



NEVER CHRISTMAS

BY LITTLE-B

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AND KOWALSKI IS STOMPING INTO THE BULLPEN, arms swinging with that frenetic energy, which instantly sets off my inner Kowalski-explosion alarm, which is why I'm slouching along a good couple of yards behind. Nothing to do with the fact I'm fucking soaked and my third pair of new shoes since he came back from the frozen north and got foisted on me (not what he wanted, not what I wanted, and I doubt even Welsh wants it now, except that two loose canons together is probably better than two loose cannons working independently, which is sure as Benny's Canadian what he would say if I called him on it, which I don't because he's the Lieutenant here and I'm not fucking Kowalski) are total write offs, not even Little Tony can use them for dress up. It may be that clothing destroyed in the course of work is tax deductible, but the fucking paperwork does my head in as much as Kowalski does.

Thinking about it, maybe all that snow turned Kowalski Canadian. I'm sure as fuck the gay thing was always there, just kept below the surface because he put all that effort into building Stella a pedestal to fucking stand on so he never had the energy to move his neck

from craning up at her like that, to actually look any other way, let alone get his cock sucked on the side. You'll notice how I don't talk about me and Ange, or me and Stella, or me and Armando, (who suddenly went through a mid-life and started doing boys), and that's nothing doing, because I'm not going to, ever.

And if the North bought out the Canadian in Kowalski, it was Benton Fraser who bought out the queer. Or maybe he did both, because as far as Kowalski's concerned, Benny can do everything, anything, all at once. Except, clearly, give Kowalski what he wants, which is clearly hot Canadian dick up his ass. Like you can do that in a tent in the middle of the fucking artic.

He just doesn't get that he is not Fraser and Fraser is not him.

Case in point, today. Kowalski tried to do a Fraser and swing off a gantry onto a fucking container and then leap six feet onto a ship on Lake fucking Michigan because he thought it was crewed by fucking pirates. He said he could see them and they were up to something heinous. Why hadn't I picked up on that? What would it have taken for me to catch the fucking clue-bus on that one?

What more would it have taken? Kowalski to do the whole Lake-they-call-Michigan thing? Problem: one, he made the swing all right, but then he didn't make the jump, and the stupid fuck can barely swim, so that was me in the just-about-water too, and another suit wrote off, and then it turned out they weren't pirates at all. Murder mystery weekend with rich paunchy German guys.

So what have we learnt, kids? Kowalski ain't Fraser. But then it seems like Kowalski expected them to switch places and while he got to save small children and give candy back to babies (bad idea: rot their teeth), Benny gets to be fucking horny and jump him in a tent somewhere in the artic and fucking fuck him until he can't walk no more because his legs are fucking *like this* for the rest of his fucking life.

Why can't Kowalski get it into his thick spiked out caffeine-addled skull that it ain't happening? It so ain't fucking happening. And can he just stop fucking dancing around, making out that it was the greatest adventure ever, and he was James Dean crossed with Errol Flynn? Because if there's anyone who likes swinging off things and is as gay as Kowalski, it's Flynn all over.

Vecchio bumped me up against the goat, his hands bunching up in my Willison Hawkeyes t-shirt, so clear that he'd have liked it more if he had lapels to grab as his hands scrabbled for a minute against my chest until he got a good hard grip, and he pulled in close, trapping me, "Forget it, Kowalski, just forget it. Benny's so far in the closet that he's in fucking Narnia. No love, no sex, just dark women in sledges bearing Turkish Delight and endless adventures in the snow..."

I swear, Vecchio don't know what he's doing to me. Or if he does, he's been learning the Oblivious routine off Ben, or maybe he didn't really go under with the Mob. No, dick, quit thinking about Vecchio going under like that, I wasn't thinking like that, uh-uh, and I really do not want to poke Vecchio's dick like that 'cause, yeah, it would be fantastic for yeah, five minutes, and then he'd pop me one, and he won't let me pop him one back ever, and when did I start talking to my dick like it was that fucking wolf? Yeah, think about fornicating half-wolfs for a minute, dick. But really, Vecchio ain't been under with the mob, he's been under

with the Mounties, in Mountie-bootcamp learning how to be super-subtle bitchy and stay cool even when you're tied up by a bunch of bozos who want to stick lampreys down your pants.

So yeah, I pull my head back. Like I used to do when I still smoked. I'm desperate to get some space between us, because otherwise things so will not be pretty, and I'll have to tell the Lieu why we were fighting in the parking lot, and sure I might be a professional liar, but Welsh, he can see right through me every time. It's like I'm naked in front of him. And if that isn't a dick wilting thought, I don't know what is. And now I'm back to my regular program, and I filter out the Vegas tough-guy thing Vecchio has going for him, and yeah, I get what he's saying, I get it so good.

So I add, quiet like, "...and it's never Christmas."

And he looks at me like he thinks literary alumni... allusions are totally beyond me, which is bad, because now it means that there are two people who think that way, and while with Benton it was okay 'cause he was practically born in a library igloo and there's no way I can know or

read as much as him, Vecchio? Fuck. I'm no moron, okay? Otherwise, how did I get a better solve rate as Vecchio than Vecchio ever did when he was still himself?

And there's the rub. Is Vecchio still Vecchio? He sure as fuck doesn't quite match the files I had, and Frannie's fucking jumpy 'round him, and Frannie thought Guy Rankin was nice, once upon a time. But then, Vecchio beat the shit out of Rankin, so maybe not that much has changed after all. But then, it has, I'm sure of it; these days he's all cool and suave and then, when nobody's fucking looking, it's you, him a golf club and a real dark alley.

I'll pass on the golf club and settle for the dark alley, myself.

But then, I wanted to settle for the tundra, for Ben, for fucking Narnia, and I don't care if Narnia's sexless or something, I don't care if it's all wholesome harmless fun and games in the snow. I don't want to be the kid chucked out for liking make-up (though I like make-up plenty, like a kid, though, playing dress up) or nothing. What everyone got wrong, Stella, my Parents, Welsh is that I never wanted to grow up at all. Nosiree.

Not work, and sleep and work; wash, rinse, repeat; for me. Adventures, and playing and days that never end. Sounds good, huh? And that is Benton's world, and Vecchio thinks I don't know, but I do. I'm more than happy to be playing kid's games, comparing things, giggling if that's where things takes us.

Only problem: I couldn't figure a way to make it stay.

What a screw up.

I get home real late, not even Ma's staying up for me. So I don't have to make excuses, but then, it's real clear that she's getting used to this, that Raimundo comes in late, with smoke on his shirt and mud on his shoes, and does his own fricking laundry in the morning, and she's even stopped commenting about that, which means... don't know what it means, I never try to second guess Ma, because she's one heck of a woman and has known me since I was -9 months old, good enough.

And fucking Stanley, up against the car, just zoned out on me, as if he was in fucking Narnia, or maybe La-

la-land. Hope the scenery's nice there, Kowalski, really do. And maybe it will be good for you, so good, get your brain and dick away from Benny some, maybe bring you down to earth a bit. Anyhows, I fucking left him, still staring into space, against his ugly ass car, staring at me like I was a ghost or something.

I really hope I'm not the Ghost of Christmasses yet to come or nothing, because he was one scary guy, except, yeah, he made old Ebenezer go all nice and cheerful. Maybe I woke him up to some things about the Mountie, yeah, and he'll start not looking at the space where Benny ought to be.

Yeah, the space, don't think that I don't think about it. The world seems empty without him. Really empty. I miss those crazy-ass cases now, the ones where it turned out that almost everyone was decent underneath and attack marmosets are fine and dandy, 'cause now it's back to same-old-same-old, honest citizens trying to con other honest citizens, and murder them, and the missing kid cases that we seem to get stuck with lately, because somebody high-up thinks Kowalski has "empathy" and is good at interviewing kids. Once we had

days, which were brighter, fuller, better tasting, and now, they're like crazy paving, all grey and broken.

Except. Except, that's how things really are, that's how things always were, the only problem is the guy who escaped from Narnia by way of Never-Never-Land and made us think otherwise.

Made us believe we could fly.

And instead we're plummeting to the ground, plummeting down towards that crazy paving, and I'm just waiting for the thump.

Fuck, I made like a statue with Vecchio, and not even one of those cool I'm-wearing-only-a-sheet-fuck-me-now statues that so liven up any art gallery. Just, wham, bam, freezerama.

I've found out some things today, and not just how Vecchio turns my crank, which I kinda knew already, and God alone knows what would have happened if the water had not been totally freezing what with him being all up-close and personal and looking like an Armani wet t-shirt contest, except more extreme, like a wet

Armani suit contest and you have to be pretty good to show up under a ton of wool and silk like that. Cold water so should have stopped that, made his nuts run home for momma and all, but clearly it didn't stop me when my dick started going "hello Vecchio" and trying to greet that nice wet bulge of his.

Yeah, not just that.

They never changed the locks at the Consulate.

Which is why I'm in Fraser's office, no, Fraser's old office, which is now back to being a storage closet, full of boxes and wondering what the fuck can explain this, and when the Mounties find me here and send me off to prison in Mountie-land, how I'm going to explain this to Fraser in my little prison letter on little prison notepaper.

"Dear (Ben) Fraser,

I messed up. I decided to break into the consulate, because I thought you might be in the closet.

And did I ever tell you that I

Did I ever tell you how really

really sorry I am.

Ray (the skinny Polish one)"

Sucks. It suckity suckity sucks. And that's the thing, I'm not gonna leave, I don't think I can leave, and those darn Mounties are going to have to drag me out by my ankles, and I won't even try and kick 'em in the head.

And the worst bit is I don't even have the booze as an excuse. I am not as drunk as a skunk, or even as drunk as a wolf, or as drunk as a hoary marmot. No liquor has passed my lips, which might make Benton-buddy the poster boy of temperance happy, but then neither has anything else, like say, Benton-buddy, passed my lips. I'm so horny that I'd settle for Vecchio, or some guy called Lou in the back of a bar just inside Boystown, just inside enough to get me sucked, but mean that I could still look all pearly white if the vice boys came in to get out the rain or somethin'. But I can't. I'm all fucked up inside, and I can't because I'm a fucking romantic.

It's that or all the jack and vodka and other fun stuff I used to drink has now settled in my brain twenty-four seven, or maybe I took a bad hit in

the ring, or maybe I got starved of oxygen when I almost fucking drowned. Or why don't we take it right back to the beginning, when I popped out the oven early and underdone. Yeah, Stanley Raymond Kowalski, this is your life, a whole load of dumb things done for dumb reasons.

There's gotta be some reason why I'm in Fraser's old office, sitting on a packing crate full of, God knows, pemmican permit paperwork, and I'm staring at that closet of his. The one he swore he used to hear banging noises from, which was probably Turnbull polishing the family silver away from Thatcher or something else Canadian normal.

And then I stand up like I'm on strings or something and pull open the door.

Nothing except what smells like a Fraser-flavour attempt at home-made moth repellent, because bug busters are so environmentally unfriendly. Okay, I also have a cousin in Arizona who blew up his house with the things, but then, there had to be a real dumb Pollack somewhere in the family tree, it's like Vecchio's genetic ability to mobster, or Fraser's instinct to lick stuff; but you get bugs, you

get bug busters, not oil of bergamot mixed with cloves and granny pants lavender.

Nothing there.

Like, surprise much? So I spin round and look at the room again.

And then I feel a cold breeze run across my back.

I just can't fucking sleep. Maybe, I should just go downstairs and slob in front of the TV, I got over that movie where the bad things came out of the idiot box long ago, and they don't even shut down no more.

So I go down and fix myself some juice. Orange, chock full of sugar, and maybe Benny will come running down from Canada on a specially trained Caribou to save me from dental decay and cavities. But, he'll be followed by an assassination team sent (politely) by the Canadian Mob on behalf of the Baby Seal Splatting Association, and yeah, happy thoughts.

Once upon a time, I used to think that happy thoughts could make you fly. Now I know all the do is set you

up for a fall.

Somehow, the only channel I can get is showing curling.

My back's all cold and the cold is drying out my t-shirt toot sweet and I turn round, and there's just the closet. Well, I'm a detective, I like to figure stuff out, and it can't be coming from the windows because they have that film on them, you know the stuff you have if you're poor, but not poor enough to not own a hairdryer. So yeah, it's the closet, and I just step into the closet, casual-like, like I hang in closets every day.

This is gonna look so fucking good when the early morning Mountie patrol find me. What are you doing, they say. I'm in the closet, I say. And sure, I've got my sweet ass out of prison, but they're gonna stick me in the nuthouse instead. And I have a nut allergy, honest. It's why I only eat chocolate M and Ms in my coffee.

I step into the closet and I step out into the snow. Not good if you're only wearing a t-shirt and even if I hadn't left the leather in the back of the Goat, it's seriously Canada here. And for some reason it ain't amusing

me that much that since Fraser is in Canada, Vecchio was right, and he is in the freaking closet. And that reason has a lot to do with the fact that I'm stuck in some big ass pine forest and my way home ain't there. No closet. Some of those trees might grow up to be closets one day, but there ain't any here right now.

No coat, no closet, hello my-future-as-a-popsicle. Greatness. Oh, yeah, and then they'll find me in couple o' hundred years and stick me in a museum like that guy in Switzerland. If you didn't know already, Discovery is my friend; it teaches me useful stuff like all about penguins which you don't get in the Artic, and frozen Swiss. What it don't teach me is how to make an instant coat out of a pine tree. Which is why I wish I had my other friend, Benton Fraser RCMP, here right now, because he would know, or he'd know a better way to warm me up. And I so am not a teenager, but what the fuck will stop my dick? The lake they call Michigan? Nuh-uh. Being about to be popped hard by my partner? You gotta be kidding me. The prospect of becoming human popsicle? Nope. Like Miss Macalister said, back when I was young and free and trying to do my homework so good that I could carry on kissing Stella behind the

bleachers when we got to college,
the answer is in the question. What
the fuck will stop my dick? Fucking.

It would be so fucking simple if I
wasn't freezing to death, and looking
behind me, I realise my feet have
made my one big decision here and
decided that yeah, I'm gonna move
about some rather than give up and
have a snow bath and hope they have
hot baths in heaven.

Footprints, footprints everywhere,
and not a head to kick.

And then I see the light, which does
not mean anything metaphysical or
anything, like I give up the booze I'm
not drinking and the gay I'm not
having and shout Alleluia, but actual
physical light. It is not exactly dark
in this forest, the cover makes it a
sort of perpetual twilight. Of
course, I could be dreaming all this,
since it's all stuff I know from
knowing Ben, it could be that I fell
asleep in Ben's office and the early
morning Mountie just hasn't woken
me up because I look cute and/or
sociopathic.

Anyway, I think I am here, and if I'm
here, I'm dying on my feet, and they
tell you that dying is like going
towards a light, so I do.

I still can't fucking sleep. I hate
Stanley, he's probably in his bed,
dreaming of Mounties and caribou,
where one of them get to suck him
off, and on reflection, it's not going
to be the caribou. This is a crying
shame since I'm sure that caribou
must have big teeth, because
everything in Canada does, and it
would be harder for Kowalski to be
such a dick without one to call his
own.

It's the insomnia talking, not me, I'd
never wish for a partner of mine to
be emasculated any more than I'd
wish him dead.

Except for those five seconds on a
train station platform which are
carved forever into my eyes. Into my
eyelids, and when I close my eyes,
that's what I see, that's what I hear,
that's what I feel my hand doing,
rising up and taking aim, and I'm
screaming no like a fool.

Like a fool, because I know it's real,
it was the rest of those two years,
which wasn't.

I walk towards the light, okay, not walk, more skid-shuffle. Snow and pine-needles do not a good pavement make.

It's a fucking lamppost. It is Narnia.

Almost.

Narnia, that's where you get fauns under lampposts that are there for no good reason, here you get guys in big ugly fur hats under lampposts. I don't know, maybe we're in Russia, 'cause that's kinda like Canada like weird and cold and cold and weird and weirdly cold, just like Canada really; or maybe the guy's girlfriend went to Epcot and all he got was this horrible novelty hat. I can so get behind that.

My mom said that I never should go talk to strange men wearing horrible hats. Well, she didn't, but if she had seen this guy, she would have, or gone hide under the bed. One of the two.

Then I notice that he's holding out a coat, and that makes up my mind for me. Mothers might tell you not to talk to strange men, but they also tell you to wrap up warm. And if I don't wrap up warm, I won't be able to talk to strange men, and anyway, I

broke that rule the moment I met Ben, I mean you can't get a stranger man than that, can you? Now, if only he'd do things to me. I wouldn't tell mom or a teacher or something. I'm old enough to look after myself, I'm a big boy now.

And he has a coat.

And he has a coat and it looks like one of those funky Inuit parka-things.

And he has a coat and it looks like one of those funky Inuit parka-things and I really need a coat right now.

"Ah, son, I thought you might be in need of one of these," says mysterious old-guy, and I'm so grateful that I pretend I don't hear him muttering, "Damn Yanks, don't have a brain cell in their heads, never plan ahead either, now if I was going to walk through a closet..."

"Thanks man," I say, before I actually end up listening to any of this bull, because, like anyone actually plans on walking through a closet in an office and ending up in Narnia, and that weird voice in my head can shut up about "what did you expect anyway?" because 1) I don't care and b) if I expected anything, it was a hot naked Mountie. "You know anywhere a

cold American can stay round here? Or failing that, the location of Benton Fraser RCMP, because we're buddies and if there's anybody I want to see in the middle of a Canadian forest, it's him."

"You're not in Canada, son, not quite. I have a cabin over north of here."

Cabin. Greatness. It might be another way of saying shack-with-no-water-running-or-otherwise, but I love it. Canada grows on you, and so does cabin-livin', 'cause cabins mean oatmeal and, if I promise to brush my teeth after, honey on top.

So I tromp off through the woods, I think I hear the guy shout something, but I head on, no time to gab right now, let's get me some cabin. Now, let's think, moss grows on the North side of trees, right? This path-finding lark is way easier than Fraser ever made out, 'cause, look, I've found a path already, and it's a really good path.

I'm not usually this inane, I'm just worried something will freeze up if I stop.

You can say this for curling, it's almost hypnotic. I'm sure Stanley told me something about Benny and self-hypnosis. Maybe that's how he does it, watches the Stanley Cup, which whatever Kowalski thinks, has gotta be the only Stanley Benny's interested in, and puts himself in that happy happy place.

Actually, maybe it's why all Canadians are so damn polite, they watch curling and it teaches them to be slow and gentle with their fellow-man. Clearly, the dragon lady hates the stuff.

I wonder if it will put me to sleep if I watch long enough.

Either I'm in a damn big cabin, or I took a wrong turning. I don't care because this place is kind of nifty, plus, there's more chance of me finding something to eat in the cupboards because more rooms equals more cupboards, particularly if a chick's involved. Doesn't stop the place looking spooky, but then that's just gonna be the weather, trust me, the dark and the snow makes everything spooky, like Lou Skagnetti spooky. Not helped any by it needing a visit from an interior

decorator, and really needing a visit from an exterior decorator. Wonder if Sven the smelly Swede has like a special rate for doing both, with a session with you, him and a riding crop thrown in for fun. Hey, I'm only halfway kidding, why else would the Ice Queen employ him? To look at colour swatches and arrange the furniture? Excuse me; she's got Fraser and Turnbull for that. And I'll bet my bottom dollar that Turnbull would love to pick out curtains. The only down point would be the fetching curling kettle print.

The Ice Queen would be so at home here, come to think of it, everything's so tasteful muted, and grey. Or maybe Stella, even, throw in a few wine chenille throws over the furniture and one of those fruit bowls on a stand. I just don't particularly want to meet the lady of the manor, or the guy of the manor, it ain't a preference thing, I don't want to meet both of them equally; it just doesn't feel quite right me being here. Maybe I'm still spooked, though I'm warming through nicely away from all that snow, and I've found myself a nice big canoodle a bra... candelabra which lights up good. Maybe it was the statues that weren't in the garden, only the plinths, but then, this place is in a bad

way, and maybe the owner put them into hock to pay for repairs.

See, perfectly logical explanation, only problem, it comes from a guy who thought it would be a good idea to sneak into his best friend's ex-office and then walked through his closet into snow-land. Yeah, logical.

Still, it's warmer in here, and yeah, gonna look for a bedroom, 'cause if these people think anything like Ben, bed's where you're going to find the warm stuff, like blankets and that, and then once I've found a room I can camp out in, I can make a fire then. And you know what I was saying about this place and Stella, yeah? You can double underline it and stick Frannie's spangles on it. I mean, woah, big four poster bed just this side of princess, and one of those freestanding mirrors, and on the chest there's silver platters with lids on. Très classy.

Hmm, being the investigative type that I am, and so not a nosey-parker, I lift up one of the lids by the rinky-dink little handle. Pemmican. Urgh. I am so not that hungry, or at least, I'm not so hungry that I won't check the other dish-thing first. Okay, weird, it's kind of pink sugary stuff, and Ben always goes on about high

energy requirements in freezerland, like when we were looking for the hand and ate butter 'cause it was fat and fat's like calorie-a-rama, so sugar has to be pretty damn good. So I pick up one of the squares and pop it in my mouth, and Christ, it's like eating sugar mixed with your mom's best bath salts.

Pemmican, here I come.

The curling's over now and I'm just beginning to swim happily in the warmth of infomercials for pop psychology books guaranteed to make you a happier better zombie and I look at the clock over the dresser and fuck, it's like five am and it's all too clear that Raimundo isn't going to get any sleep tonight, since we're officially in today territory now. At least I know why Canadians like curling so bad, it's long and takes away your pain for hours, great if you're out there in the big whiteness with nothing to do except go play chicken with polar bears.

I think I ought to go grab the bathroom before any of Maria's little bundles of adolescent joy hog it. Yeah, and shave and do my teeth and all that shit, because I might not care

too much about Stanley, but I don't want ma worrying about me more than she is already, her baby boy shouldn't be going around getting in cop chases now he already get laid off the force once, and if I hear that again I'm going to do something really stupid and Benny-like and dangerous just so that I don't have to hear it again.

Yeah, go save myself from tooth decay because Benny ain't turned up to do it for me yet. Maybe the caribous are running slow or something. Or maybe he's met a Mountie girl and's making Mountie babies right now; the guy barely knows what a telephone is and his letter writing sucks, it's all "Diefenbaker and I are well," and then he does nothing but go on about what interesting thing happened three towns over in Gluggamoulson.

Toothbrush, toothpaste, open mouth and mirror. Simple. So why does it feel such hard work?

What was that stuff? I swear I will never diss pemmican again, ever, nosiree, pemmican pie for now and forever. Pemmican for breakfast, pemmican for lunch, pemmican for

dinner, pemmican for brunch. And it's got to be good for me because Ben eats it. Or maybe not, since Ben eats dirt and poutine and bird's nest soup and baby seals, raw baby seals.

I mean, eww! But pemmican is nice, pemmican is my friend, and Ben is my friend and maybe I can lure him here with the pemmican and then he can help me, 'cause otherwise I'm stuck, and pemmican is not going to start fires or build igloos or find me something other than pemmican to eat.

I think maybe I might have missed something else edible and I look around, and then I notice it, I can see Vecchio in the fucking mirror. Man, he looks like shit.

He doesn't half make funny faces when he's doing his teeth, looks like he's going to lose that brush up that big schnoz of his if he's not careful, and his eyes are shut, kind of like he was getting a vigorous backrub from somebody who can't quite get it right, but it feels so good.

I pull a face and can't see it, just him, and then I wonder if he can see me.

Fucking Kowalski, he's such a fuck up, and he's still happy about it, and he's better at being me than I ever was, always remembered flowers for Ma's birthday, always got a better solve rate, and when did Kowalski steal my life? 'Cause suddenly he's the tough guy who's fun to be with, not me, not even Frannie wants to spend time with me, I'm just the scary muscle. And everyone talks to Kowalski, not me, everyone was sorry about his damn baseball shirt, but no-one said nothing about my suit. I'm disappearing aren't I? And one day, I'm going to look into the mirror and see nothing or Kowalski, and I don't know which scares me most.

I open my eyes. Kowalski. I close my eyes and open them again. Kowalski pulling faces like some kid in fourth grade. Thank you, God, now I know which one scares me most and it's this one.

And Kowalski keeps mouthing something at me through the glass.

I open the cabinet. Toothbrushes, toothpaste, weird female things I'm never asking about, mouthwash. No Stanley. Close the door too, and in the glass, more Stanley; open it again, same old same old and no Stanley.

Close it to and wave my hand behind the mirror and Stanley doesn't even flicker some.

And then it gets real weird, even weirder than Benny-weird, as his hand starts coming out of the mirror, like it belongs to the lady of the lake and she's reaching for Excalibur, except it ain't hers and there's no magic sword, just me. And then it grabs my shirt and pulls.

And Toto, I ain't in the bathroom no more.

I only reached out because I'm as curious as George or something; and then blammo, all fall down, because it takes a lot to pull a grown man, and one of the laws of emotion, huh, motion is that once you start something going, it keeps going until it hits something, if it has momentum.

Vecchio's big on momentum, which is why he's landing on top of me right now. And then he's up over me on his hands and knees and that's good, because it gives my dick room to, oh fuck, dick, don't do that, please don't do that. Save that for when we get home again and I can

think about Ben naked again, because you like naked Ben, don't you, but if you do that now, you'll be too tired, and I know you like Vecchio too. And this is too fucking disturbing, first I talk to my dick like it's a wolf, now I'm talking to it like a four year old, and that sucks, because it means I'm thinking about dicks, and Vecchio has a dick, and it's not very far away and I really don't want him to notice, and...

"Hey, little Stanley's come to play, you like that Kowalski?" I was not expecting that, Vecchioes found out: 1, broken jaws: nil, "You like it when I get all close and tough on your ass, you like when I hold you against things, when I hold you down..."

I am trying not to come here so bad, 'cause that would suck, 'cause it sounds like he wants to. But then, maybe he doesn't, maybe the only thing he wants to fuck with is my head, and not in the happy fun way either, in the Bookman way. In the "I've just found out that my partner's queer and I'm gonna give him enough rope to hang himself like a little Christmas fairy on a tree" and there's just a dark edge, a hint of menace, a hint of danger.

I like danger, I love danger, I love

dangerous Canadians; but Vecchio, he's another type of dangerous now. No wonder Frannie's all jumpy round him. 'Cept I really doubt he'd play with Frannie like this, or at least I hope not, and I don't know is he playing-fun or playing like a cat with a mouse, like a horny cat with a nice-assed mouse.

And mirrors are meant to make you see things better, so why am I having such a tough time with this, I mean, I'm wearing my glasses, don't leave them off much no more, want to be ready to shoot, ready to fight crime, and yeah, Fraser likes it when I wear them, though for all I know it is just buddies, buddies like buddies to see where they're going. Plus, on the dog-sled-roadless-road-trip it meant that I could check out Fraser's ass from further away. Fraser's ass makes my dick jump up more.

Fuck. That was so not the idea. How do I know I haven't done a Star Trek or something and pulled through the freaky mirror-world Vecchio, you know, the one who is actually a criminal mastermind who likes say tying up cops and doing them up the ass with cucumbers? I don't know nothing.

And I've got Vecchio on top of me.

This makes running away kind of difficult.

Thing is, I don't want to sound desperate or terrified or nothing, I need to play it cool, so I ask myself, What Would Steve McQueen Do?

"I could say the same to you Vecchio." Typical Kowalski, typical smart ass, and such a nice ass it is too. Trying to look tough, but his lip's trembling and I can't tell if he's scared or freaked or horny as shit.

"Yeah," I say, feeling a little bit Bookman and a hell of a lot more me than I have for a real long time, "but my name ain't Stanley."

And the guy whose name is Stanley is trying to sink back into the floor and I realise that for a guy in his best Egyptian cotton pyjamas, (quit snickering there in the cheap seats, I have sensitive skin), freaked. He's definitely freaked. I can hear a little Stanley voice going "no, majorly freaked, freaked beyond freakage" and yeah, I need to do something about that.

So I lean my head down and kiss him, polite and nice like a good little

Catholic schoolboy, who okay does guys but he does them like he does girls should he on occasion do them. I can't decide whether I sound more like Benny or the Lieutenant, but then it doesn't matter because Stanley's mouth is opening like a sinful flower waiting for a bee to dive in, all the bee had to do is have the courtesy to sit there nice and wait.

My ass is still up in the air, which might make me look real dumb, but there's nobody to see, here in Magic Mirror Land, and yeah, I need to go slow here, Stanley's still shaking some, and his half open parka's fur's all wet like he's been tromping through the snow or something. I just poke the tip of my tongue between those lips and he sucks on it like he's a drowning man and fuck, what has he been eating?

Kowalski's mouth tastes sickly sweet and sticky, and a bit like old meat left in the back of the refrigerator and then hauled out and stuck in a bachelor's one skillet special, but only after you chop the green bits off. Hey, I haven't always lived with my ma, you know, I have had to fend for myself out on the Great Plains or something. Kowalski tastes like that, as he sucks on my tongue so hard that my jaw begins to ache, and of gun oil

and... Heck, he tastes of Kowalski, sugar coated bad meat flavour Kowalski, it's that or a vulture with a sweet tooth.

In the corner of my eye, I see the open silverware. Did his mom not tell him any decent fairy stories, then? There's one sort of person who lives in a castle with a magic mirror, and you don't want to eat anything she gives you, or leaves lying around for that matter. I like this spell, though.

The moment I come up for air; god, that man's got a mouth like a suction pump, I almost drown in it as he sucks me in as if he's drowning; two skinny hands grab my ass and pull down, hard. My knees protest. Bad enough that they're in making out on the floor territory without them having to move without getting clued in on the program first.

Kowalski's smart, I knew that when I saw his/my solve rate; but this is fucking genius. He's hard and warm beneath me, the fur from his open parka tickles my wrists as I reach up to stroke his face.

I move my head to catch Vecchio's

fingers in my mouth. He tastes better than candy, better than pemmican, and it gives me something hard to suck on, not quite a cock, but then, if I had his cock up here, it wouldn't be getting friendly much with mine down there. And yeah, he's proved his intentions are pure and everything, so yeah, he just needs to get on with it now, because the one thing my dick would like more than what it's got, is friction.

And maybe, if I suck Vecchio's brain out his fingers, then he'll get going some, and not care that I might be some skinny fragile little doll, which I never have been, or scared, which I was, but I'm not now. I'm not asking him to fuck me up the ass with a cucumber or anything, but there's only so much cotton wool I can take, and if I wanted cotton wool, I'd go and lie down in the big mountains of the stuff outside.

So, yeah, sucking. It's a pavlova response thing, suck a guys' fingers and it goes straight to his dick, because dick thinks that some nice warm wet fingers are coming to play, and yeah, Vecchio-baby, that's it.

And that's it.

And that's it.

And this is it.

And who let the damn snow in here, everything is white, no it melted away like fairy dust, and it's fairy dust that makes you feel like flying.

And then Vecchio gets up and sits down in front of me. What happened to basking? What happened to having a hot and horny human blanket? What happened to Elvis? What happened to baby Jane?

Vecchio should look real stupid, sitting there on his ass in his jammies; but he don't he looks like sex on a stick, like candyfloss, except less sweet and more likely to appeal to the over twenty-ones. Very happy sex on a stick, and yeah, there's come seeping through that white cotton. I may have fouled up my boxers, but everything's tucked away nice, and hopefully we'll find a laundrette behind a tree or something before it dries hard; but Vecchio, it's all making shapes at his crotch and it's so very inviting.

So very inviting that I RSVP and roll over and get my head there and I'm laying on my belly while my tongue tastes there, and sniffs, and traces out his cock with a cocktail of come and

spit, the electric taste of skin merged with the cool clear taste of whatever the fuck expensive stuff Vecchio gets his jammies made out of, might be linen, but how the fuck would I know? Bad boys don't wear linen. It creases too bad. Maybe Vecchio has a Fraser-level ironing habit. But no starch.

Too much thinking, not enough licking, not enough blowing Vecchio's mind, 'cause sure he can't get it up again that fast, but there's nothing wrong with putting him in Happy Land, is there? So I blow on the damp spots some and he squirms like a girl with worms down her neck, not that I ever stuck worms down girl's necks. And I pick up some of the fabric between my teeth and move it around like a cat does her kittens, only without it sounding all Oedipal. And I keep doing it, and just when Vecchio gets used to it, I make like I'm doing it again, and get my mouth round his still soft cock and just hold it there for a bit, while Vecchio spaces out.

Then I suck a little and honestly, this is so much better than pemmican, and we'll leave the bath-salt gunk out of it for now. And yeah, he starts filling my mouth out a bit more, growing hard just 'cause it's my

mouth round his dick, getting everything warm and wet and comfortable.

And then Vecchio grabs my hair and pulls my head up. The rest of me follows because my body is rather attached to my head, and vice-versa, my head is nobody without my body pulling its weight, otherwise it would sit around all day and watch Discover and pig out on nachos and pizza, my body give its va-va-voom, its get-up-and-go. Ouch. But it's good ouch, because now I'm not playing with cotton but his mouth and he's got his hands on the back of my neck and we're kissing hard and fast and dirty. And so hard I think my teeth are going to fall out and my geek chic glasses are going to hit orbit and cause NASA problems for years.

I'd object to him taking away my lovely toy, but I know it only means he's gonna have a better use for it later, and well, maybe I should help speed things along. I'm nothing but considerate. I'm going to let him play with my toys and everything.

Kowalski's trying to undo the buttons on my pyjama shirt, his fingers all clumsy and lazy with sex,

and they have a mind of their own and whenever he gets distracted for just a second they race off and try to get intimate with my nipples through the thin cotton.

Quick but lazy kisses that taste of cotton and me. And some of that syrupy stuff. They will probably taste of that syrupy stuff from now 'til the end of the world, but Kowalski can feel free to try and get rid of that taste anyway he wants.

He breaks away to better concentrate on the really difficult buttons, and I see something dark over his shoulder. And I feel something walking over my grave, which is weird, because I don't have one yet, ma keeps knocking me for my lack of forward planning there.

And the shadow's moving, it's coming closer and begins to resolve itself into a person. And right now, I wish it was the Wicked Witch Of The West or whoever owns this bijou vacation pad. It's Benny, and he's dressed for work, not in those fancy-ate dress reds, but in the kit he actually works in up where it is cold and even the polar bears get frost bite, all sombre brown and skins, making him look like an old photograph come to life to haunt us.

And he's looking at me with those eyes that so haunt my dreams, the ones where I see only pain and betrayal as I pump bullet after bullet into his shattered back, laughing and revelling in vengeance. And the worst thing in that dream is the thing I see most in his eyes, as they grow dark and cloudy while I anoint my hands with his blood, still hearing the screams from those silent lips, is that he doesn't understand at all.

And then I look at the real Fraser, not the dream Fraser and I can still see it, that he doesn't understand, he knows there's something of a betrayal, but he does not understand, he sees rejection and pain, and I know, in a moment, it will be as if it was never there at all.

I see dark eyes full of pain and betrayal and fractured innocence. I see the dark lady amongst the snow, her snow-white lily-white fingers tasting of Turkish delight and electricity, her every breath a lesson in seduction, her cold face betraying one incapable of love but forever craving it, stealing it wherever she can and craving most of all the simple love of somebody, who's never really quite been tainted by the world, for whom the stains of the human

condition have always washed out. And then she covers him in beetroot juice, or blood, or rage or fury and revels in the fact he doesn't quite understand, and that it is that, not her actions, that tear him apart slowly, more surely than the rack.

Vecchio's gone kind of wooden and stiff and not in a good way either. He keeps looking at something just behind my shoulder. I thought he just had a thing for my neck. In my dreams, Ben has a thing for my neck, and he licks it like a cat, not like a wolf, all tasting with that little bit of bite I need, and I'm arching up, arching up and almost coming just because he keeps licking at the pulse point, sometimes hard, sometimes soft, big long licks that almost reach my ear and make me think of Dief, and little jackhammer licks. And fuck, he's making me come with his tongue on my neck. Except it isn't his tongue. It's my finger, wet with spit and a little pre-come, and my other hand is wrapped around my dick, unmoving, just there enough.

Who would have known that my neck was an erroneous zone? Stella sure didn't. Liane sure didn't. None of the girls knew, and neither did the

guys, but then it's hard to experiment when you're in the disabled stall in the back of a bar and you're more interested, you're supposed to be more interested, in tongue on your dick. Hard and fast and impersonal, not loving and tasting and like nobody ever knew me before.

I really hope it ain't the lady of the manor, because I'm sporting a woody like Woody Mcwoody the Yukon wood mill owner, who through a tragic accident ended up with one made of carved pine polished with resin, the cause of his popularity with all the girls. And for a guy who isn't real, he sure had a big boner. Not that I'm in competition or nothing.

I can't keep myself in suspense forever, even if it might blow the happy-horny thing I have going and I turn my head, and...

It's Ben.

It's Ben and he looks like a kid, who's just been told that there is no Santa Claus, there is no Christmas, no presents, no nothing, and it's like having a plaster ripped off and he's pushed hurt and unready into that cold world where the grown-ups live. And he has to work, not play, at

being grown-up in this grown-up world, and be polite and clean and do his chores without complaining. But he's still a kid inside, hurt and alone.

Except, for Ben, it really never was Christmas at all.

Vecchio stands up and opens his arms to Fraser, while I'm still half way in hot and horny la-la-land and half way into metaphysical musing and pop-psychology, and is like, "Benny, we love you, let us take the bad feelings away, the bad memories away, and replace them with something better. Benny, let us love you, fuck, we already do, we were just too afraid that you might bolt or somethin' and we didn't notice that we'd left the gate open and you didn't even need to bolt," and I'm like woah, Vecchio has the hots for Ben, why did I not know this? It would have made undercover as him so much better, easier, under the covers with Mountie-mine.

And when Ben doesn't come over, doesn't move, he don't do anything 'cept his best tree impersonation, all wooden and still, Vecchio just steps up and kisses him as if he was Prince Charming, pushing the life back into

him, with a questing tongue and grasping, embracing, soothing arms. What was it with Prince Charming, didn't he like Cinders' home cooking, and decide to chop and change and rescue a new princess every day? I should feel put out, a minute ago he was kissing me, his nose and my glasses clashing like titans, and his hot tongue battling my own. He wasn't kissing me like this, soft and gentle like a kiss-gourmet, like it's a sort of absolution.

A single tear like a spun glass tree decoration begins to roll down Fraser's cheek, catching slightly in the stubble, gilding with light his wind-chapped face. And Vecchio pulls back a moment, his lips wet and gleaming, and wipes it away with his hand. Perhaps, if he was wearing something other than his jammies, he'd have pulled out a handkerchief out the Armani, but he is Armani-less and he is beautiful. It is like he's left his Armani-shell behind, left the Bookman-shell behind, and he's like a turtle come out of his shell. But turtles die if they loose their shells, and you can't put them back, Johnny did that in sixth grade and got social on his ass for it. I don't want Vecchio to die, I don't want us to die, will we die if we stay here?

I try to think happier, like a butterfly coming out of its chrysalis, beautiful and shining, at first floppy and dull but growing to hard brightness. But the butterfly is doomed, it's at the end of it's cycle and all it's got to look forward to is sex and eggs and death. I think we can skip the eggs, unless some even weirder shit is going on.

I don't want to die, I want to be forever.

I want to be here forever, standing here, watching them, watching as Vecchio cradles Ben's head in his hands again and dives in for another slightly hotter slightly dirtier kiss, his tongue flicking across Ben's lips like a curling rock skimming across ice. I want to be here watching as Vecchio takes everything in little bitty steps and gives everything to Ben, teaches him what it feels like to be Christmas, to be loved and loved absolutely.

I close my eyes, I don't want to see this end. Because I never want this to end, ever.

I want to live in Never-Never Land, I want to never grow up, I want to live this endless now, I want never to have to step back into the cold world of

grown-ups and work and the booze that makes only a pale mirror of this. I want everything to be like this.

The sounds have stopped, I wish I could close my ears and live an eternity of this in my head.

There's a hand touching me. I open my eyes. It's Ben.

And we hold him in our arms until he stops shuddering, until he relaxes and melts like snow at the end of winter and the beginning of spring. And still we hold him, and with our touches let him know that it is alright to change, and we ourselves wonder what he might become, what we might become, and we don't worry, we're just content to wait and see.