

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.

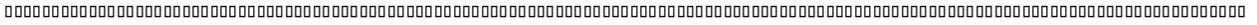
Oh, he’d wanted this for so fucking long, and here it was in his hands—in Vinnie’s hands—in Vince’s hand on his cock. Frank wished there was more light in the room, wished he could see the soft expression on Vince’s face that was reflected in his voice. That was definitely the best of all; that Vince 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





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."

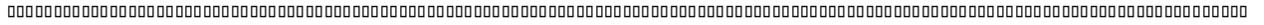
Frank thought it had looked a whole lot better in the dark. "Right. Okay." In fact, he couldn't imagine that what was coming tomorrow would look like anything at all he wanted to see. He trudged out of the room, picking at the damp stickiness of his undershirt and shuddering with the cold chill of it. 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.