to know he could take it and want it and crave it again and again. For Sonny, that was winning. For Vinnie, that was the gold. It was a perfect, perfect relationship.

Now he suckled his lover's honey-colored cock, the glistening hardness, the fervent heat of it. Sonny moved his hips back and forth. Vinnie gripped those wriggling hips, making Sonny go taut with need, making Sonny thrust up. If maybe once he had been, now he was no longer shy doing this. He was enthusiastic; he made noise; he sipped, he kissed, he nuzzled.

He heard Sonny gasp, moan, gasp again. Vinnie moved one hand down, caressing tight balls, then down further, teasing the crevice beyond, fingertip exploring, touching, pressing slightly in. Now he had him. Sonny was crying out then, coming hard, fast, furious. He arched his back. His knees bent. Vinnie held him, one hand around his cock, the other underneath him, and worked his mouth, pulling every last cry, last breath, last drop of nectar from the wild man beneath him.

When they could both sit up, they grabbed their drinks, downing them in loud gulps. Then Vinnie started laughing because they were both wearing only sweaters now, and nothing else.

The fire had banked again.

Vinnie grabbed the blanket from the back of the couch and shared it with Sonny, throwing it over both their laps.

Sonny was still laughing. “After all that, you’re still modest?”

“No. Cold. And I don’t want to get up and stoke the fire.”

They leaned against each other. Finally Sonny got up and went to the bathroom. Vinnie got up and built up the fire.

When Sonny came back, he had another blanket wrapped around him, and he had more orange drink in a pitcher. And bread. And peanut butter.

They were like two little boys, laughing and eating, falling against each other. The storm outside raged. Rain turned to hail. They didn’t care.

They fell together again on the couch, kissing for the longest time. The Vodka made Vinnie’s head spin. Or was it Sonny? Yeah, it was Sonny all right, doing things to him again. Doing impossible, magical, evil things.

They spread the fuzzy blanket out on the floor right next to the fire. The second blanket they shared, but it was discarded rapidly, and their sweaters had long since been tossed away. The afternoon had turned dark as night. Only the firelight let them see each other, skin bathed in the golden, flaming shadows.

Sonny covered Vinnie, who spread his legs invitingly. But at the last minute, Sonny rolled over, his lube-filled palm caressing Vinnie’s cock, then pressing him down as he lifted up, as he wrapped his thighs around Vinnie’s waist, locking his ankles together at Vinnie’s back.

Vinnie pushed against him and Sonny caught his breath, sighed, caught his breath again as Vinnie slid, fully hard and slick, past the tight muscle and into his body, hoping he stimulated him, hoping, then knowing by the look on Sonny’s face that, yes, he had the right angle. He had everything just right.

He pushed, let up, pushed again. Soft thrusts. Loving. God he loved this guy. How this could be possible, he didn’t know, but he just wanted him, the glaze-eyed man currently in his arms as well as the cocky, arrogant crown prince of Atlantic City...wanted him...over and over.

Sonny’s legs gripped tight. His head fell back and his eyes closed. He said softly, “Like that, Vinnie. Like that. Forever. Oh please.” The last two words were strained with pleasure.

Vinnie might make this last. Maybe. If he concentrated. But Sonny was so tight, the muscles so welcoming, enveloping.

Vinnie pushed into him and froze. He didn't move for a long time. Sonny's body relaxed around him. Sonny languidly opened his eyes, smiled. "You bastard."

The fire wickered. "Yeah," Vinnie breathed. He kept his hips still, leaned down, took Sonny's mouth deep, thrusting his tongue in. Sonny sucked hard at his tongue. They necked like that for a long time, with Vinnie deep inside him, not moving, just being together, joined.

When Vinnie let up for air, Sonny's warm brown eyes flickered in the coppery firelight. The sight rocked him to his core. Vinnie kissed them as Sonny blinked.

Sonny's legs moved against his lower back. His hips rocked. He moaned. Vinnie started to move again, luxuriously. Everything was damp, warm, wet. The darkness of the room blanketed them. The firelight caressed them.

Slowly for now, Vinnie moved. He pushed one hand between them and stroked Sonny's straining erection. It shuddered in his hand. He pushed his pelvis, then stroked up with his hand. Sonny tossed, writhed. His hands moved over Vinnie's shoulders, caressing. Vinnie kept moving, kept stroking. Slowly, the rhythm built. Built.

"Push harder," Sonny begged.

Vinnie leaned down, kissing him. "Insatiable?"

"With you," came the moaning response.

After awhile, when he was ready, Vinnie did just that. His fingers caressed Sonny's balls, then moved up and down harder on his cock as he thrust and thrust. He thought he heard shouts...or cries...or maybe just groans. It was both of them, voices mingling wordlessly, bodies joining, spilling over, coming hard, liquid, liquid inside, outside and everything overflowing as the shadows of the fire jerked over their embraced forms. Sonny hugged Vinnie tight with his arms and legs. Vinnie felt on fire, his cock spasming, jolting again and again inside the heat, the welcome that was Sonny.

Sonny reached between them and touched himself, hand bumping Vinnie's hand, slick, sure. Together, they rubbed his ejaculate into his skin like lotion. Vinnie's palm soothed, stroked until Sonny was still, silent, chest not quite heaving anymore. Sonny's legs relaxed, fell to either side of Vinnie's hips.

They parted. Vinnie rolled onto his side, his back to the fire. They kissed and held each other for a long, long time. Vinnie rubbed his hand against Sonny's hips, massaging, although he was quite sure he had not hurt him. As far as Sonny had told him in all this time, Vinnie had never hurt him. It was supposed to hurt, he thought, at least at first, but Sonny said no. Never. He'd said once, "When you want someone bad enough, I guess nothing hurts. It's all pure pleasure."

Vinnie felt a kind of affection at those words like nothing he'd ever felt before.

They dozed, embraced.

When the flames died down, Vinnie sat up and fixed the fire again. Sonny tugged at him, mumbling, and when Vinnie finished he turned back toward him, letting Sonny pull him back down, hold onto him. They covered themselves with the extra blanket again. Vinnie pressed his face into Sonny's neck and let him pet his hair since Sonny so often seemed to get something out of doing that. Then he ran his hands over Vinnie's back.

Vinnie breathed him in, cool spice, the dewy sweetness that was his skin.

Sonny pushed him onto his back and kissed him again, and again. His hand cupped Vinnie's cheek. "You're so beautiful," he whispered, brows narrowing perhaps in confusion at his own words. "So beautiful."

He had no voice to tell Sonny how much those words thrilled him.

After awhile they got up, went for water, food, the bathroom. Then they came back by the fire and collapsed in a pile again, arms around each other. They were chuckling. The afternoon was gone. It was evening now, and snowing.

For the rest of the evening, they kept themselves immersed in each other. Vinnie could not stop touching the splendid, slim/sharp heat that was Sonny. They lazily massaged, stroked, petted. Kissing never got old. It didn't matter how slowly the heat built again, or if it took hours.... What mattered was being together, holding, touching, pressing as much of themselves against the other as they could, resting sometimes, moving, then resting again. They touched each other, explored more intimately, more thoroughly over their entire bodies than anyone ever had before using hands, fingers, mouths, tongues.

The thought crossed Vinnie's mind. *Eventually we'll grow bored.* But that didn't happen. Instead, the only thing that stopped them was exhaustion. They fell asleep in each other's arms, unaware when the fire died down to mere sparks, orange and winking.

*

They did finally make it to bed in the middle of the cold night. When Vinnie woke the next morning, he felt Sonny's arm heavy on his waist. He carefully pulled out from under it. Sonny moved, made a protesting sound, then woke a little, suddenly grabbing at him.

Vinnie turned toward him, leaning against Sonny's chest. "I have to get up."

Sleepily, Sonny grabbed him tighter.

Vinnie leaned down and kissed him, then lifted up slightly. "You have to let go."

Sonny groaned wordlessly, pressing his face into Vinnie's chest.

Vinnie touched his cheek with one palm, kissed his forehead, laughing a little. He reached over Sonny's head and grabbed a pillow. "Here," he said. "Grab onto this."

"Fuck," Sonny muttered, but then he turned over, hugging the pillow, and seemed to fall right back to sleep.

Later, when Sonny didn't come down, Vinnie went upstairs to check on him. Sonny was still fast asleep clutching the pillow.

Vinnie sat down next to him. At the motion, Sonny woke. In a strangely childish gesture, he raised his arms. Vinnie leaned into them.

"It's late," Vinnie said.

"It's your fault. You fucking wore me out." His arms pulled Vinnie close until they were practically kissing.

"You wore *me* out," Vinnie protested.

"You're younger than me," Sonny argued.

"Well, it's Saturday."

"So?"

"Frank's coming over between noon and one."

"So?" Sonny repeated.

Vinnie just looked at him.

"What? You outta beer or something?"

Vinnie chuckled. "I don't care. You can stay in bed all day. I'll tell Frank you have a cold or something."

With difficulty, Vinnie extricated himself from Sonny's arms. Sonny was so clingy, but Vinnie realized he liked it.

Vinnie fixed an early lunch for two...just in case. As he was finishing putting away the bread, he turned at a sound. Sonny was standing in the doorway watching him, showered, smelling clean and good, fully dressed. He sat down at the dining room table and let Vinnie serve him.

Vinnie put the plate in front of him, then reached out on impulse and messed up Sonny's neatly combed hair.

"Hey!"

Vinnie grinned at him, sat down before his own plate, and took a big bite of his sandwich.

They ate silently, watching each other. Vinnie was hungry. Very hungry. But the sandwich was not filling him. He realized his hunger was deeper. And watching Sonny smooth his napkin, wipe his lips, he had the sudden urge to grab him and throw the plates off the table and hoist Sonny up on it, then have his way with him. Second course.

Hadn't they had enough? He looked away before his body had time to really respond to the image. But he felt his face flush.

Sonny cocked his head, watching him. Then he leaned forward on one elbow. "What's for dessert?" he asked slyly, suggestively.

Vinnie bent his head, trying not to look at him. "I didn't make any."

Sonny leaned back, then casually brushed invisible crumbs from his sweater. "You ever think about seeing other people?"

Vinnie turned abruptly in shock. "Wha...?"

Sonny's lips were pressed tight. His smiling brown eyes were dancing. His eyebrows rose playfully. "Well?"

Vinnie squinted at him. He didn't know what to say. He finally found his voice, then said, pretending casualness, "Have you?"

Sonny chuckled. "We just never talked about it."

"What?"

"You know. Commitment. That sort of thing," Sonny said, palm rubbing the tabletop.

Vinnie stood, gathering up his plate. "Well," he said, pretending nonchalance. "I thought it was pretty clear when we made a production out of throwing out the box of condoms after you moved in."

Sonny laughed. "Oh yeah. That was *so* romantic."

"But," Vinnie added, "If you have other ideas, I'll make sure I buy more on my next trip to the store. Can't be too careful these days."

Sonny got up and approached him. Vinnie was still holding his plate but Sonny sidestepped it, leaned in and kissed him. He pushed gently with his tongue, then pulled back. He lifted his hand and ran it through Vinnie's hair. "Not necessary," he whispered, his eyes all mischievous and alight. "Thanks for the lunch." He turned and walked toward the door, glancing out the window. "Oh look, there's Mr. McPike pulling up the drive. Good thing the snow's melting pretty quick. Perfect timing."

Sonny walked out of the kitchen and went to open the front door.

*

Vinnie overheard voices, Sonny asking if he had trouble driving in this nasty weather, if he'd eaten, if he wanted anything to drink. After all the complaints Sonny made about Frank, and occasional sarcastic outbursts to Frank's face which Frank usually took in good sport, he was almost always charming, always polite to him. Vinnie knew he did it for him. The thought warmed him.

He put the dishes in the dishwasher, turning once to see Sonny take Frank's coat and hang it by the door.

After all this time, Frank visiting almost every Saturday, he should've been used to it all by now. But he still found it a weird sight, Sonny with Frank's jacket, Sonny steering him politely to the couch.

Vinnie went to the fridge to get the beer. As he came into the living room he heard Frank ask Sonny, in a perfectly sober tone, how he was doing.

"Great. Really great. Except...Vinnie's kinda a..." He looked up as Vinnie approached, then lowered his voice and winked at Frank, "...a nag sometimes, but otherwise..."

Vinnie moved past Sonny's outstretched legs, kicking him. "Oops. Sorry." He kicked him again in the calf. He handed Frank a beer.

Sonny pulled his legs in, saying, "So how's the kid? The fam?" And he began the small talk that should've made them all roll their eyes but with Sonny it was different. It actually seemed like he was really interested in that stuff. Charisma just poured off him and it was intense, like a light you couldn't take your eyes from.

Vinnie had started another fire and it merrily burned, warming the whole room. The blankets had been laundered and folded by him that morning, and draped over the back of the couch.

There was a game on in a little while and they had planned to watch it.

Vinnie was so glad to see Frank. He missed working with him and told him that as often as he could. He stepped past Sonny and sat next to Frank. "Good ta see ya."

Frank smiled at Vinnie, then looked over at Sonny. "You guys are in a friendly mood today."

Sonny eyed him and shrugged. "Well, it's not like we've been up to much." He took a sip of his beer.

"Yea," Vinnie added. "It's been boring around here."

"Been spending a lot of time by the fire," Sonny added.

Vinnie gritted his teeth. He was determined that Sonny was not going to make him blush in front of Frank. Not today.

"Yeah, well that coldfront isn't shifting yet," Frank quipped. He eyed them.

"Nice," Vinnie replied, swigging on his bottle. "Sonny tried to do some yardwork after that storm yesterday. A waste of time."

"Yeah, and I had no help, either."

Vinnie scowled. "So what's up with you, Frank? Anything interesting going on at OCB?"

“We keep hearing about budget cuts and maybe being shut down, but it’s still up and running.”

“Daryl still on the outs?”

Frank laughed. “That weasel is trying to get his job back. He says he’s getting counseling and, well....”

“Yeah, well calling some old lady he doesn’t know and telling her what he’d like to do in her pants...that don’t go over well even in my world,” Sonny said chuckling.

“That guy was always twitchy,” Frank replied. “He pissed me off so bad that last day....” He stopped abruptly. Took a drink. Leaned back. “Let’s just say he said stuff about you, Vinnie, and I had sweet dreams of putting my hands around his throat for three weeks straight after.”

“What’d he say?” Sonny asked.

Frank said, “Nothin’ repeatable.”

Sonny said, “I knew guys like that. They were the ones who did the job but nothing more. They didn’t go deeper; they didn’t do their homework. They didn’t have imagination or ever think of alternative outcomes to their every day. They hated when they would come up against someone who planned ahead, saw ten different outcomes and made contingencies for all of ‘em. They’d badmouth you to compensate for insecurity.” He laughed. “Or little dicks.”

Vinnie stared at him. “You been reading more of those psychology books of yours?”

Sonny shrugged. “I just knew a lot of people like that.”

Vinnie glared. “Of course.”

Sonny looked blindsided, then confused. “Well, Vinnie, at least you have imagination.”

Vinnie felt his eyebrows rise in surprise. “Yeah, and so do you.”

Frank suppressed a smile.

Sonny turned to Vinnie. “Speaking of contingency plans, I ever tell you about my house I still have in the Catskills?”

Vinnie frowned.

“Oh yeah. I think I forgot.” Sonny pretended to examine a fingernail.

“But the IRS took everything...” Vinnie said.

“Dave and I inherited it in a trust from my parents. They can’t touch inheritance that’s already been taxed free and clear. The trust is sealed. The upkeep is all from the trust. Dave’s gone now, so it’s all mine....”

“You have a house...?”

Frank leaned forward. “Maybe I oughtta leave you two alone?”

Vinnie didn’t look at him, but his hand shot out, blocking Frank. “Stay.”

“Well it was an easy slip up, forgetting to tell you,” Sonny quipped. “I hardly ever go there.”

Vinnie let out a sound of exasperation.

“Sorry,” Sonny said sarcastically.

Vinnie shut up. But he was definitely going to talk to him about it later. Sonny had let him believe he had nowhere else to go after prison. What else hadn’t Sonny told him? And why keep secrets?

He felt his mood shift and consciously ignored it. They still had the rest of the afternoon. And he was going to enjoy Frank’s company.

The game came on and they got a little drunk.

Vinnie noticed Sonny giving him surreptitious looks all afternoon, but he ignored them.

Later, when he went into the kitchen to throw away some bottles, he turned from the trash.

Sonny was standing there staring at him. “What?”

Vinnie turned away, went to the fridge.

Sonny came closer. “So you’re not talking to me?”

Vinnie frowned. He realized what Sonny said was true. He was ignoring him. “That was a hell of a thing to throw into the conversation out of the blue. Are you trying to make me feel like a dupe?”

Sonny frowned. “No.” He said it softly.

Vinnie sucked on the inside of his lower lip. “I don’t understand.” He looked away.

“Vinnie, look at me.”

Vinnie met those shifting but warm eyes.

“You teased, I took the bait. You don’t think I have contingency plans? Huh? You think it’s easy for me to trust anything? Anyone? Now?” He blinked hard.

“Well then what’s all this? You don’t trust me?” Vinnie asked, shaking his head.

“Yeah, but...”

“But...what?” He tried not to sound harsh, but he was, he realized, rather pissed, and with Frank right in the next room, this was awkward as hell.

Sonny let his shoulders slump. “Okay. I...I get it. You’re pissed. What do you want to know? I do have other money. Did you think I just paid my lawyer with air? Did you think I wouldn’t have off-shore accounts no one ever heard of?”

Vinnie’s mouth dropped open. He tried to keep the betrayal off his face.

“Vinnie.” Sonny came closer. Vinnie backed up. “I’ll tell you everything. I’ll give it all to you. Hell, I don’t want any of it!” His hands were fists.

Vinnie kept thinking of Frank in the other room. He hissed, “You think that’s what I want? Your money?”

Sonny was shaking his head. He winced. “I was gonna tell you...”

“When?”

Sonny came closer, reached out. “Vinnie, don’t be mad. Please....”

Vinnie smacked his hand down. “Don’t!”

Sonny grabbed it hard, held on. “Don’t *you* push me away!”

Vinnie twisted, backed up another step, felt the counter against his backside.

“Vinnie, listen to me! We never even talked...talked about anything permanent.”

Vinnie looked at him in disbelief. “Maybe not in words....”

“Okay, but listen...”

Vinnie looked away.

Sonny grabbed his chin, turned his face back. “Listen! It’s us. Okay? I swear! I don’t want anything else. But just in case things weren’t, you know, rational, I had options. Sometimes, Vinnie, I don’t know my own mind.”

“Tell me about it,” he said, very close to Sonny’s face.

Sonny grunted in frustration. He shook his head. Then he stared intently at Vinnie, fist still around Vinnie's wrist, hand still on his face. "I know one thing."

Vinnie glared. "Yeah?" he asked sarcastically.

Sonny blinked twice, a little too hard, then said, "I know I love you." Then he leaned in, kissing him soft, so soft, then harder....

And Frank walked in.

Sonny pulled back. Vinnie took a sharp breath.

Frank said, "Just looking for some water. Don't mind me."

Sonny moved away quickly. He said, before Vinnie could even move, "I'm going for a walk." He went to the front door, grabbed his jacket and was out in a flash.

Vinnie turned hot eyes on Frank.

Frank said, "So, sportshoes, what you got for snacks around here?"

Vinnie took a shaky breath, only then realizing he'd been holding it. "Yeah. Chips. Dip. We got apples."

"Yeah. Good." Frank frowned at him. "You okay, kiddo?" Vinnie realized he was scowling and puffing air in anger.

Vinnie glanced away. Grabbed the chips and a bowl. "Fine. It's just he can be such a bastard sometimes."

"Uh, hello...it's a Steelgrave. You surprised?"

Vinnie rolled his eyes. Frank rarely said anything negative about Sonny anymore...at least in his presence.

"Oh. Is it the house thing?" Frank asked nonchalantly. "You know I'm not gonna tell anyone. He's not my case anymore."

Vinnie nodded. "C'mon. Let's go watch the rest of the game."

"He's gonna freeze his ass off out there."

"Good," Vinnie said.

About fifteen minutes later, they heard Sonny come back, close the door. The game was almost over but it looked like it might be going into overtime.

Sonny sat down to watch, but this time in the chair. He tapped his shoes on the floor. Drummed his fingers on his knees. He rooted loudly for home advantage, but his eyes kept going to Vinnie, and Vinnie felt himself grow hot under the gaze.

Frank was astute and polite. When the game ended, he made excuses that he had promised Drake he'd be home for dinner.

"But I thought we were having dinner," Vinnie protested.

"You whine worse than my son." Frank came forward and hugged him. "Two weeks," he said. The following Saturday he'd promised Drake the zoo. "Besides, the weather's turning again, and I don't want to drive home in complete darkness when it hits."

Vinnie hugged him back. "Okay. Thanks for coming. Your birthday's coming up. Let's celebrate with a steak dinner or something."

"You got it, sport." Frank grinned at him. Then he was out the door.

When Vinnie closed it, he felt Sonny's eyes on him again. He turned, rubbing his forehead with his palm.

Sonny got up from his chair. He walked over to him. "I'm sorry," he said softly.

Vinnie rolled his eyes, scowling.

"I'm sorry," he said again, grabbing his shoulders, pushing him back against the door, then pushing his body up against him. "I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry..." And he kissed him. Again and again.

Quite quickly, Vinnie got lost in his mind, in the feel of Sonny's mouth, his slightly beer-scented breath, the pressure of his body. Oh yeah, he was lost. Maybe he was in the fucking Catskills now. He didn't care. Finally, he felt his arms come up, reach around Sonny's firm, compact body. He grabbed him hard. Sonny melted against him.

After awhile, Sonny said, "It's too early to go to bed. Ya wanna go out for dinner?"

"In this weather?"

"Yeah."

So they put on their warmest jackets and went for Chinese, flirting over wontons and lo mien.

Back home, Vinnie dressed as usual for bed, all the while knowing they were far from done with each other for the night.

Vinnie got in bed and propped himself on a pillow, flipping channels on the TV. A few minutes later, Sonny came in, turned off the TV and got into bed. He climbed right on top of Vinnie, grabbing the remote and

throwing it on the floor. He put his hands on either side of Vinnie's face. "I want you to understand something," he said.

Vinnie loved the weight, wanted to grab him, but he remained still, watching that enigmatic face, the flickering playful eyes that showed every emotion in split seconds. Sonny was mercurial, like trying to hold onto lightning.

First the eyes smiled. Then a sudden flash of something...pain?...crossed them. Then an inward distance. "I never wanted to hurt you," he said carefully.

"I wasn't hurt," Vinnie argued, but he kept his tone level.

"I couldn't even go to the house. I was afraid to go there alone...it didn't feel safe. Maybe I'd be followed. I blocked it from my mind but it was always there...a...a net. And my accounts. Do you think I dare draw on them until I'm off parole, until I'm sure I'm not being watched? Who's waiting in the wings to sue me next, huh?"

"Paranoid much?" Vinnie asked.

Now the eyes looked hurt. "You know damn well..."

Vinnie just stared at him.

Sonny sat up a little, lowered his hands to Vinnie's shoulders. Sonny started to speak again. "I...I...Vinnie..." And he lost his voice.

Vinnie couldn't tell now what Sonny might've been about to say. He watched him chew his lower lip and stare at a spot just over Vinnie's head. Finally, Vinnie said, "What? Just...what, Sonny?"

"I just can't tell you everything."

"There's more?"

"No. No more houses, I mean. I mean if I tell you...if...I tell you what...what's..." He stopped again. He started to slide back, the hems of his shorts riding up his tanned, muscular thighs.

Vinnie caught him at the hips. "What are you talking about?"

Despite the firm grip, Sonny rolled to the side. He still faced Vinnie, but he wasn't looking at him. "I already gave you such a hard time last year," he almost whispered.

"Yeah, and I guess I deserved a bit of that."

Sonny punched him on the arm. "Shut up. I don't mean that. I'm not trying to be vindictive. Not anymore. It's about...about when I black out, when I...when I..."

“What is about that?” Now Vinnie was truly perplexed. He turned more to face Sonny. Sonny was curling his hands to his chest. His face slid into the pillow. “Hey. Answer me.”

“The dreams....”

Vinnie leaned up on his elbow. “You never told me you remembered them.”

“It doesn’t mean anything,” Sonny said softly.

“What doesn’t mean anything? Quit talking riddles!”

“I’m just outta my mind...hitting you...hitting you....” He swallowed hard. “Forget it, okay?”

Vinnie grabbed his shoulders. “Sonny, look at me. Talk to me! Come on.”

Sonny shook his head, but Vinnie made him look at him. Vinnie said, “So you’re beating me to a pulp in your dreams. Sounds healthy.”

Sonny gave him a disgusted look. “Yeah. Right. And the door comes down.” He took a hard breath. “And every cop in the place has your face. Every last one.” He took a hard breath again. “It’s not your fault. I dream it because...because I love you so damn much and it’s my biggest fear...that I love you and you do this thing to me, you take me down. You take me down.” His voice broke a little. His eyes looked up. He stared at Vinnie.

All Vinnie could do was nod. “Yeah. Well. That’s what happened.”

“Well, I can’t escape it, right? Not in the dream. It feels like I’m dying. I want to die. Then you come...and you save me. And I think I can’t do this. Not again. And I look up and all the faces around us are you, some with guns, some with batons, all waiting for their turn to take me.” Sonny tried to look down.

Vinnie grabbed his chin. “You think I don’t love you.” It wasn’t a question.

“No. I never said that.”

“Christ.” Vinnie’s mind raced. The panic attacks. The first time when the cops had knocked down their front door and Sonny had flashed back, passed out, ended up in the hospital. Did he think for even a second that Vinnie had set it up?

As if reading his mind, Sonny said, “It’s not rational. It’s not that I don’t think you love me...after everything...Jesus, after yesterday... last night. But Vinnie...Vinnie....” His voice faded. He whispered his name one more time.

Vinnie wrapped an arm over Sonny’s shoulder. “But I didn’t take you down. I didn’t. I refused to testify...”

“Of course you always come to save me. But I’m...afraid,” Sonny whispered. It was a hard admission for him, Vinnie knew. Then, voice so low Vinnie could barely hear him, “I’m terrified of losing you...that this is all...somehow not...not real. I don’t win against you, Vinnie. In every fight we ever had, I never have.”

“Sonny, that’s your old world talking. This isn’t about winning!”

“I *know* that! I said it wasn’t rational. But you said it. I am paranoid. So I never said anything about the house. And it wasn’t to hurt you.”

Vinnie tried to let all the crazy thoughts flying through his mind settle. As calmly as he could, he said, “I get it. You needed to know you had a place of your own you could go...somewhere safe if it came to that.”

“It’s not that I don’t feel safe here...” Sonny tried to explain.

“I know. But back in Atlantic City, the last month we were together, you were never safe, not even in my arms. When you realized that, it must’ve been... How can I blame you now?”

“But I do trust you...now,” Sonny said.

“But you just told me, you can’t win against me.” Vinnie put his arm further over Sonny, then squeezed his other arm underneath him. “I can hold you like this. Tight.” He felt Sonny fall into him, go limp. “And you still can’t win.” Sonny lay very still. “So you give in.”

“Is that what I do?”

“Yep. That’s what you do.”

Sonny gave a painful laugh. “But I don’t want to fight you. Not anymore. Not for a long, long time.”

“Yeah? You don’t want to try to take me? Not even a little?” At the question, Sonny turned his head slightly. Vinnie felt the slim body surge against him, an interesting reaction although Sonny might not even have been conscious of it.

Sonny kissed him lightly on the lips. “Take you?” He laughed. “You’d have me on my back in five seconds. Maybe less.”

Vinnie chuckled. “If you ever said no, I’d stop.”

“But I don’t want you to stop.”

He thought about Sonny strutting down Casino Boulevard, that familiar tilt to his head, a glint in his eyes as he would watch the white stretch limo pull up, the heavies get out, and Sonny giving the orders and all those big guys obeying, backing down to the power of Steelgrave, the charisma, the brilliance. “But is it a problem?” he asked. “You were all-powerful for so many years in your world. Then I come along.”

“It’s...it’s weird, yeah. But I like it.” Sonny’s arms went around him.

“But Mr. Steelgrave,” he said teasingly. “I don’t wanna take you down. And if we argue or anything now, that’s just normal life. It’s not about win or lose. It’s just being human.” Vinnie started to stroke his back.

Sonny nodded against his chest.

“And you don’t think you can take me?”

“Not a chance.”

“But don’t you think maybe it would be fun just trying?”

Sonny lifted his head. “Maybe.” He kissed him.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, ‘cause either way it ends up, I win.” He gave him a big grin.

Vinnie chuckled. “You’re such a fucking brat.” He kissed him this time, long, deep, until Sonny squirmed against him.

They kissed for a long time, relaxed. Vinnie loved kissing him. He could do just that all night. Finally they progressed to petting, stroking. They lost their shorts quite quickly after that, and their shirts. It was so good to feel Sonny against him. Simply, he wanted it to last forever. Sonny’s body was tight and fiery. Silken. Smoldering. It turned him on like nothing else ever had. His kisses communicated a molten spirit, along with a kind of royal entitlement, a surge of purity Vinnie had never tasted. In a thousand years, he probably could never have explained this feeling, not completely, not thoroughly, not to anyone. He wanted to explain it to Sonny, but his body did that. He didn’t need words with Sonny. Not all the time, anyway.

Now his hands were all over Sonny’s ass. He loved cupping the firm but full roundness. It was slim and tight, the skin a slightly paler bronze than the rest of him. And Sonny’s cock was perfection in itself, flushed dark, strong, hard. The perfect size. Vinnie had always thought Sonny’s body was exceptional, even before they’d become lovers and Vinnie had glimpsed him changing in the gym. He’d had a few more pounds back then but...exceptional. He stroked Sonny’s taut belly, his nipples, firm and pale pink/brown. Finally, he reached up and grabbed the lube. He palmed a good amount.

Sonny, grinning, rolled onto his back. Vinnie, grinning, acted as if he was putting his hand between Sonny’s legs. At the last second, his palm encased Sonny’s cock. His free arm pushed underneath his shoulders and pulled him over on top of him. He spread his legs, stroking Sonny’s hardness between them and down as Vinnie lifted his hips, bent his knees, pulled his legs up. Sonny fell forward a little, his cock going into the cleft. Vinnie whispered, “Go easy on me, Steelgrave. I’m a virgin.” He laughed. He was deliberately using that powerful name, now, trying to get Sonny to let loose a little.

Sonny frowned, took a sharp breath. “Wh...what?”

Vinnie said softly, “Don’t go all coy on me. You brought Atlantic City to its knees. Surely I’m no contest compared to that.”

“You’re not on your knees,” Sonny parried wickedly.

“Because I want to look at you,” Vinnie replied.

Sonny pushed. “Vinnie...I...Oh!”

Vinnie felt his breath expel hard. Sonny was hot and slick. He liked it. He wanted to feel it even more, the intimacy. He grabbed his knees, tilted up and Sonny was in him. It was sudden, sharp. It was a little raw. But it was fine. Vinnie shuddered. “Christ.”

Sonny held his long legs up, apart, then draped them over his shoulders. And then Vinnie felt the depth of it, the hot tingling all over, and he saw white flashes and he thought, *Oh don’t stop. Don’t ever stop.*

Sonny was over him, nuzzling him, cussing. That meant, of course, he was pretty darn content. “Vinnie, you’re so...oh god...you’re so...” Of course he couldn’t say anything coherent. Neither could Vinnie when he was inside Sonny.

Vinnie’s cock was rock hard, throbbing. It bobbed, brushing up against Sonny’s belly, then smacking his own belly, then bobbing up again. Sonny’s pelvis brushed against his balls as he thrust. Vinnie’s breathing grew rapid. He felt on the edge completely, and completely possessed. It was...grand.

Sonny’s hand touched him, stroked up his erection, thumb rubbing the moist tip. Vinnie bucked. Sonny gripped him harder, milked him. There was no time to think as the pleasure built and didn’t stop. Vinnie came explosively, crying out. Sonny groaned a second later, and Vinnie could feel him pumping into him, hot, smooth, wet. Sonny’s cock pulsed over and over inside him. His muscles contracted at the heightened pleasure of it, even as he was still coming.

Sonny collapsed on top of him. He was cussing softer now. Vinnie laughed as his legs fell and stretched out, and Sonny sort of rolled away from him. Vinnie grabbed him, held him, kissed him.

In the sudden quiet, as their breathing returned to normal, they could hear wind and rain pounding the windows again. The night grew colder.

Vinnie drew the blankets up practically over their heads. Underneath, Sonny whispered, “I’m not surprised.”

“Huh?”

“That you were a fucking virgin,” he said wickedly. “Always in that good boy role of yours.” He kissed him hard. But Vinnie was laughing so the kiss went awry.

“I swear,” Vinnie said between chuckles. “It’s God’s honest truth.” He didn’t bring up the fact that so was Sonny the first time he took him. But it had become a joke with them...that neither had ever been with a guy

before each other. That maybe they didn't know what they were doing when, actually, they were both simply and naturally attuned to each other.

As for the actual physical lovemaking act--intercourse between two men--it was no mystery to Vinnie after a year and a half in the pen. And Sonny said he'd been around enough homophobes in his life to learn, in detail, what exactly they protested against a little too much.

Sonny just sighed and started nibbling Vinnie's neck. They fell asleep as the night sky turned white, and the rain turned to snow.

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