

(Sonny/Vinnie, slash, Wiseguy, 6916 words)

THE END OF EVERYTHING

by

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No world without you...

The pre-bachelor party started the night before the real thing. Sonny had had the ballroom lavishly decorated in his own hotel. All the guys who worked for him were invited; even the casino employees who had little or nothing to do with Sonny's underworld "business" were there. The catering was from outside, expensive and delicious. The drinks were free and copiously flowing. The entertainment was a soft rock band. The girls who attended were "not nice." And one of the best things about it...Patrice wasn't there.

Ever since Vinnie had talked with Frank he had been depressed. Frank had told him not to tell Sonny about the Patrice-planned hit slated to take place at Sonny's actual bachelor party in the Bronx the following evening.

But Vinnie had felt wrong about that from the very beginning. An internal, sharp pain in the region of his heart had kept him up much of the previous night. He had come to love Sonny very much and he was just so tired of all the lies and games now, all the playing. And this wasn't just any lie. This was about Sonny's very life. He was betraying Sonny to get to Patrice. And why? Because he was betraying Sonny in the first place, from day one. All to bring down the Atlantic City mob. If Patrice went with it, New York would fall, too. It was a major drama. All in the name of justice and right for the good of "the people."

He knew that.

But he also knew Sonny. Knew him and loved him better now than he'd ever thought he might. The human Sonny. The friend Sonny. The brother Sonny. Did love trump justice? Not on the books, it didn't. Never. No one cared about feelings when they were dealing with criminals. You lock them up, throw away the key. That was that. You didn't think about it anymore. It was what the public wanted. No matter that they might be re-released back on the streets some day, worse than ever. It was today that mattered. With the criminal gone, people breathed easier. It was such a damned illusion!

There was little Vinnie could do about any of it. He had made plans for Sonny's soft fall. That was it. He kept up the lies. And he kept up the loyal, wiseguy façade.

His heart grew heavier.

He had been in no mood for a party, but he went. Sonny was his best friend now. He wanted to support him in everything, even this marriage of convenience.

He stood now, in the middle of a throng of black suits and casino uniforms, people eating, chatting, talking. Girls in bikinis were dancing on little stages all around the room and guys were loving it, tipping them politely (well, the night was still young) and eating hearty of caviar and shrimp and prime rib and chocolate mousse.

Vinnie wore his polite, “sweet” face. He greeted people nicely, smoothly, but he stood off to the side and just watched for awhile.

Dressed in a gray suit, white shirt, silver tie, Sonny made his rounds as always. He was light on his feet, slim, shining, his face and hair bronze in the ballroom light. Wherever he went he brought people into his golden circle, dragging them along in his wake as if he were a magnet and they the steel. He laughed and joked with everyone equally, making people smile, making people feel special. It was how Sonny got his way. He was open, gregarious, commanding, and empathic. Sonny made them all feel as if they mattered. And they did. All of them. . As long as Sonny could use them. It was the shrewd Sonny that was hidden now. But Vinnie knew him, too, just as well. And he wondered if he himself had fallen for a charm that meant nothing to the man, if he loved a guy who really couldn't love back, but was as astute at pretending as Vinnie was.

Strangely, he felt left out, useless, tired and trapped.

Maybe everything that had happened in the past year was all in Vinnie's mind. Maybe all their good times, the growing closeness, the heat between them neither of them spoke of but both seemed to crave was some kind of delusion. Sometimes Vinnie wanted it to be a delusion to assuage the guilt within him every time he lied to Sonny, every secret time he met with Frank.

Now he watched Sonny be easy with his affection with everyone, anyone. He watched Sonny touch people, bring them into his glow. Didn't Sonny do that with him all the time? Why did Vinnie ever think he was special?

But he knew why. Sonny had chosen him. Vinnie was Sonny's right hand now. That was a fact that could not be dismissed. And Sonny talked to him with such affection these days, touching him often. Sonny said words like “we” instead of “I” all the time with Vinnie. *We don't like that, do we, Vinnie? Or, We're in this together, right?*

And there was a kind of rapturous warmth between them that they could not deny. Just being around Sonny was a thrill. Vinnie's body got used to the quick-tingle jolts he felt when Sonny laid a hand on his arm, or touched his back and lingered there almost like a caress. Sonny would smile then, soft and friendly, and give Vinnie a look that in that one

instant erased all the darkneses, cancelled out “the mob,” and sent a thousand wings fluttering in Vinnie’s stomach.

How many times had that happened? And Sonny saying, quietly, “You and me, huh?” Then he’d casually glance down, his hand moving low to the small of Vinnie’s back, warm, warmer...then finally coming away and they would both turn to gaze at either side of the room or office or conference hall as if neither one knew what to do next, or where this was leading. But it felt good. It always felt so good.

Vinnie’s eyes misted.

He loved seeing Sonny seemingly happy, in his element. He kept thinking over the past few days, whenever he and Sonny met eyes, *Nothing bad can happen. I won’t let it.* But then he realized he didn’t know how to ensure that despite his plan to stop Patrice and make Sonny look like the victim. He didn’t know anything for sure anymore. And he knew that even if everything went according to his plan, the day after tomorrow Vinnie would never see him again. Vinnie would be leaving for another job. He would disappear, cover intact, and be forced to try to never think of the man again.

It was hard to contemplate. Sonny and he would separate. Their friendship would end. Sonny would never know the truth of Vinnie’s betrayal, Vinnie’s job, or Vinnie’s feelings. Never.

The sharpness in Vinnie’s chest intensified. He couldn’t quite remember ever feeling this way about anyone, let alone another guy.

He watched Sonny laugh easily, clap a guy’s back, accept a drink. Then, suddenly, Sonny swiveled around, eyes searching the crowd. Vinnie stood stock still. A warmth grew in him. He knew what those eyes were looking for. He waited.

When Sonny found him, Vinnie automatically smiled, started to raise his drink to him from across the room. But Sonny’s smile fell so abruptly that Vinnie startled. Then Sonny’s eyes narrowed to slits. He watched Vinnie with the strangest look, like the blood had run out of his face, like he was seeing a ghost.

Vinnie’s throat tightened. His eyebrows narrowed.

Sonny’s face got stonier and stonier. The people around him seemed to sense the sudden freeze and turned away politely. Then the noise seemed to diminish and it was just the two of them across forty feet of a crowded room staring. Staring.

Sonny’s mouth parted as if he was letting out an angry breath. In that look was every sorrow, every grief, every frustration that Vinnie could imagine in the man...and more.

That was when Vinnie knew Sonny knew about the hit.

Sonny knew!

And it had been someone other than Vinnie who had told him.

Vinnie's betrayal of Sonny took on a new dimension. There were layers upon layers of deceit, of lies, but this...this was new. Suddenly revealed. Vinnie knew the end was near, but he didn't know it would include this. Sonny's new knowledge of him. A revelation. He never wanted Sonny to find out. That had been all the comfort he had had. But now Sonny knew. Even if he had the facts wrong, Sonny knew that Vinnie was not forthcoming, not who he pretended to be.

Vinnie's own mouth dropped open in outright surprise. His hands started to shake. He almost dropped his drink.

The thought crossed his mind: *I need to call the Lifeguard NOW!*

At that moment, Sonny turned away, dismissing him. Vinnie couldn't move for a few seconds, could only watch as his own shock ran over him with chilled fingers and Sonny made some gestures, then strode toward the door. People parted to make way for him. Then he was gone.

Vinnie realized he wasn't breathing. He took a breath, steadied himself, put down his drink, then without thinking he headed for the exit.

This was wrong. Wrong. Wrong.

He didn't know what he could do, what he was even doing right now in going after Sonny. But he had to talk to him. Talk and get him to listen. It was all he wanted, all he thought about in this moment. He only hoped his instincts would give him enough on the spot know-how to put things right.

If he was thinking right, he should've run away. Called Uncle Mike. Pulled out. *It's "breakfast" time at the Royal Diamond. Time to die.* It wasn't safe now. He wasn't safe. If he was thinking normally, he would have just disappeared. Vanished without a trace. And Sonny's bachelor party would still occur and arrests would still be made. Frank and the OCB had enough evidence to get Patrice. Vinnie didn't need to be there to ensure that.

But Vinnie wasn't thinking like a Fed anymore. All he was concerned about was getting Sonny to understand. To understand, dammit! Vinnie was protecting him. Vinnie was *helping* him. At least, that's what he tried to tell himself.

Chasing Sonny down a long hall was never how he predicted this party to end. His silk suit whispered against his legs as he ran; his shiny leather shoes hit the soft maroon carpet lightly but still with enough sound to alert the other man at the far end. The light was soft and yellowish, the walls buttery-colored, the carpet red. All the colors narrowed

to a dark gray silhouette at the far end, like a shadow that had not found its dark center yet.

In his silvery stance, Sonny turned. Vinnie felt like he was flying toward him, pleading, “Wait...Sonny...wait!”

At the same time, Sonny turned away saying loudly and with a hiss, “Stay away from me!” The voice was menacing. It went through Vinnie like a knife.

“Please...” He was breathing a little harder now, slowing down as Sonny was about to turn the corner.

“Stay away or I’ll kill you!”

“Sonny, listen...”

Sonny spun, facing him, glaring just past his head. “Why didn’t you tell me about the hit? Were you gonna do it yourself? Huh? Why not now?” He gestured around them. “No one’s around. No one would ever know. Pop. I’m gone.”

“God no!” Vinnie wanted so badly to reach out. “No...that’s not the way...” But before Vinnie could finish Sonny lurched forward, hauled off and swung at him. Vinnie ducked. Uncharacteristically, since Sonny was really quite a good boxer, Sonny had over-estimated his own strength, his balance --or maybe he’d just had too much to drink-- and when he hit air his weight lurched forward and he fell...straight into Vinnie.

Vinnie caught him under the shoulders as Sonny’s hands came up, scrabbling for balance at Vinnie’s waist. Vinnie tensed for a split second, expecting the man to butt him, to try to deliver more blows, even as he was saying, desperately, over and over, “Let me explain. Let me explain.”

He was sure Sonny would try anything to hurt him now, kick, bite, grab, shake. He tensed for the expected onslaught.

Instead, Sonny did nothing. Went limp. His head bowed against Vinnie’s chest. Softly, “You’d choose Pat over me?”

Jesus! How could Sonny be so open, so vulnerable still...even now? What if he had chosen Pat? What if he was here to kill him? For what Vinnie had done, anything short of death was completely undeserved. But it gave him the moment he needed, and it told him how truly deep Sonny’s feelings went.

“Never, Sonny. I hate that guy. I’m trying to save you from him.” For several seconds, as Vinnie held him up, Sonny did not move. His breaths were anguished, but subdued. Then he lifted his head, his weight growing even heavier in Vinnie’s arms, and met Vinnie’s eyes. Vinnie stared at him, felt himself rock back under that dark stare, lose

focus, lose balance. There was a door behind him. His back pressed against it as Sonny's head came forward, as Sonny's lips met his, as the whole world seemed to whirl into a glittering unreality.

Vinnie had wondered, suspected, wanted... but he did not think Sonny would do *this*. Especially not now.

The softness of those lips seemed to press against his whole body. His muscles became taut and liquid at the same time. And those lips massaged his, kept caressing until Vinnie moved his mouth, opened it very slightly, and kissed him back.

Strangely, so strangely, Sonny was gentle, actually reverent.

Finally Sonny moved back. His brows were narrowed. His eyes swimming. His mouth drawn down. He reached up briefly, touched the side of Vinnie's head. Then he said, very huskily, "This... This is *not* negotiable!"

Vinnie glanced nervously down the hall but no one was in sight. Under his breath, he replied, "I know." His lips still tingled with that astounding kiss. His heart, well, his heart skipped, then shuddered, a sudden bewildered wreck.

Reaching behind him with one hand for the doorknob, and pulling Sonny closer with the other, Vinnie got the door open. He yanked Sonny into the darkened room. Sonny kicked the door shut without letting go of Vinnie. Vinnie leaned toward him, put his head against Sonny's shoulder with his mouth almost but not quite touching Sonny's neck. He felt Sonny's body quiver against him. Then he said soft, low, "Sonny, *Jesus*, I...I can explain."

Sonny grabbed him tighter. "Fuck, Vincent. What the hell game are you playing?"

"Okay," Vinnie said softly, holding him tight. "I'll tell you." And in that moment he'd never wanted anyone more in his life. In that intensity he wanted Sonny to know everything, all of it, even if it might get him killed. Even if it meant the end of his career. Because Sonny deserved it. Sonny wasn't playing with Vinnie like he did with the others. Sonny wasn't just toying with him. Sonny had made him his right hand. Sonny had made him his brother.

Now his lips touched Sonny's neck. He felt him tense under the light kiss. "I'll tell you everything."

In a whisper, "It's you and me, Vinnie. You and me. No. More. Lies." Sonny's arms around him loosened just a little.

Vinnie sighed, breathing against the pulse, the skin, the heat of him. "I promise."

"So you *did* lie before."

“Yes.”

“But you’re not gonna lie now.”

“No.”

Sonny sighed softly. “Why should I believe you’re gonna tell me the truth now?”

“Because you’re going to hate it.” Vinnie brought his hand up, pulled back. He caught Sonny’s chin, fingers stroking his cheek and added, “Because you’re gonna hate me.” He brought their lips together again. And that sealed it.

Sonny grasped him harder around the waist, pressing himself into him.

The desperate need that filled his body came on so quickly. Fire ran through his blood. It was Sonny and this was the reaction. Expected, but not. Intense, but so much more. He could not remember ever feeling this way before. An unquiet heat. An urge to clasp, grab, move fast. He wanted to push Sonny, tug Sonny, cover Sonny, hold Sonny. He wanted to feel his pulse, feel the surge, touch him everywhere. The odd thing was, he’d never gone for a guy before. Now there was nothing else in the world that mattered to him *but* this guy.

Trying to control himself, he pulled back. He gasped out, “We have to talk.”

Sonny gave him a look that was a cross between a grimace and a wounded child.

Vinnie flattened his lips in empathy. This was going to be very very bad. “Sonny...”

Sonny blinked, frowned. “Maybe I don’t wanna talk.”

Vinnie could only shake his head.

Sonny’s body shuddered again. But he pulled back, saying in a scratchy voice, “I don’t want to hate you, Vinnie.” He turned away, shaking his head. “Don’t make me hate you.” He pulled completely away from Vinnie’s grasp, paced a couple steps away, his back to Vinnie, then turned and paced back. He came up along Vinnie’s side. His hand reached out to Vinnie’s shoulder, then to his hair. He stroked it once, then walked two more steps away.

As Vinnie turned to watch him, he saw the man, whose back was to him now, hunch into himself, cross his arms.

“Sonny...I...I’m a....”

“Stop!” Sonny’s voice came sharp, sudden. Then he moved forward. There was a long table in the middle of the room. He uncrossed his arms, placing his hands flat on the surface, leaning into it. “I changed my mind. I don’t want to know.”

Vinnie stood very still, arms limp at his side. “You have to know. You have to know what’s happening.”

“Don’t do this to me, Vinnie.”

“It’s already done. Sonny, I...”

“Please don’t!”

“...am a Federal agent.”

Sonny let out a loud breath. He did not look at Vinnie. Slowly, he lowered himself into one of the many black chairs that surrounded the conference table. His elbows bent. His hands raised. He lowered his head into his open palms. And then, quite abruptly, he started laughing. He said, between breaths, “My god, Vinnie. Is that all?” He laughed again, louder. “Well, that’s a relief!”

Shocked at the response, Vinnie couldn’t even breathe. Sonny was...laughing.
Laughing?

Through the dim shadows of the room, slowly Vinnie approached. Sonny’s breaths were broken, shaky, even as he laughed. Vinnie sat in the chair next to him, lowered his head and waited.

Suddenly, Sonny said, very quietly, “In two days I’m getting married.”

“What?” Confused, Vinnie found himself floundering. “Well...yeah...”

Sonny took a breath. “Patrice was never going to be my best man.”

Vinnie waited.

Softly, “You were.”

Vinnie swallowed hard. “I don’t....”

“Shh! Let me finish!”

Vinnie took a deep breath. Held it.

“Now...well...you can’t be my best man anymore.” Sonny took his hands away from his face. He wasn’t laughing now. “Patrice I was going to kill. But you...now...well...” He looked up. “You I can’t kill.”

Vinnie let his breath out slowly, confused.

“I was wondering all this time...thinking you hated me, thinking you were going over to Pat. Vinnie...” His eyes narrowed. “Do you hate me?”

“What? No...no!”

Sonny glanced up at the ceiling. His head fell back, and he said, voice a little slurred, “Theresa...she’s gonna hate me. She’s really gonna hate me.”

“Sonny, I want you to know I couldn’t tell you about Patrice because we were setting him up for your murder. But you were going to be saved. I made sure. I didn’t want anything to happen to you. Everything was perfectly timed.”

Sonny said, “I can’t marry her.”

“Sonny, do you understand what I’m saying?”

“I’m calling it off.”

“Are you listening to me at all?”

Sonny straightened up, looked at him. “I always listen to you, Vinnie.”

Vinnie frowned. In that moment, his mind could not form words.

Sonny said, “Now what? Now that you’ve told me...now what? I’m canceling the wedding. So now...now your plans are canceled, too, I guess.” He started to laugh again, but it was pain filled.

Vinnie blinked twice, still watching him. Sonny seemed...well...strange. Almost drunk.

Sonny gazed back without blinking once. Then he said quietly, “Vincent...what are we doing?”

Vinnie gulped. Sonny had not said, “I” or “you.” He had said “we.” Vinnie said, “Hell if I know.”

“I should just walk out of this room. Never look back. And you should do the same.”

Air came quickly out of Vinnie’s lungs. He waited.

Then Sonny got a look that wrenched Vinnie's heart. The eyes looked hot, riveting, pain-sparked. Sonny tried to laugh again. Failed. As if his voice had knotted, clenched, battered his throat. "I should walk way right now." He reached out then, lightly touching Vinnie's hand. "But, pal...I don't wanna let you go." The words barely made it out of his mouth they were so garbled.

Vinnie's heart clenched at the words, at the tone. He couldn't remember anyone ever quite using that tone with him and having that profound an affect on him, no one, that was, but Sonny. His breath released again, almost a silent sob. What was he doing? What the fuck was he going to do?

"I could kidnap you and take you away from all this." Sonny looked away as he whispered now. Was that a laugh or a sob? Vinnie could no longer tell the difference.

Vinnie closed his eyes against those hopeless words. "If I said yes it wouldn't be kidnapping."

"But I wouldn't expect you to give up everything for me. Not willingly." He put his fists to his temples, pressed. Gaspd once.

"I wouldn't expect you to, either. Christ, Sonny..."

"And so, now, here we are."

Vinnie bit his lower lip until it throbbed.

Silence descended over them. The loudest thing in the room was their breath, each man puffing, inhaling, exhaling, as if in anger, as if in surrender. Together they sat as less than one hundred yards away the pre-bachelor party still went on, the music and the glimmer, the excitement and the thrill. Outside the city sights and sounds wound around the tall hotel, darkness and glare, starlight and cloud, street thugs and tourists all clamoring for bits and pieces of the world they thought was real, was alive. Everybody wanted something. Big or small. A little or a lot. The connections were endless, limitless.

Finally, Vinnie asked quietly, "What are you thinking?"

Sonny's breaths had slowed a little. He could finally look at Vinnie again. He said almost flatly, "I'm relieved. I'm appalled." He paused, then, brows narrowed, voice like velvet, seductive: "I hate you. I want you."

"I never hated you, Sonny."

Sonny watched him, eyes narrow, still. "Maybe you should've. It would make things so much easier."

“You say you hate me...does that make all this easier?”

Sonny blinked, stared. Softly, “Nope.”

Vinnie nodded, felt his eyes mist. “Sonny...let’s get outta here.” He wanted to put his arms around him again, feel him, inhale him. He wanted so much. Too much. His mind reeled.

Sonny laughed again, but without smiling, then bowed his head. “You’re too much.”

Vinnie still didn’t feel like laughing at all. He was too desperate, too shocked, and still too guilty. He got up, grabbed Sonny under the shoulder. “C’mon. Please.”

Sonny let himself be pulled up, said almost drunkenly, “Where ya goin’, Vinnie?”

Vinnie faced him, hand still on his shoulder. His eyes felt blurry and strange. “Anywhere with you.”

Sonny looked him up and down. “Where ya got that badge hidden?”

“I said I’d go anywhere with you, Sonny. I mean it.”

Sonny’s quick laugh lacked any and all mirth. “And leave it all behind?”

“Yes!”

“You’d do that?”

“I said yes.”

“Then we’re both insane, Vinnie. We’re in a nightmare and can’t wake up.”

“Or maybe it’s the best dream of my life.”

Sonny’s eyes softened perceptibly at the remark. “Fuck.” Then he whispered, “Okay, then.” He glanced around the darkened room once and led the way out the door.

Someone was coming down the hall. The shape got closer and turned into Aldo. “Hey, Sonny,” he said coldly. “I came to see if you needed any...help?” He glanced once at Vinnie, eyes like knives.

Both Sonny and Vinnie’s hands had dropped to their sides so they were no longer touching. Sonny said quietly, “You’re a good guy, Aldo, but I’m fine. If Pat wanted to try anything sooner, I got Vinnie here to protect me. Right, Vinnie?”

Oh, Vinnie thought. So that’s who told Sonny about the hit.

“Yeah.” Vinnie watched Aldo carefully. He didn’t like the guy, never had. But it seemed he was loyal. The fact that he was Theresa’s brother helped, but who knew after Sonny cancelled the wedding where loyalties might lie then and what might change? Either way, Sonny was in danger and would remain so until removed from sight.

Did Sonny even realize his whole world was about to change right now?

But Sonny wasn’t stupid. Vinnie knew Sonny was aware. The man was so aware he was probably already making a hundred different contingency plans in his mind as they stood face to face with Aldo as if nothing were amiss, as if all was still going according to plan.

“All right, then, boss,” Aldo said. “You coming?” He indicated the direction of the party.

“You go on, Aldo. I have some business to take care of first.”

Aldo nodded, started to turn away.

Sonny called out quietly, “And Aldo?”

Aldo turned back.

“Thanks. I won’t forget this.”

A hint of a smile edged Aldo’s lips, but beyond that, the man was cold as January’s frost.

Vinnie knew what Sonny had done...what Sonny always did. He cemented that bond. He made sure his people knew he appreciated them, noticed them, thanked them. If anyone could warm even Aldo’s cold cockles, it would be Sonny Steelgrave. And Vinnie realized that was why he’d risen to the top at only 35. He’d even usurped Dave in running things when Vinnie had first arrived at the Royal Diamond. Sonny was the personable one, the charm, the heart and the warmth of the organization. Dave was all but forgotten but Sonny moved on, loved by everyone except those who wanted more than he was willing to give. But Vinnie noticed how moved even Patrice was by Sonny’s quick enticements, his vows, his honeyed words, no doubt the secret son of sirens from some long lost shore. That was why Patrice felt threatened. He knew Sonny was better than he was at forming loyal alliances, at simply running the fucking world.

When you’re Pat the Cat and you have no soul, you just can’t figure it out. So you stew yourself into a murderous pit.

Not that Pat was wrong, either. If things were left to run their course, Sonny would own New York one day, and much sooner than later.

Vinnie turned to eye Sonny. Sonny met his gaze unflinching, the brown eyes warm but unfathomable. “What I’m giving up for you, Vinnie...” He reached out and lightly touched his shoulder. “What if it doesn’t work out?”

But Vinnie could already feel Sonny pressed hard against him, squirming, naked, alive. Even now, as they stood in the hall watching Aldo’s retreating back, in his mind Vinnie was touching him, clutching him, holding him...could a person burst into flame from mere desire?

As if reading his mind, Sonny’s lips curved up very slightly. “But then again, when does anything with you not turn out wonderfully perfect?”

*

Sonny felt Vinnie come into the room right behind him. What the heck? After all this time, heading immediately for the bedroom did not seem impolite. After all, they’d been flirting for...how long now?...weeks?...months? And Vinnie didn’t seem hesitant...in fact he hadn’t said a word all the way up in the elevator. And that was kind of nice because Sonny’s mind was working miles a minute, thinking too much, thinking too fast. He’d have to cancel the wedding, cancel the bachelor party. There would be danger now from every corner. He needed to become scarce. And Vinnie...he needed Vinnie to maintain normalcy, not do anything stupid like going to his boss right away, quitting his job. No one could ever know Vinnie was a cop. No one. As he thought, his mind formed scenes, plans, entire escapades. And through it all the heat standing next to him would not abate. Vinnie pulled at him bodily, emotionally, just by existing. He would not let this amazing guy go. He couldn’t.

Still, his chest quaked. Did Vinnie really want this? Want all of it? Everything Sonny had to give beyond their connections, their jobs, their very lives? Because they could not play around in this arena. It was just too damn dangerous.

As Sonny turned, he watched Vinnie shed his coat and loosen his tie. His heartbeat quickened. Sonny did the same, pulling the tie over his head and tossing it.

Was it going to be like this from now on? The two of them together always like this?

Yeah, he could live with that all right. Vinnie with him felt better in any world than being without him. That was the truth. He always felt so happy when Vinnie was by his side, when they did everything together, work, play, meals. Now was just an extension of all that, including an intimacy that went beyond words, a closeness Sonny craved all the time now. All the time.

But Vinnie...sometimes he was so enigmatic. Dark. Closed. Was it just because of the undercover lies? Because Vinnie was so good? Or did Vinnie question this very scenario, question Sonny’s role?

As if in answer to his unspoken question, Vinnie came up alongside him. This time it was Vinnie who placed his hand on Sonny's back. Usually it was the other way around. He leaned toward Sonny's shoulder and said shakily, "You and me, right?"

Sonny turned, felt a smile. Okay, so they were attuned...for now. A nod was all it took and Vinnie's sweet blue eyes glimmered, glowed, filling the room with his unique and disarming presence.

He felt...well...fucking undone. Everything around him was falling, plans, contracts, entire worlds. Yet all he cared about, all he wanted no matter how anything turned out in the outside reality, was this man standing before him, this brother who made his heart whole.

Sonny's penthouse bedroom glowed in lavish hues of gold and silver. There was light but it was star-dim, as if it peeked between leaves or clouds. The bed was tumbled satin and soft wool. Sonny sank down onto it as Vinnie came toward him kneeling, leaning into him.

They kissed and this time it was comfortable, warm, real, not like those hot stolen kisses in the boardroom so near the pre-bachelor party. Not like questioning, drunken boys playing around. Vinnie's arms reached around Sonny, pulling him close even as they sank back.

Sonny couldn't breathe...didn't want to.

Vinnie was so warm, so solid. How long had he been wanting him like this? He couldn't recall. And he could never remember wanting him *this* badly, so much that he almost felt lost and the only thing holding him in place were muscled arms, deep silken kisses, the welcome strength of Vinnie's weight.

He was Sonny Steelgrave. He automatically assumed, pictured, fantasized himself on top. But Vinnie felt so good, and the longing in him was so deep it reached hollows within even he had never touched before, and he wanted it like this, wanting Vinnie wanting him back, possessing him, controlling him.

It was crazy.

Vinnie let up suddenly, seemed about to apologize, to give way as he always did, letting Sonny take the lead. Before he could, Sonny said, "Don't you goddamn move." He spread his still trouser-clad legs allowing Vinnie closer. Behind the cloth he felt a growing hardness meet his own.

Vinnie smiled down at him so serenely he thought he must certainly be dreaming. He'd waken and hell would resume. He'd continue to live in a garish world wanting what he couldn't have, taking everything else, all the while slowly trying to convince himself that having babies with Theresa was not only the right thing to do but a hell of a terrific idea.

Only, despite his caring for Theresa, it wasn't what he wanted. Had never been what he wanted.

He gasped suddenly. Vinnie touched his face with one palm, still poised, still watching him. Sonny closed full over-heated eyes before he could embarrass himself further. Vinnie kissed him again. And again.

Sonny held on tight. And soared.

God but he'd never felt like *this* before.

Sonny opened his eyes. A mistake. Vinnie was blurring, sliding this way and that. Vinnie pulled back and started to undo Sonny's shirt. Sonny raised a hand and ran it over the side of Vinnie's head, his fingers tugging very slightly at silk-soft hair. Breathing hard, he said, "You have the power to hurt me more than anyone ever has."

Vinnie stopped what he was doing, met his eyes. Sonny's eyes cleared and the pure beautiful blue of Vinnie's dancing, misty gaze came into focus, stunning him. "I don't want to hurt you. *Ever.*"

Sonny bit his lower lip. Vinnie kissed him until his mouth opened again, then moved to the side drawing Sonny's head with him, still kissing him, as he tried to undo buttons even lower. This time Sonny helped, feeling strangely shy and desperate all at once. He'd only been shy in bed one time, and that was his first time. Since then he'd never really equated sex with openness. His experiences had been one night stands, and the girls mostly skinny, pretty, glittery fluffs of void.

This was not one of those times, and could never be.

Was Vinnie feeling the same? He reached out to touch him on the hip as Vinnie got his trousers all the way undone and started pushing. Sonny lifted up, trying to help. Everything came off at once and the offending garments were kicked away.

Sonny was painfully aroused. He felt completely bare, even though he still wore his shirt. He pulled Vinnie to him as Vinnie stroked, slowly, one naked hip. He wanted Vinnie's hands on him, but he also wanted it to last. He couldn't believe how hot this was, Vinnie in his arms, Vinnie stroking his ass.

Vinnie kissed him again, soothing him, distracting him from "down there" and bringing him back to lips, tongue, taste, and soaring sweetness.

His erection pressed quite comfortably against Vinnie's thigh.

Sonny managed to get his hands inside the back of Vinnie's trousers and Vinnie's skin was so smooth, so warm. He wanted more. He managed to undo the buttons and with Vinnie's help they both removed his pants.

When they surged together, Sonny's legs opened. Vinnie settled between them, his stiffness pressing Sonny's balls. Sonny's organ was trapped against the firmness of Vinnie's stomach.

And that was that, the intimacy between them that had always been there, that had been sufficiently strong enough for anything...anything to happen between them, was even more enhanced. It was absolutely astounding. The pleasure between them increased beyond calculation.

Through gritted teeth, Vinnie hissed, "Christ!"

And they were kissing deep, deeper, pressing into each other as if they were always meant to be fused this way, encased, encompassed.

When Vinnie pulled back they were both breathing hard. "Who *are* you?" Sonny gasped, as they undulated together again, and Vinnie's mouth slipped to his neck, then his chest, licking, kissing.

Sonny felt himself turn to liquid, melt...everywhere but one spot. And that spot just seemed to get more and more red-hot as Vinnie's mouth moved down...down...

Damn, he was ready. He was so ready. But he felt control ebbing and he wasn't used to that. In bed he had always controlled when, how. Now he grabbed Vinnie's shoulders for support, hanging on. Vinnie lifted one of his legs under the thigh, exposing him even more, and began to lap at his balls.

Sonny threw his arm over his face, muffling his pleased cry. The stimulation was electric, and his veins sang with hot ecstasy. When Vinnie licked his shaft and then the head, he just gave up. And then he was encased in warm, slick wetness, Vinnie's tongue and mouth soothing while at the same time riling him up again. It was more than just an act. It was as if Vinnie owned him now. That sweet, firm mouth. It pulled on him, sucked him with such tenderness...

Vinnie...

When he came he thought: *This is it*. This was how Vinnie had been sent by Patrice to kill him. It might work, taking him to the place of ecstasy from which he could never return. What a way to assassinate someone! It was the best orgasm of his life.

That was when he knew what Vinnie had said was true...Vinnie had never hated him.

But how could Vinnie be a Fed and still want...*him*?

Vinnie rose in the bed, brushing Sonny's forehead with his fingertips. And Sonny remembered less than half an hour ago, his own words. *I hate you. I want you.*

How in all of Mankind's hells, and those yet to be invented, could this ever work? He must have shown his disbelief in his eyes, on his mouth. Because Vinnie frowned very slightly. And when he went to kiss him, Sonny turned his head hard to the side, feeling Vinnie's lips land on his jaw and just below his ear. Then he heard Vinnie murmur as he moved himself against Sonny, pressing them together, thrusting very gently at the cleft of Sonny's ass, "Please don't hate me." Soft intake of breath, "I can't help it. I love you."

It was impossible, of course. But he heard the words. The promise behind them. That perfect, big, strong, beautiful guy confessing, confiding, trusting... Sonny turned his head toward him again, hands coming up to stroke Vinnie's face, his neck, then snaking their way under the white cotton shirt to touch warm, hard shoulders.

"I want you, Vinnie. But do you want *me*?"

"What do you think?" came the soft question.

"You're everything." Then he repeated the word in a whisper. "Everything."

"I want you, Sonny. Only you." The words whirled around him, Vinnie's breath in his face like champagne and autumn and clinging reassurance. Vinnie wanting him of his own free will, wanting him like this, and Sonny felt as if every world he'd ever known had just popped right out of existence.

"Let up for just a sec, okay?" Sonny said, trying to hang onto his sanity.

Vinnie moved off, looking confused, almost hurt, but Sonny ignored him, turning in the bed, hand going for the nightstand, rummaging. He came up with a jar and handed it to the bewildered, aroused man still half poised over him. He smiled up at him. Then put his arms around him pulling him close. "C'mon" He spread his legs, wrapped them around Vinnie's thighs, leaned up and kissed him until he felt Vinnie against him again, kissing back.

Vinnie didn't open the jar right away. He took his time with Sonny, petting, stroking. Their shirts were shed. And now the two of them moved together, Vinnie bringing them to their sides. His hands went down behind Sonny's back, stroking. When he opened the jar a sweet scent filled the air. First he stroked him from behind, then moved his hand between them, slick and exploring, fingers smooth, slow. Sonny pushed against him.

When Sonny was ready he pulled Vinnie close, pulled up his knees, then wrapped his legs around Vinnie's waist. And it wasn't so difficult after all, Vinnie sliding into him, filling him up...only now did he know it was all he had ever wanted, Vinnie wanting him like this, loving him like this. Breath expelled from his lungs. "I never hated you, Vinnie."

Vinnie gasped, pulled back, then forward, and passion built like nothing Sonny had ever known. Their groans of pleasure filled the room. Sonny felt sudden tinglings all over, then a stronger tingle in his balls and suddenly he was coming, crying out, as Vinnie rocked them close, closer and then Sonny could feel the pulse inside him, the liquid bath as Vinnie buried his head in the crook of his neck and shoulder, sobbing, laughing, gathering Sonny to his own chest.

In utter astonishment, Sonny let himself be held. Never had he been made love to like this.

As Sonny's legs fell, Vinnie rolled to the side. Vinnie was still breathing hard, saying, "That was...was..."

"Amazing," Sonny finished for him. Their eyes met. Smiling. And Sonny said, kissing him just to the side of Vinnie's mouth, "When can we do it again?"

He pulled back to see Vinnie's grin begin. "Just let me catch my breath."

Sonny started to chuckle, leaned in and kissed him. He didn't let up for a long, long time.

*