Eyes wide open in the darkness, all Frank McPike could make out without his glasses were the fuzzy shapes of shadows cast by the light that streamed in through the window. He felt like a cadaver on a slab, lying stiff and silent as he listened to the tiny whispers of a house this old, the odd creaking of the bed, and Vince’s quiet snuffles. There wasn’t
enough light to read by, but too much to avoid seeing the big shape lying beside him, if he let himself look. But in the absence of sight his other senses were doubling up; odors assaulted him, his ears were straining, his skin tingling to feel any movement from Vince Terranova. This was a damned stupid idea, and he still didn’t know why he’d let Vince tell him what to do. He could have made up the bed in Vinnie’s old room, he could have slept on the fucking couch—anything would be better than this exhausted, aching anticipation of...of nothing at all. Vince moved beside him, settling down, and he cringed when he felt the hairy masculinity of a leg brush his. If he just didn’t move, if he kept perfectly still, then Vince would have to drop off eventually. No one could stay awake after the last few days they’d had. No one except Frank, for the godawful reason of all.

He counted sixty seconds of stillness and released the breath he’d held—just as Vinnie rolled and threw an arm across his stomach. The heavy heat burned through his undershirt and he sucked in his stomach, willing to burrow through the mattress at this point—anything to get away from his friend’s oppressively intimate body. **Just go to sleep,** he ordered himself, but fluffy white sheep turned immediately into hard, bronzed Vinnies, all of them staring at him with eyes so dark he wanted to fall into them and drown. Vince moved again, wrapping himself all around Frank and Frank tensed in frustration as the blood began to pound in his groin, his body reacting violently to Vinnie’s unconscious sensuality even as he swore at the unfairness of it all.

His body wanted Vince, and didn’t give a damn about the cold-shower thoughts his mind was raining down on it. To lie here this close and do nothing was purgatory, the only restraint staying him the sure and certain knowledge that Vince would punish him far better than any Biblical devil if he acted on his impulses. He tried to edge away, but he was practically hanging off the edge of this damned little bed already. There was nowhere to go, and even as he tried to get away from those affectionate arms, Vince pulled him back. Frank could feel the flaccid cock pressing against his hip, hot groin bleeding heat through the old jogging shorts Vince wore instead of decent nighties. Like he’d get any sleep this way.

They were both exhausted, and he knew he should have passed out before the blankers settled. He would have, too, if it weren’t for this overanimated teddy-bear in bed with him. If it weren’t for being so close to what he wanted, and the arousal kicking through him, and this anxious waiting in his body for each tiny zephyr of Vinnie’s breath across his skin. He tried to push the heavy, masculine weight of Vince’s leg off his—

“Frank? You still awake?” Vince muttered.

“Yeah.” Shit, even the sound of his voice was getting to him tonight. See what exhaustion could do to a man’s self-control. Time to get out or get his ass kicked. “Look, this bed isn’t big enough for both of us, lemme just take the couch...”

“No? Well, **you’re buggin’ me, buddy.**” He started to turn away and was caught again, this time by a wide-awake man who could read him better than anyone, even in the dark. He could practically hear the gears turning as Vince evaluated the situation and just lay there, paralyzed, waiting for Vinnie to kill him for it. The arm around his waist strayed down past his firming cock to his thighs, just barely touching him but damned well enough for Vince to get the picture. He tried to bat the arm away and was flustered by the quiet chuckle.

“Got a little problem here, Frank?”

“Whaddaya mean, ‘little’?” he defended himself gruffly, trying to defuse the situation with humor and hide his embarrassment. He was a grown man, for godsakes, it wasn’t as if either one of them hadn’t been in this kind of situation before, was it? Nothing to be embarrassed about as long as Vince didn’t know why he was up. Just laugh it off, then get out of here before Vinnie hit him over the head with outraged Sicilian-stallion machismo.

He hadn’t expected Vince to check out the
'little' comment. But that was exactly what the man was doing, hand coming back up to settle right on his cock. Frank sucked in a breath as an electric thrill rushed through him, arousal crowding out thought. How the hell was he supposed to react to this? Lie here and take it or grab Vinnie, turn him over and fuck him? “Uh, Vince?” he managed, if a little shakily, clenching his fists to stop from filling his hands with the feel of his Vincent Terranova, “you wanna get your hand off my cock?”

But now Vinnie was rubbing him through his underwear, and he didn’t know if he should scream or groan.

Vinnie grinned at him in the conspiratorial semi-dark, his hand pressing Frank’s cock so sweetly. “What good’s that gonna do? You’re not gonna get any sleep like this,” his hand tightened, stroking the entire length of aching cock, “are you, Frank?”

“I’m not gonna get any sleep with you doin’ that, either.” The protest was feeble, nothing more than a mere formality, he knew, since he hadn’t made a single move to pull Vinnie’s hand away. Hell, it was all he could do to keep from arching up into the lazy caress and grabbing a handful or two of Vinnie in return.

“Maybe not, but you’ll sleep soon enough after you get yourself taken care of.” The heat of the warm hand collided with his balls, cupping him, while fingers traced patterns on his skin. “C’mon Frank, it’s nothin’. What’re friends for?”

None of Frank’s friends—at least, not the straight male ones, which was the category Frank always thought Vince had fallen under—had ever been for this, that was for damned sure. “Vinnie?” he asked tremulously, half scared that Vince would stop, half terrified that he wouldn’t. “What’re you doin’?”

Vince was leaning over him now, tugging his underwear down to free his erection and palming it again all in scant seconds, laughing with quiet indulgence. “What d’ya think I’m doin’? C’mon, Frank, not even you could’ve forgotten what this is all about. I’m helpin’ you out. Relax, don’t worry about it.”

Frank wasn’t worried. He was panicked. But not enough to move, not enough to do anything to stop this.

“Yeah, that’s it, just lay back and go with it.” Vinnie’s voice was just above a whisper, stealing through the darkness behind Frank’s closed eyelids, and it felt too good to have Vinnie working his cock. Blind, he reached out and grabbed a sweatshirt-clad shoulder, squeezing in the rhythm Vince was using on him, desperate to finally touch Vinnie carnally at last. He was so goddamned hungry for this, so embarrassingly desperate, like some horny teenage at the Prom. But he’d wanted this, wanted Vinnie for so long that not a whole hell of a lot else mattered. He knew he should have stopped this before it started. He should never have gotten into this fucking bed. But he had, and now there was nothing in the world that was going to get him out of it. Not until they had finished what Vince had begun. The warm hand grabbed his balls, pressing them hard up against his cock and he gasped out loud. This was just too good to be true, like one of those $19.95 mail-order offers on TV that looked so fantastic you wanted to reach for the phone even as you called yourself an idiot. And as much as he wanted to reach for Vince in return, he was terrified of that little voice in his head that was calling him an idiot, telling him that pushing, now, was risking it all. He still wanted to grab Vince, still wanted to rub himself against that heavy cock covered in the delicious silk of those tantalizing shorts—but childhood memories had too strong a hold. He couldn’t forget his father, who had the hurtful habit of haring off right when Frank reached out to him, right when he realized just how much Frank had needed him around.

His body had declared war on his brain and was taking no prisoners; he just surrendered to the fact that his partner, friend and constant wet-dream was bringing him off. Beautifully. His hips started the harsh cadence of fucking, straining up against Vinnie’s palming hand, and he groaned.

“See? I was right, wasn’t I?” Vince asked in a friendly whisper, teeth gleaming in the dark while his hand spread pre-cum the length of Frank’s cock. “This is all you needed. Yeah, just let me take care of you.”

Frank didn’t waste a breath on the answer, and he didn’t waste a thought on the de-
tachment in Vinnie’s voice. He just reached down to clasp his hand around his partner’s, silently demanding an increase in pressure and pace. And Vince obliged, squeezing his cock tighter, so tight it was a wonderful ache, the heady pressure stripping his cock as Vince let his hand be guided, adding his own erotic twists with thumb and forefinger whenever he seemed to feel like it. “That’s it, Frank. C’mon, let yourself go. Don’t hold back, you’re always holding back. It’s just you and me here, just me giving you a friendly hand. Oh, yeah, that’s it, let me do this for you.”

Frank wasn’t going to argue, not when his whole body was going tense, taut nerves heralding the familiar rush of approaching orgasm. “Oh, Vince,” he groaned, left hand stroking Vince’s back, right hand rubbing restlessly over his own chest, plucking at nipples trapped under sweat-dampened cotton. Frank was on fire, his chest heaving now in the effort to keep up with his body. Vince’s hand left him and he whimpered in frustration, mindlessly reaching out to bring the pleasure back again.

“Just a minute, Frank, I’m not gonna stop. Need to get all this out of the way.” He felt the big body shifting beside him and then two hands grasped his undershirt, sliding it up off his stomach; felt a sudden eruption of pleasure ripping through him as fingers briefly—too fucking briefly—twisted his nipples, deserting his chest to push the sheets down past his hips. As far gone as he was, he could still hear the affection in the deep voice, could still hear the way the accent had thickened. “Don’t wanna mess up this stuff,” was the cursory explanation, and the voice was definitely trembling as much as the hand on his cock. He wondered if Vince could see him better than he could see Vince, wondered if Vinnie liked what he saw; but then Vince unerringly took up where he’d left off and Frank forgot how to think. He just felt, instead; felt the hand squeezing and rubbing his cock, felt the hairy warmth of forearm against his belly and the soft silk of shorts against his hip that covered Vinnie’s reacting cock. Vince’s free hand sneaked over his shoulder to tease at his nipple, and Frank was whimpering again. The rough pinches closed a circuit, the connection a live-wire current straight to his balls with every squeeze and tug of Vinnie’s fingers.

Oh, he’d wanted this for so fucking long, and here it was in his hands—in Vinnie’s hands—in Vince’s hand on his cock. Frank wished there was more light in the room, wished he could see the soft expression on Vince’s face that was reflected in his voice. That was definitely the best of all; that Vince was doing him, that Vince was loving him the way he wanted it, the way he needed it. After all the hopeless, stupid self-consciousness, after all the tender affection and the aborted attempts to bring Vinnie to bed with him, here it was all by accident, all so perfect.

It felt like scant seconds, and suddenly he was coming, fireworks going off in his body as he arched, tensile, off the mattress. Oh, it was beautiful, Vince doing this for him, and he reached up with both hands, clutching at the bigger body and pulling hard, toppling the heavy weight down across his chest and gasping against muscled shoulder as his nostrils filled with the scent of Vinnie.

Vince was chuckling against his throat, the quick breaths electric against his skin. “Hey Frank,” Vince breathed into his ear, panting a little, “I never knew you had it in you. I always thought you’d, you know, flash your badge then order your dick to salute ‘n spill it.” Vince laughed at his own humor, and Frank found the breath to laugh with him even as he clenched his fists into hot muscled skin, even as climax echoed through him. Vince always had thought he was a prude. Well, that would change soon enough, he decided with an anticipatory sigh.

Vinnie was still holding his cock, squeezing it tight but unmoving, his other hand rubbing Frank’s shoulder reassuringly. “Yeah, that was pretty good, huh partner?” Vince asked as he started to settle down, the leg moving, welcome, back over Frank’s knees. There was one thing Vince had forgotten, one more tiny thing that Frank wanted as his body trembled in the glow of sex with Vinnie. He reached up, tangling his fingers through the thick dark hair and pulling his lover’s head down, pressing his lips against the full mouth
and running his tongue along them to tempt them open.

And then something was suddenly, terribly wrong. With an undefined sinking in his gut, he realized that Vinnie had gone tense in his hands. But only for a split second. In the next second Vinnie was shoving his hands away and jumping out of the bed, turning on the lamp and then turning on Frank. In out-of-focus horror, Frank watched as Vinnie wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, staring down with an unmistakable look of disgust on his face.

“What the hell did you do that for, pal?” he demanded.

The question was all hostility and accusation so that Frank stammered, “What’s going on here, Vince? It was just a kiss, nothing to get worried about.” But if anything the disgusted look was increasing. Vince aborted the next swipe at his mouth and Frank swallowed, the situation becoming sickeningly clear.

“Why? What are you, some kinda fag?”

The accusation was a slap in the face that made Frank finally drop his eyes…and realize exactly the picture he presented. His cock was still hard and teardrops of cum spattered his belly, cum that was there because Vinnie had just brought him off. His tee-shirt was up under his armpits because Vinnie had been considerate enough to move it out of the way, his nipples still puckered hard from Vinnie’s fingers. Under the circumstances, this visible surfeit of pleasure was mortifying.

“Look, maybe you’d better take the couch after all.”

The semen on his belly was chilling now, soaking into his shirt and sliding down his skin. But the emptiness inside him was so much more chilling than that. “Let me get this straight,” he tried, tight-lipped and terrified. “You just jerked me off, but that’s okay. That’s just ‘helpin’ somebody out.’ But I tried to kiss you and now I’m on the couch?”

“I—” now it was Vince’s turn to be speechless, at a time when Frank needed desperately for him to have the answers.

“You what, Vince?”

“I dunno. It is different, though. I thought you were just, you know, keyed up. I sure as hell didn’t think it was because of me.”

Frank sucked in a careful breath. He was exhausted, his emotions were too close to the surface for a conversation like this. It was a certainty that if they kept talking tonight, things would get worse and not better. He wanted to get the hell away but he didn’t trust himself behind the wheel of a car, not this tired. Besides, given that they’d be at work together in two days time, a pre-dawn exit was a little too dramatic.

“Look Frank,” Vince went on into the lengthening silence. “There’s blankets in the hall closet; you can use my old bed, or sack out on the couch.”

“Right, I know where they are.” He felt the scream roiling up inside him, wanted to turn and shout, ’You’re tearing me apart and you know it. Don’t fucking do this to me!’ He wanted to blast Vinnie with the truth, and ask just whose cock had stiffened up against him during all of that. He was desperate to defend his own feelings and demand that Vinnie acknowledge his. But instead, he quietly picked up his glasses and slipped them on,

“It was all pretty clear. I thought,” he started feebly, heart chilled and brain numb as the aftershocks pounded at his shattered emotions. He knew what the answer was going to be, but he had to ask anyway. “You’re straight, aren’t you?”

“You bet your ass I am.” From clear across the bed Frank could feel Vinnie’s desire to bolt, like a rope stretched too tight between them and fraying under the stress. He sat there, just waiting, for the axe to fall. “Look, maybe you’d better take the couch after all.”

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finally getting out of the bed that he should never have gotten into in the first place. He went to the doorway and turned, desperate to find something to say, something to make tomorrow easier, but his mind had gone on overload when Vince had jumped away and flicked on the light.

Somehow, he managed to get the gentle apology out past all the other stuff lined up in his throat. “Vinnie? Look, I'm sorry. I don't know what to say.” It hurt to see Vincent Terranova so uncomfortable in his own skin, but it hurt even more to have the look on the handsome face chiselled into his brain. Frank dropped his eyes.

Vince looked guilty. Vince felt responsible and betrayed at the same time.

“Don't say anything, Frank, just—get some sleep. We'll talk in the morning, okay? It'll look better in the daylight.”

Frank thought it had looked a whole lot better in the dark. “Right. Okay.” In fact, he couldn't imagine that what was coming tomorrow would look like anything at all he wanted to see. He trudged out of the room, picking at the damp stickiness of his undershirt and shuddering with the cold chill of it. Mind on neutral, emotions cauterized for the moment, he fished blankets out of the hall closet and dumped them on the overstuffed leather couch. He'd had more than his share of fantasies on this couch, and the creaking of leather as he gingerly moved under the covers vividly rebuked him for every one. As soon as the blankets settled, Frank felt the first shivers of reaction grip him. Not sexual pleasure but nausea shook his body, and he swallowed down the gag reflex several times before risking a deep, fractured breath.

Dawn’s early light provided just enough lifting of shadow for him to recognize every painful reminder of the years-long relationship that he had just possibly, in twenty minutes of ignorant self-indulgence, utterly destroyed. Over in the corner was the baseball Sparky had chewed to hell and back that Vince had kept when the dog died because ‘it’s scruffy like you, Frank’ and because Sparky would only fetch it when Vinnie threw it. On the mantle was the infamous plastic souvenir Liberty Bell that he couldn't but smile at even now. Frank wondered if it would be there the next time he came over here. Then he wondered when the next time he came over here would be. Or if it would be. Try as he might to avoid it, Frank’s guilt rolodex loftily entitled, “Repercussions of This Betrayal of Vinnie’s Trust,” was spinning at full speed in his head. No more beers. No more understanding. No more 2:00 a.m. visits because he needed the support of someone who understood him, because Vinnie obviously wouldn't want to understand him after this. No more starfish head-to-toe hugs when Frank felt close to the edge and no more careful gestures when Vince fell over it. His license to touch Vince had just been unconditionally revoked, and all because Vince had touched him so goddamned well.

But damn it, Frank hadn’t misunderstood what was behind that whole bedroom farce. He couldn’t have. The picture replayed in his mind, his own responses embarrassingly edited, and there was Vince, doing a lot more than was necessary to just ‘help out’. There was Vince, voice trembling and cock thickening, whispering words to urge him on. Vince had wanted him to let go, had wanted to be there when it happened—was there, breath panting against Frank's neck with obvious pleasure—and there was Vince standing by the bed looking guilty, looking betrayed. Maybe the fact that some part of him, conscious or not, had been enjoying it was worse in the long run, because Vinnie sure as hell wasn’t admitting that it had happened that way.

And oh God no, what about the job? Each of them had, over the years, assessed the risk of their personal relationship to Vinnie’s cover; somehow Frank didn’t see that being a problem anytime in the near future, because he couldn't imagine how they’d be able to work together. What the hell were they going to do on the job? And what about Uncle Mike? Well, Dan might understand but he’d be the only one. How was Frank supposed to explain to Paul Beckstead why his top team couldn’t be in the same room together anymore? He could just see it now, the neatly typed report titled “Betrayal of Trust Between Field Supervisor and Undercover Operative: the role
of homophobic fucking therein.” This sure as hell wasn’t a joke, and if it was then it wasn’t funny. Field agents had to trust their supervisors above anything and anyone else, and tonight had screwed that up royally. Now Vince would have to get beyond this—and so would he—before that loyalty and trust even had a chance to begin anew.

I should never have put my glasses on. I should have left ’em off until I got out of the room, so then maybe I could have pretended it wasn’t as bad as it really is.

Frank pulled off his glasses and lay them on the end table above his head, scrubbing hard at his eyes and refusing to acknowledge that the water in them was anything more than exhaustion. Not even his emotional turmoil would be able to keep him awake for much longer, he hoped. But just in case, he turned into the back of the couch so that when Vinnie came out of that bedroom later, Frank wouldn’t have to see the expression on his face.

It wasn’t as if he’d been naïve enough to expect anything else. If he’d thought Vinnie could have accepted something different, something to make them both happy, then he would have hauled Vinnie off to bed months ago. Only Frank had known better. So it wasn’t as if he’d had any hopes to lose… He could praise his foresight until Hell froze over, and pat himself on the back for having known his friend and subordinate better than anyone else in the world, but it was a damned hollow comfort as he lay here on this clutching leather couch alone. He’d been right about this, too; this was much, much worse than purgatory.