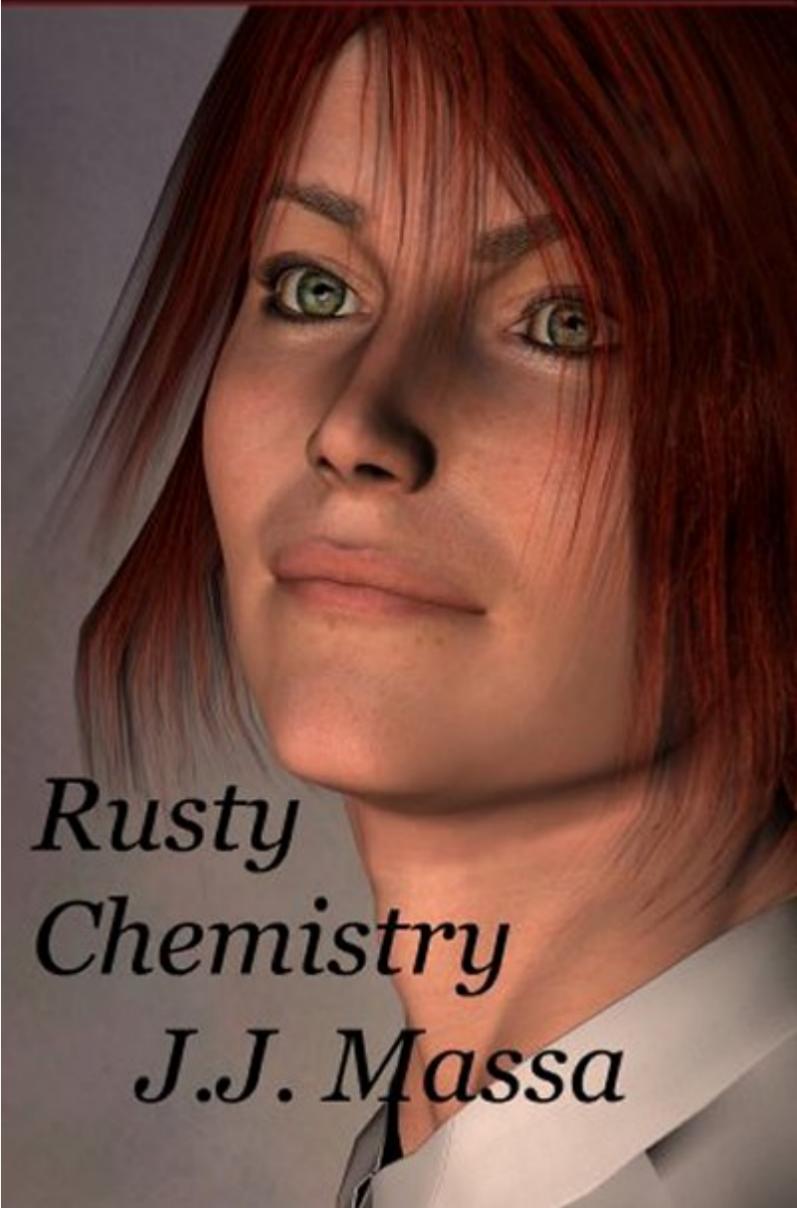


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A close-up portrait of a woman with vibrant red hair and striking green eyes. She is looking slightly upwards and to the left with a soft, contemplative expression. The lighting is soft, highlighting her features. She is wearing a light-colored collared shirt.

*Rusty
Chemistry
J.J. Massa*

J.J. Massa

RUSTY CHEMISTRY

By

J.J. Massa



RUSTY CHEMISTRY

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RUSTY CHEMISTRY

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ISBN: 1-59836-230-5

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J.J. Massa

Dedication:

Nix Winter for her inspiration. My editor, Tracey West for her unfailing support.

RUSTY CHEMISTRY

*Barefoot innocent
Beautiful flame
Into danger sent
Heart not tame*

*Love is a dream
You must Believe
Partners, team
And love receive*

By Nix Winter

J.J. Massa

Chapter One

Lancelot Morgan strode angrily through the University's vast network of corridors, finally stopping someone who looked to be a young college student. "I'm looking for Dr. Ambrozak," he growled at the pimple-faced girl.

"Oh," she squeaked. "His office is on the third floor." Lance turned to leave when he heard her amend, "He's not there, though. He's in his lab at the end of the hall."

With an inarticulate snarl, he turned on his heel and marched toward the end of the hall cursing all people and their convoluted thought processes.

He stopped when he found a doorway with a plaque bearing the embossed name: Vanya Yakovetch Ambrozak, Ph.D. Glancing through the wired glass window, he saw a hunched figure, a boy, Lance guessed, staring intently into a microscope.

Little of the person was visible save a mop of pale red-rust hair and stooped, white-covered shoulders. He seemed to be scribbling blindly on a nearby pad.

Lancelot rapped quickly and pushed the door open, not waiting for an invitation. "Is Dr. Ambrozak around?" he demanded.

"*Da*?" the boy answered, tearing himself away from his microscope with obvious reluctance.

"I'm looking for Dr. Vanya Ambrozak," Lancelot announced, some of the hard edge leaving his voice.

"*Da*, I am Dr. Vanya Ambrozak." The other man's brow furrowed as he looked fixedly back at Lance.

Lancelot's eyes widened as they swept over the young man he'd taken for a visiting high school student or possibly a very young college freshman. The guy didn't seem old enough to have a Ph.D., he reasoned.

Well, it didn't matter, he decided, in fact it just made some things more clear. "I have a complaint," he gritted, pulling out a small plastic container and slamming it loudly on the counter.

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“What is...” the diminutive doctor reached a fine-boned hand out and snatched the plastic bottle. Uncapping the lid, he began to shake his head sadly.

“That was *alleged* to be a sleeping agent,” Lancelot snapped in a clipped voice. “I’m the one who ended up sleeping after I was injected by the man *that* didn’t work on.”

“*Gospodi pomiluy!*” the boy doctor groaned, sliding off his stool. “Is not supposed to be in plastic! Who? Where gave you this?”

“What?” It took Lance a moment to figure out what the other man was saying. *English was obviously not his first language.* . “Your office sent it over. How old are you?”

The younger man’s eyes went wide as he stared at Lance. “Old? My years?” his face turned pink as he dipped his head, ostensibly to regard the bottle Lance had given him. “Am twenty-five age,” the professor mumbled. In a stronger voice he proclaimed, “I am my office and this is not container I sent.”

“Oh--well--Your container didn’t look right,” Lancelot confessed sheepishly. “And anyway what difference does that make?” he demanded, his tone more aggressive.

“As you saw, is very big difference it makes. The chemicals of solution are rendered impotent when combined with polymers of plastic bottle,” the small scientist explained.

“Why didn’t someone *tell* me that, hmmm?” Lancelot challenged peevishly.

“Someone was sure you’d call to ask prior to pouring sleeping solution from container to bottle...”

His first instinct was to sputter and spurt and carry on loudly, but one glance at the mischievous twinkle in those gold-flecked hazel eyes and Lancelot found himself chuckling.

“Guess that’s why you’re the one with all the Ph.D.’s huh?” he laughed, intrigued by the little professor. “Any chance you can whip me up another batch?” he asked, embarrassed.

“Am chemist, not cook,” the smaller man shot back, but he still had that twinkle in his eyes that told Lancelot that he was joking and not offended. “When would you need this?”

“When can you have it for me?” Lancelot shot back. “Oh!” It occurred to him that he hadn’t actually told the professor who he was. “Lancelot Morgan, at your service,” he announced, thrusting out his hand. “Rude of me not to introduce myself.”

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Red-faced, the younger man nervously grasped Lancelot's much larger hand, giving it a cursory pump. "I know you, Mr. Morgan. I mean to say that I have seen you at meetings. Please call me Vanya."

Lancelot studied Vanya's flaming face intently, a thrill of attraction zipping through him at the touch of that small, elegant hand. "I don't remember seeing you at any meetings," he confessed, a bit surprised and embarrassed. He was sure he'd know if he'd ever seen this interesting little man before.

"You are big spy, I am small chemist," Vanya answered, clearly uncomfortable. "I will call you to know when solution is finished."

With that, the diminutive professor turned away and slid back onto his high stool, focusing all his attention back onto the microscope, as it had been when Lance had first arrived. Lancelot Morgan, secret agent extraordinaire, was dismissed.

Vanya resisted the urge to look up until the large and charismatic agent had gone. While he wasn't sure why Lancelot Morgan caused his stomach to flutter and his cheeks to flame, he certainly didn't want the other man to realize the effect he had.

Vanya hadn't been in America very long when The Agency had contacted him. He could keep his research and teaching tenure at the university he was assured, but they'd be grateful for his assistance.

He had voluntarily transferred from Crimea State Medical University in the Ukraine, pleased when this large university and hospital had accepted him. He knew academically that America was the land of the free, but in reality, he had been certain that The Agency's request was really a polite demand. That didn't bother Vanya since The Agency served several countries, his homeland among them, in its fight against organized terrorist cells.

In short order, Vanya pulled out the necessary chemicals and began to prepare the sleep toxin that the handsome agent had requested. The process of preparing the formula took hours so he was pleased to realize, somewhere along the way, that he didn't have any scheduled classes that afternoon.

It wouldn't have been the first time that he'd gotten involved in research or a task and missed giving a lecture or teaching a class, unfortunately. The Absentminded Professor was an accurate nomenclature, he realized.

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Chapter Two

Vanya made his way down the subway steps, turning left innocuously when he came to The Agency's hidden entrance. He was still distracted and not thinking clearly when he arrived at the reception desk to find only a guard on duty.

"Offices are closed for the day, sir," the muscular black man informed him.

Vanya shook his head slightly. "Is okay, I must leave something only. Is for Mr. Morgan." What an idiot he was! He hadn't even stopped to check the time.

"Your thumbprint here, sir," the other man instructed, holding a flat device for Vanya to press. "I'm not sure he's still in," the man warned him as Vanya passed his desk and headed deeper into the bowels of The Agency's headquarters, still silently berating himself.

He hadn't gone very many steps when he heard his name issue from a nearby wall speaker. "Dr. Ambrozak, please report to Mr. Franklin's office. Dr. Ambrozak, please report to Mr. Franklin's office," the tinny voice intoned.

He supposed that his entrance had been reported somehow and turned in mid-stride, heading for the boss's office. As soon as he entered Franklin's secretary's domain, she leapt up and opened the office door for him, indicating that he should enter.

"I'll take that," she offered as he moved past her. He looked at her blankly for a moment, embarrassment coloring his cheeks as he realized she meant the small bag he carried.

"Is sleeping solution for Agent Morgan," he murmured his limp explanation.

"Yes, sir," she smiled kindly at him, taking the bag and stepping aside so that he could enter Mr. Franklin's private office.

He hadn't spoken with Emory Franklin personally since that first interview almost a year prior and he was more than a little apprehensive now. As Vanya nervously crossed the threshold, he wracked his brain trying to guess at what the old man could want.

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“Dr. Ambrozak,” Franklin came around the desk and patted Vanya’s shoulder. The other man was so much taller than he was, Vanya felt like a child before him. “I’m afraid I must speak with you this evening about something rather unpleasant.”

The sleeping solution that hadn’t worked! Morgan had been compromised and could have been injured.

“Sir, I am most sorry about...” he began earnestly, only to be cut off in mid-sentence.

“Please, Dr. Ambrozak, I beg your indulgence. This is such an unpleasant task for me that I pray you’ll allow me to finish.” The melodic British tones flowed over him, soothing, even in spite of the alarming words.

Vanya nodded mutely, easing onto the edge of a chair.

“Young man, I know you aren’t an agent, but I have need of some of your--your services. Services that I’m afraid you didn’t agree to when you signed on with our organization.”

Vanya was really confused now. “All of my abilities are at your disposal, Mr. Franklin,” he answered, tilting his head sharply, trying to understand the older man’s unspoken nuances. Not only was the gentleman’s uneasy demeanor confusing, but also, so far nothing Mr. Franklin said had made sense to Vanya.

Pulling a chair in front of Vanya’s, the old man sat and leaned forward, placing a palm on his shoulder and looking hard into his eyes. Vanya, so unused to personal contact in his isolated and lonely life, merely shifted uneasily, glancing from Franklin’s riveted gaze to his heavy hand and back again.

“Dr...Vanya,” Franklin began. Then, speaking more firmly, “Vanya, you understand that everything you do for our organization is completely voluntary. You *do* understand that, don’t you?”

Thoroughly bemused, all Vanya could do was nod once again. If it made the old man happy, he’d say he’d volunteered. He would have, too. Only people like him did as they were told when their government spoke. America was now an ally to his government so one voice was the same as its sister to him.

Releasing a sigh, the Englishman sat back in his chair, reaching back to grab a yellow folder from his desk. Pulling out a glossy square, he handed it to Vanya.

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“This gentleman poses a threat to us. He has aligned himself with The Gray Death, the terrorist group that blew up that cruise ship as it was entering St. John’s Harbor, Newfoundland last year.”

Vanya studied the man in the photo. He looked normal, dignified even. He had short, light brown and gray hair, an attractive, no doubt expensive smile, and looked to be around fifty or so years old.

He looked up at Mr. Franklin curiously, just as the office door opened and Lancelot Morgan walked in.

“He’s a chemist, Dr. Ambrozak. He likes young men. He likes very young, very attractive, very intelligent young men. You are all of those. We need you to seduce him.”

Chapter Three

Lancelot froze in the act of opening the folder Franklin proffered. A photo slid out and fluttered to the floor. He leaned down and lifted it, coldly studying the smiling face of the handsome man pictured.

For a moment he was sure that the old man was telling *him* to seduce the man in the photograph. It wouldn't be the first time that he seduced and even bedded a suspect, male or female. Glancing at Vanya he realized that it very well *might* be the first time for that young man.

"Sir," the young scientist spoke up, his voice almost calm, his pale face nearly expressionless. "I have not... That is I never..." he floundered, apparently unable to make himself clear.

Lance moved to stand behind the young professor, feeling unaccountably uncomfortable with the idea of Vanya seducing the polished man in the picture. Lancelot was bi-sexual. He didn't know what the little professor's sexual orientation was.

"Mr. Franklin," he began, hoping to alleviate some of the tension pouring from both Mr. Franklin and Vanya. "Perhaps I could do it or even someone...."

"Sit down, Mr. Morgan!" Franklin snapped. In a calmer voice he continued speaking, "Dr. Ambrozak is the perfect body type for this man and his looks are along the lines of Dr. Havalon's general preferences. In addition, there is a biochemistry conference at the University of Alberta. Dr. Ambrozak will fit in perfectly. Add to that his familiarity and even his expertise with the chemicals in question—his presence is quite necessary."

Lance noticed that Vanya remained silent so he continued to quiz Franklin about the mission. "What is our objective? What information are we after?"

"We need information on the nerve inhibitors Dr. Paul Havalon has developed and certain anti-toxins he's cultivated to counteract them." Franklin turned to look at Vanya, "Frankly, you are the only person suited for this...task that The Agency can trust

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definitively. If you hadn't come in today, I would have called for you tomorrow. Every bit of information you can assemble, young man. I shudder to think what The Gray Death would do with such tools of torture."

Lancelot nodded, noticing that Vanya nodded at the same time. The connotations of the violent group in question with such horrible nerve agents at their disposal didn't bear thinking about.

"You, Agent Morgan, will accompany Dr. Ambrozak," Franklin's voice was cold, distant now. It was obvious he'd rather be anywhere else. "Naturally, you will be responsible for taping all conversations between Dr. Ambrozak and Dr. Havalon. We can't risk trying to videotape any encounters between them. The Gray Death will have trained him to watch for devices that might capture his image on film. It's more likely that he will say the wrong thing and leave himself open for entrapment."

"Yes, sir," Lancelot nodded, glancing down at his new partner. He didn't know the young man very well so he couldn't be sure if he was always this quiet or if he was rattled.

"Needless to say, Agent Morgan," Franklin went on, his voice serious and sharp. "You will be responsible for the success of this mission and Dr. Ambrozak's safety. You will need to work closely with him and supervise his activities. He is, of course, not trained to work in the field."

"Of course, sir," Lancelot agreed.

* * * *

Before he knew it, he was standing in the hall outside of Franklin's office next to a very shaken looking little professor. "Come on, Vanya," he said, sliding an arm across the smaller man's shoulders. "Why don't you come home with me and let's talk about this?"

Wide-eyed, the silent Ukrainian nodded, following Lancelot after he dropped his arm to lead the way out of the building. Once outside, he hailed a cab and the two men climbed in. Not a word was uttered all the way across town and up the elevator to Lance's penthouse apartment.

Lancelot glanced covertly at the smaller man, concerned with his silence. He couldn't blame him for his distress. Lance, too, was distressed, very much so.

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Something about Professor Vanya Ambrozak grabbed him deep inside. It had to be his protective instincts. Certainly, the other man was attractive. In fact, he was cute as hell with that messy mop of wine red hair, full lips and sparkling hazel eyes.

That couldn't possibly have anything to do with his reservations about Vanya doing this assignment, however. Lancelot was a professional. He would never allow personal feelings to interfere with an assignment. Of course he wouldn't do that.

The problem was that Vanya wasn't a trained operative. That was what concerned Lancelot the most. This was an important assignment and a very dangerous one as well. He'd need to discuss this at great length with Vanya. Very great length.

Once inside, Lancelot hung up his coat and moved toward the kitchen, stopping only when he realized that his guest hadn't followed him. He looked back and saw the younger man standing almost like a statue in the foyer and decided that a glass of medicinal alcohol was called for.

With a vague idea that Ukrainians probably liked vodka as much as Russians did, he poured them both a large, cold glass full. He snagged a bag of chocolate chip cookies on his way back into the living room.

After organizing their impromptu repast on the coffee table, he jogged back to the door and took Vanya by the shoulders, sliding his rumpled suit coat off and hanging it up.

Turning, he steered the young man to the sofa and pushed him lightly, causing him to sit with a plop. Startled, the young professor looked dazedly up at him.

"Is impossible," he muttered, eyes round and frightened in his face. "I will fail this." Reaching forward, Vanya grabbed a glass of the vodka and drank it down without stopping.

"Whoa there, little fella," Lance sprang forward, grabbing the bag of cookies and pushing a handful at Vanya. "Eat something. That's a lot of alcohol, buddy."

He took them, and with a sharp nod, Vanya shoved two cookies into his mouth, washing them down with Lancelot's untouched glass of vodka.

Shaking his head in amazement, Lance headed into the kitchen, returning with the bottle of vodka and a bowl of ice. Sitting down next to Vanya, he dispersed ice and vodka and grabbed a cookie for himself.

"So tell me, Professor, why in the world would you think you'd fail at this? Mr. Franklin thinks you're perfect for it."

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“Is mistaken,” he murmured in a daze. “He is mistaken,” Vanya repeated, turning to him. “Will be my fault for this. Hundreds, *thousands* will be harmed because my fault,” he clutched at Lancelot’s arm, backing away rapidly when his fingers met with Lance’s bare skin.

“Your fault? Why is it that you think Mr. Franklin is mistaken? Are you uncomfortable with the idea of having sex with a man? Is that the problem here?” Lance tried to be considerate, but the idea that Vanya was so panicked over becoming intimate with a man bothered him somewhat. Disappointed him, if he was honest about it.

“No, nooo,” Vanya moaned, dropping his head into his hands, his rusty pink hair sprouting between his fingers. “Is me... Is I am repugnant.” He raised his head to peer at a stunned Lancelot, his hazel eyes moist.

Lance reached out and pulled the younger man against him, automatically seeking to comfort him. “Why would you say such a thing? Who told you that you were repugnant?” Anger warred with a host of other emotions within him as he wrapped an arm around the distraught man. Repugnant was most definitely *not* the word he would use to describe Vanya Ambrozak.

“Nobody tells. Is true. I cannot. Nobody ever has touched me. Not man and not woman has touched. Is because....”

“I’m touching you,” Lancelot murmured, inhaling the scent of the soft hair under his nose. “I’m touching you.”

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Chapter Four

An abandoned baby, Vanya had grown up in Ukrainian orphanages so crowded that it was rare indeed to receive more than the most cursory touch. All of his life he'd been isolated and alone, turning to books and education to fill the emptiness inside.

The very idea of touching and being touched by the stranger in the picture terrified him, even sickened him. Conversely, leaning against Lancelot Morgan's broad chest and having his muscular arm around him—that felt better than anything ever had in his entire life. He felt safe and he was reluctant to give that up.

"I do not know how," he confessed in a whisper, face pressed to the starched white shirt of the older man.

"You don't... What? You're afraid that...." Vanya felt Lancelot take a deep breath. "Okay," the larger man shifted around and tilted Vanya's face up with one hand. "How about this?" he began, "You've kissed someone before haven't you?"

"*Ni*, no, no kiss, no um, how you say, *mitsno obiyamy*, is embrace with arms, is hug. No," he repeated becoming upset again. "My inadequacies will cause death, injury! I cannot do this! I *cannot*!"

He struggled to move from Lancelot's tight embrace but the larger man held him fast. "Hush! Be still," Lancelot admonished, both arms going around him now. "We are partners on this case, Vanya. We'll figure this out together." Vanya struggled halfheartedly one last time. "Together, Vanya," Lancelot repeated, giving him a tight squeeze.

"I am having hug now, yes?" Vanya wheezed, causing Lancelot to laugh and loosen his hold slightly.

"Yes, little professor, and if you put your arms around me, we'll both be having a hug," Vanya could hear the smile in Lancelot's voice.

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Slowly, shyly, Vanya eased first one arm and then the other around Lancelot's ribs until his hands clutched at the smooth muscles of the other man's back. They sat silently for a minute and Vanya reveled in the warm closeness of his first hug.

When he felt Lancelot shift slightly, he drew back and looked up at him. "You will show me how, yes?" he asked, so grateful for the other man's presence. "You will teach me?"

* * * *

Lancelot looked down into the pleading eyes of the little chemist and was lost. Vanya didn't need perfect English to make himself clear. He had never made love with anybody, ever, and he wanted Lancelot to teach him how to seduce someone.

While Lancelot doubted that this innocent little man could ever purposely seduce anyone, Dr. Havalon would expect Vanya to be experienced with men. If not, their hand would be tipped. Besides, he reasoned, it wasn't right that the young man's first sexual experience be a job.

Sliding one hand up to cup the back of Vanya's tilted head, Lancelot sunk his fingers into that raspberry-cinnamon silk and lowered his lips to caresses the pounding pulse at his temple.

"I'll teach you," he agreed, moving to kiss first the left eye, then the right, and ending with a kiss on his nose.

"I feel odd," Vanya whispered. "My heart, it beats fast and I feel both cold and hot. My limbs shake. Perhaps I am ill?"

"No, Professor," Lancelot murmured warmly, brushing his lips across a smooth cheek. "You aren't ill, you're excited. And maybe you're attracted to me just a little?"

Vanya tilted his head and Lancelot fought a smile as the studious young man analyzed that statement.

"I have long admired your looks. You are tall and muscular. Strong with dark hair and dark eyes. If only I were more...."

Lancelot cut him off by dropping a light kiss on Vanya's startled mouth. "Not one more word," he growled. "You are a *very* attractive man, Vanya. I thought so this morning and I think so now."

Saying the words and looking into those wide, gold-flecked hazel eyes, Lancelot knew he was telling the truth. The minute he'd seen that mischievous twinkle in those

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intelligent and slightly exotic eyes, his blood had pooled and heated in his groin. It had surged again when he'd seen that disheveled, fire-burnt mop in Franklin's office.

Truthfully, teaching Dr. Vanya Ambrozak about the pleasures of the flesh would not be a hardship--not at all.

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Chapter Five

“So you’ve never had a kiss before?” Lancelot tightened his arms around the quaking young professor and pulled him closer.

Vanya’s bright, hazel eyes were round and wide as he shook his head from side to side, obviously nervous. “Can I kiss you now, Vanya?” Lancelot asked, pressing his lips to the young man’s temple once again and feeling his racing pulse.

“I don’t know how,” Vanya choked nervously. “I’ll do it wrong. You won’t like it.”

“Shhh, its okay,” he wrapped both arms more closely around the anxious man. “I’ll take care of everything, okay?”

“*Tak*. Yes, okay,” Vanya stirred against him restlessly, angling his head back a little to keep eye contact.

Slowly, Lance leaned down and covered Vanya’s soft, trembling lips with his own. “Mmmm,” he groaned against that beautiful mouth, brushing his lips back and forth and just learning the feel of it.

Hungry, hard, overwhelmed, awestruck, Lancelot was all of those things as he deepened the kiss, lightly touching his tongue to the seam of Vanya’s closed lips. He latched that full lower lip with his questing tongue, gently mouthing it.

Vanya parted his lips just a little and Lancelot eased his seeking tongue inside. He savored the other man’s sweet depths, tasting him, sucking on his tongue, exploring the mouth under his own.

Vanya’s soft moans were inflaming him, stoking his passion, setting him on fire. He fought to keep himself in check. This was Vanya’s first time—his first everything. First times were special. He would take his time and make it count. It would be good for Vanya, he’d make sure of it.

Vanya felt like he was floating free but not alone. He was wrapped up in security, wonderful, warm, and welcoming. Lancelot pulled him across his lap and Vanya

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snuggled closer, allowing his arms to sneak around the large man's neck and shoulders. Tentatively, he touched his tongue, letting it follow Lancelot's into his mouth and tasting him there.

The sharp bite of the vodka mixed with the bittersweet chocolaty vanilla taste of the cookies became even more intoxicating blended with Lancelot's own heady flavor. Vanya's breathing was ragged, and he was lost in the swirling currents rising in his body, lost and found, safe in Lancelot's arms.

It didn't matter that he didn't know what to do because Lancelot would know, and sure enough Lancelot was kissing his throat. How could that feel so good? It was only his jaw, his chin, his neck, but each brush of Lancelot's mouth sent white-hot jolts of desire through his body. He would let Lancelot show him what to do next.

Lancelot stroked his back, tracing lazy circles there. His other hand, open, warm and flat on his stomach began a slow massage, easing his fingers beneath the waistband of Vanya's slacks.

Vanya couldn't be still, he reached for Lancelot, clutched at him, hips moving a little because he couldn't help it, he couldn't stop. What was happening to him? Everything felt so good. He'd never, ever felt anything like this and he wanted more, much more!

Lancelot's roving hand made its way up Vanya's chest and he ran a fingernail across a pebbled nipple causing Vanya to cry out. He was shocked at himself--he had never known that his body was capable of this. He could feel Lance's large hardness under his thigh and knew he was much bigger there than Vanya's throbbing length.

Lancelot's finger traveled slowly across his chest, so slowly while the massage of his stomach continued. That mysterious ache was back. He knew Lancelot was going to touch his other nipple--he was so sure he was.

When it happened he cried out again but this time the sound was smothered in Lancelot's mouth. Vanya's lips parted willingly and he sucked on Lancelot's tongue, greedy for it, wanting to assuage the ache and it did, but it awoke new desires, too, for more. More something....

Lancelot's hands left him and he whimpered, pleadingly. The big man was sucking on his tongue now and he didn't even know when that had happened but it was wonderful.

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Those big hands were unbuttoning his shirt. Soon, his long fingers were gliding over the bare skin of Vanya's chest, pushing the thin dress shirt apart and off. He found the difference between those earlier touches and these, without the cloth between them, absolutely miraculous.

Lancelot caressed him, his arms and his back, his sides and his stomach, returning to his chest. Seconds later he was kissing Vanya's throat again as his hands traced delicate curlicues on Vanya's inner thighs through his pants. Vanya opened his legs wide, wanting--wanting something, what, he really didn't know. Was that his voice mewling and moaning?

Lancelot eased him down on the cushions of the sofa, sliding out from under him. With quick and efficient movements, he removed the white linen shirt he wore and then unfastened and unzipped Vanya's belt and pants, sliding them off of him along with his shorts and socks. Both men had kicked off their shoes somewhere along the way. Still wearing his own pants, Lancelot eased himself down to the couch and stretched out beside Vanya.

He wondered foggily if Lancelot had noticed the differences between them as the big hand cupped his small sack carefully, stroking him almost too lightly. Vanya could hear his own voice, inarticulate sounds, and then Lancelot was shifting, pressing his lips to Vanya's stomach.

It was a different pleasure entirely, deeper, far more urgent. Vanya didn't know what to do with his hands so he stroked Lancelot's hair, feeling the larger man shiver against him. Lancelot moved down, still stroking lightly and then Lancelot's mouth closed around him. The pleasure was strong, so powerful and Vanya was melting, melting and soaring.

Suddenly, he panicked. He was out of control! It was wrong--it had to be.

"No! *Ni! Zupynka!*" he struggled away, telling him to *stop*. Vanya scrambled out from under Lancelot, huddling down into the corner of the big couch. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," he mumbled. "I don't know how...."

Lancelot moved back onto the couch, sitting next to him again. "Shhh, Vanya," he soothed him, "Don't worry."

"I will fail! He won't want me and I don't know how...." He knew he was babbling, but he was frightened. His body had felt like it was going to fly away and leave him behind.

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“Hush,” Lancelot crooned, pulling a naked Vanya back into his arms. “Nothing’s ruined. Nothing at all,” he promised. “You won’t fail. You just panicked.”

“But...” Vanya felt like crying. He had been so enthralled by everything Lancelot had been doing. Now Lancelot wouldn’t want to touch him ever again.

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Chapter Six

For a fleeting moment, Lancelot considered lifting the smaller man in his arms and carrying him into the bedroom, but he didn't want to upset him further. Instead he stroked the young man's back and petted his hair until he seemed calmer.

"Did you like *anything* we did, Vanya?" he asked in a soft voice, concerned, but trying to relax the skittish man.

Vanya nodded frantically against him, the satin of his hair teasing and tickling Lancelot's bare chest. "All," came his muffled response.

"All? Everything?" Lancelot pulled back and tipped Vanya's face up with one finger, stroking his cheek with a thumb.

"*Da*," Vanya answered, blushing and embarrassed. "All. Everything."

Lancelot surged to his feet and pulled his almost-lover up with him. He paused long enough to unfasten his belt and pants and kick them off, followed by his shorts and socks.

"Let's go in the bedroom and do more of it then, hmm?"

Not waiting for a response, he scooped an arm across Vanya's shoulders and led him down the hall and into the bedroom. Once through the doorway, he turned and, taking Vanya's hips in his hands, he walked backward to the bed, falling on it and pulling Vanya down on top of him.

Vanya began to laugh, an almost giggle, and then his breath caught sharply on a gasp. His eyes widened in alarm and he froze.

"What? What is it Vanya?" Lancelot was afraid he'd hurt the smaller man somehow.

"Our *statevvy chlen*," he choked. At Lancelot's confused stare, he waved one thin, elegant hand. "Is our sexual--our penis, yes, that."

If anything, Lancelot was much more confused. "Did I hurt yours somehow? Maybe when...."

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“No, no is not hurt. Is touching,” his voice dropped to a whisper. “Mine touches yours,” he said, almost fearfully.

Lancelot stared at Vanya for long seconds before the other man’s words sunk in. He felt his lips twitch and couldn’t stop the grin that blossomed across his face. With a happy chuckle, he rolled Vanya over onto his back and began kissing him.

He kissed his face, his neck, his shoulders while at the same time, he caught Vanya’s hardening member in his palm along with his own and held them together in his fist. When the smaller man’s hips began to pump slightly, Lancelot loosened his hold and eased back, looking down at him.

“It feels good when they touch, doesn’t it?” he murmured, looking into Vanya’s enraptured face.

“*Da*,” Vanya groaned, “Most good,” he concurred.

“Wait until you feel this,” Lancelot purred, kissing, nipping, and licking his way down Vanya’s lightly haired body and stopping at the dark strawberry curls framing his hard shaft.

Without missing a beat, Lancelot snagged a tube of oily gel from his night table and dropped it on the bed next to Vanya’s hip. Slipping his hands under Vanya’s thighs, he raised and parted them, his tongue lathing the younger man from the end of his cleft, over his perineum, and then sucking a small testicle and the other into his mouth.

One hand stroked the younger man’s rigid erection while the other hand gently stroked the parting between Vanya’s cheeks. Lancelot slurped Vanya’s hardness into his mouth as he began to finger the tight pink flower between his cheeks.

Vanya was moaning now, his head tossing from side to side as Lancelot moved his lips and tongue up and down on him. He realized, as he reached for the lube, that this might be the first time the Ukrainian had ever ejaculated. It was obvious he’d kept his body under strict control for an entire lifetime.

Still sucking and licking, Lancelot squeezed a dollop of the gel onto one finger and began to rub the tiny pucker, coating it with the lube. He squeezed a little more onto his fingertip and gently pushed. He pulled it out again and added more gel, inserting his finger once more.

Vanya had begun to mutter in his native tongue, his hips bucking up and pressing down on the finger in succession. Deciding it was time, Lancelot added more gel and slid

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his finger all the way into the younger man, pulling it out again and pushing in, his mouth moving in sync with his pumping finger.

When Vanya groaned and shouted, splaying his legs wide and bearing down on the finger, Lancelot knew he'd found that magic bump. He continued to fuck the little professor with his finger, moving it steadily in and out, caressing the bump often and still sucking his cock at the same time.

"Dopomahaty mene! Help me!" Vanya cried out, obviously wanting, needing to come but somehow, unable to.

Lancelot lifted his mouth from Vanya's hot and pulsing cock and urged him, "Come on, Vanya, let go for me. Come on." He took the throbbing erection back into his mouth all the way to the root.

As if permission, coupled with the slick slide of Lancelot's rhythmic finger were all that he needed, Vanya's small sacks tightened. Finally, twenty-five years worth of stored semen erupted from him. Lancelot was still swallowing when he realized that his new partner had passed out.

Chapter Seven

Vanya shot to a sitting position, colliding with Lancelot's hard chest and causing the older man to grunt.

"Going somewhere?" Lancelot chuckled, easing Vanya back down on the bed.

"I-I slept?" Vanya asked, nervous that he'd somehow messed up and still very overwhelmed by what had happened.

"You passed out," Lancelot furnished. "It's not unusual and I suspect, for you, that was the first time that you've...."

The large man seemed at a loss for words and Vanya decided to help him out. "Is first time in many years, yes." He looked into Lancelot's dark eyes and realized he felt safer and closer to him than he ever had with anyone. "See here?" Vanya asked, pointing to a series of thin scars on the side of his right bicep. "Was not allowed to have--" he waved a hand indicating his now limp member. "In sleep sometimes as boy, it comes out. No good. Matron, she doesn't like it."

Lancelot's expression was horrified. "Do you mean to tell me that you'd be whipped for--for coming in you sleep? For waking up with a hard-on?"

"Is so," Vanya nodded.

"That's almost enough to make me lose mine," Lancelot was still shocked.

Vanya hesitantly reached down and stroked Lancelot's large and hard cock. "No, is not lost. You still have it," he grinned at the bigger man. With a bodily shove, Vanya pushed Lancelot onto his back and climbed over him, straddling him with his knees. "My turn now."

As he began to slide back, Lancelot leaned forward and caught him by the arms. "You don't have to do anything right this minute, Vanya."

"I am good student," Vanya intoned seriously. "You teach me, I learn fast," he assured Lancelot.

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He tried to keep his face straight but something must have reassured Lancelot. "Okay, young man, show the teacher what you've learned."

Vanya grinned and lowered his mouth to one flat nipple, nipping lightly and causing Lancelot to groan. He buried his face in the thick matting of hair on the other man's chest and rubbed his face in it. It was so soft.

Mimicking what Lancelot had done to him, Vanya kissed and nibbled and licked his way down to the large shaft jutting from an ebony nest of curls. Studying it for a long second, he finally decided to treat it as a large ice cream treat. Starting at the base, he licked it, rubbing and rolling the large sack under it, and then he moved to take the flared top into his mouth.

He licked the drop of clear liquid from the seeping slit and savored it, rolling the taste on his tongue. "Is good," he grinned to Lancelot, causing the agent to groan and close his eyes.

Vanya leaned down again and took as much of Lancelot into his mouth as he could, but that really wasn't all that much. After a minute, Lancelot bent forward and pulled him up.

"Vanya, you will have a chance to practice that, I promise." Vanya looked at him worriedly. "You get a B plus," Lancelot grinned, reassuring him. "We have something else to consider before you make me come that way."

Vanya's first impulse was to quip about such a low grade for the overachiever that he was but Lancelot's tone stilled that impulse.

"What?" he asked, nervous once again. "What is wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong," the other man promised. "We need to discuss intercourse."

"Oh," Vanya bit the side of one index finger. He had realized this would be part of things and he'd liked very much how Lancelot had pleased him before. Still, the spy was well endowed and Vanya didn't feel very big down there. "It will hurt," he observed, not asking.

"For a moment and then it will be sore later. But it won't hurt the whole time or every time," the big man told him honestly.

"Okay," Vanya said. "I lay on my stomach?" he asked, trying for nonchalant and falling short.

"Maybe with him," they both knew he meant, Dr. Havalon, the man in the picture. "We're going to do it so that you can be in charge this time, okay?"

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“Me?” Vanya gasped. He realized that Lancelot was trying to reassure him but he was twice as worried now.

“Trust me,” Lancelot looked him in the eye, unmoving.

“Yes, yes. I trust you,” Vanya told him and he did. He did trust Lancelot. He would do what the big man said.

Vanya still lay atop Lancelot. The other man tugged at first one knee and then the other until Vanya once again straddled him. Reaching over, Lancelot handed him a tube of viscous gel.

“Squeeze that onto my fingers,” he instructed.

Vanya complied with the request, emptying half the tube onto the other man’s outstretched hand. Lancelot chuckled but Vanya didn’t care. He figured that, if some was good, under the circumstances, more would be better.

He knew Lancelot was coating himself with one hand. He knew where his other hand was when he felt one finger and then two enter him. For long moments, Lancelot moved his fingers in and out, scissoring them to stretch the tight muscle. Vanya was hard again and having trouble not pushing against the invading fingers when he felt something wide and blunt taking their place.

“Slowly,” Lancelot advised, guiding him with a hand on his hip as with the other, he held his erection still for Vanya, pressing into him.

Pain, such pain! How could anyone do this, Vanya wondered, it hurt so much. The thickness of the wide head stretching him bordered on agony, yet the agony became exquisite in the feeling of fullness, of sweet completion. Finally, soft pubic hair brushed his cheeks, and he felt the soft fur of hair on Lancelot’s lower belly caress his sacs.

Vanya leaned forward, brazenly touching Lancelot’s full lips with his own eliciting a hearty groan as the older man took over the tentative kiss. Two heavy hands landed on his hips as Lancelot pulled him up and urged him with a squeeze to lower himself again.

Still kissing hungrily, they rocked together, their labored breathing the only sound as each strained toward completion. Somewhere in his mind, Vanya recognized the primal urges that drove him, but mostly, he rode the hard cock deep inside him, loving the thick hot caress as it filled him.

He raised and lowered himself, letting Lancelot’s length come nearly out and gliding back down on it again, lost in the new sensations he was feeling.

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A ragged voice, Lancelot he realized, panted, “Faster, Vanya, please.”

Faster, yes, he decided, letting the big man guide him again. He felt his own cock being handled, his shaft enclosed in a warm hand, fingertips circling the moist head. Vanya tilted his head back, crying out as he exploded for the second time that evening. His climax quaked through him in a wild tremor, his head rocking back and then forward as he collapsed in a heap on his partner.

Kissing and caressing him, Lancelot rolled them both onto their sides, slipping out of Vanya in the processes. With a yawn and a moan, Vanya nestled into Lancelot, on the cusp of sleep.

“Better get some rest, partner,” Lancelot advised with a yawn. “We only have two more days to practice before the conference.”

Chapter Eight

The morning of the conference dawned cold and rainy and the flight to Alberta was strained. Vanya looked pale and had barely touched his breakfast—a fact that Lancelot had learned was a rarity indeed. They had gone over their plans once again before the flight and Lancelot knew that Vanya was more than prepared.

Their rooms were adjacent with a connecting door, but the men left the airport separately with Vanya arriving at The Alberta University Hotel first. Lancelot unpacked his bags and hung his clothing in the large closet, wondering if Vanya had gone out to search for their prey yet.

The plan was exact in that Vanya would allow himself to be seen but would shy away from direct contact for the first evening. He was to locate and observe Dr. Havalon, otherwise, lay low. The evening would probably be his alone, and he'd been instructed to explore the university.

As it happened, he wasn't the only chemist to settle on a similar plan. The weather in Canada was much nicer than it had been in New York and it was Friday night, a good time for strolling and people watching.

The two men met in the bar after nine that night. It had been determined that the older man stay out of Vanya's room as much as possible. They were sure it wouldn't matter much the first night, though after that, they couldn't take any chances.

Lancelot moved to the barstool next to Vanya and slid onto it, ordering a lager from the woman pouring drinks. "Have you seen him?" he asked without preamble, not feeling particularly amenable for some reason.

"He is there," Vanya responded, inclining his head slightly but not looking up.

He'd make a good spy, Lance decided, trying not to react. "Where?" he asked and then leaned slightly toward Vanya. "Maybe we shouldn't be seen together."

"Perhaps if he does," Vanya murmured, "he will think you are competition for my favors. Is so on television, yes?"

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Lancelot barked out a laugh, quick to notice when a man looking remarkably like the man in the picture he had, turn away from the group around him and stared at Vanya.

"I think you've been spotted, my friend," Lancelot mumbled, glancing up to make eye contact with the handsome older man.

"He's been following me all evening," Vanya lifted his head to look at Lance.

Lancelot fought whatever urge made him want to touch the younger man and instead ordered another drink. "Did he speak to you?" He was uncomfortable with that thought but hid it valiantly.

"*Da*, but I merely acted nervous and made haste back here. He came soon after." Lancelot made no reply, merely nodded.

The two men sat next to each other with Lancelot throwing covert glances at Vanya, his eyes following his tidy frame when Vanya eventually got up and left. He forced himself to wait ten minutes before following the younger man out.

* * * *

Tiredly, Lancelot unlocked the door to his room, tossing his keys onto a small table near the door as he entered. He paused for a moment trying to decide if he should speak with Vanya when his question was answered for him.

"We are friends now, yes?" Vanya's voice came from deep within the darkened room and Lancelot squinted, searching, reluctant to turn on a light.

"Yes, we're friends, close friends," he reassured him, stepping further into the room.

"As favor to friend and student, please to review lesson with me?" the younger man's words were halting and his accent pronounced.

Unable to respond verbally, Lancelot opened his arms and waited. Within seconds, he found his embrace filled with a shivering Ukrainian biochemist.

Not a word was spoken as Lancelot undressed Vanya and then quickly peeled his own clothes off. Silently, he kissed and caressed the young man as they made their way to the bed.

Lancelot was only partially successful as he tried not to consider their mission but to pay full attention to Vanya instead. For his part, Vanya was far more needy and demanding than he had been the previous two days, kissing and touching Lancelot boldly.

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Rolling Vanya underneath him, Lancelot forced all thoughts of the next day, the next hour from his mind. His hard cock poised at Vanya's stretched and prepared hole, Lancelot kissed him roughly, hungrily as he steadily pushed into him

"*Bil'she*," Vanya moaned, "More!" he clarified and Lancelot was only too willing to comply.

In and out, Lancelot stroked his hard shaft into the man beneath him, feeling the smaller erection rub along his abdomen as he pumped.

"*Shvydkyy*, faster!" Vanya more vocal than ever before, demanded and translated simultaneously to Lancelot.

Far too quickly, he reached the point of no return, stretching his hand down to make sure that Vanya joined him there. Shouting their release within seconds of each other, Vanya's pearly semen painted both their chests right before Lancelot's hot seed filled him.

It was impossible for Lancelot to decipher Vanya's foreign mumblings as he gathered his sleepy and satiated bundle against him. Refusing to look further than this night's sleep, he buried his face in the small man's hair and followed him to slumber.

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Chapter Nine

Vanya attended all of the biochemistry workshops on his conference card, pleased that several of Dr. Havalon's interests coincided with his own. He was even more pleased, however, that some of his assigned workshops didn't include the doctor.

Often, when he saw him looking his way, Vanya did his best to melt into the crowd. Sometimes, though, he paid close attention and even fawned a little. The older chemist was very attentive.

Finally, the day was over and Vanya didn't know how to feel. The last workshop hadn't included Dr. Havalon and he was nowhere to be found as Vanya made his way back to his room.

He was alone when the elevator doors opened to admit Lancelot two floors above the conference.

"Dr. Havalon is waiting in the hall near your door." The experienced agent began speaking immediately. "Take this coin and empty your pockets when you go into the room. I'll be right next door."

"What shall I do?" Vanya asked tightly, not afraid, not anything, just mostly not ready.

"Do whatever you can to make him speak," Lancelot told him. "Hopefully he will either tell you something that can help us find the formulas or something to incriminate himself so that we can blackmail him."

"*Da*, I promise," Vanya guaranteed, poised to move when the doors opened.

"Don't get hurt," Lancelot demanded just before they reached his floor.

Vanya shrugged, unsure what else he could say in the light of such a demand. He stepped off the elevator and walked toward his door, pretending surprise when Dr. Havalon strolled up to him.

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“Yakov?” the much older man queried, looking hopeful. Yakov was his middle name and they’d decided to keep to something familiar so that Vanya would recognize and answer when spoken to.

“*Da?*” Vanya glanced over at the other man as he opened his door.

“Can I come in? I thought it would be nice to talk with you about some of the workshops.”

“Of course, please,” Vanya swept his hand forward. “Let me find lamp,” he said, but Dr. Havalon objected, drawn to the window.

“No, no, I’d like to look at the view.”

The university buildings and grounds to the northeast were spectacularly floodlit. The illuminated waters of the Saskatchewan River were in the center of the landscape, beautifully contrasting with the red and white lights of the traffic to the west. Beacons pulsed far out on the river and sailboats and larger vessels could be seen just beyond the river valley park. The scene was exceedingly romantic.

They stood close together in the dim light from the window, the professor breathing audibly. The doctor turned to Vanya/Yakov and coaxed his blazer from him, then fitted it over the back of the chair at a table. He took off his own jacket and meaningfully placed it over Vanya’s, making eye contact while he did. He returned to the diminutive Ukrainian and took him in a mild embrace, kissing him passionately. Vanya responded but nervously. They drew back from each other.

The Ukrainian was winded, uneasy. “I am sorry. I do not--I barely know you.”

The doctor seemed to find his discomfort endearing. “It’s okay, you’ll like this. I want to make you feel good,” he promised.

Vanya knew he wouldn’t feel good and tried to disguise his aversion through feigning nervousness. Maybe this could end sooner than expected. Dr. Havalon seemed to sense his uneasiness, and continued to reassure him.

“Is okay,” Vanya smiled shyly, emptying his change, including Lancelot’s coin with the transmitter, onto the small table. “I need some minutes to see messages, however. Please make yourself comfortable.” Vanya grabbed the phone and hurried toward the bathroom, glancing back at the professor just before he closed the door.

Vanya hurriedly removed his belt and button-down shirt, keeping his white t-shirt. He steadied himself, his hand on the doorknob. He took a deep breath, reminding himself

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what was at stake. When he emerged from the bathroom, he locked eyes with the doctor and held his gaze as he slowly walked toward him.

Dr. Havalon had moved to sit at the edge of the bed, and put his hands on Vanya's waist as he came within arm's length. He drew him closer and grabbed the button of his pants.

"Do I please you?" Vanya asked him, diffidently, trying to make him speak.

Dr. Havalon did not reply, but quickly unfastened the younger man's pants

"What would you like from me?" Vanya asked him, leaning in and running his hand over the salt and pepper hair.

Paul Havalon looked up, and then his eyes dropped down again, as he demonstrated in looks and in touch exactly what he would like, a little too enthusiastically.

"Slowly please," Vanya admonished, pushing Havalon's shoulders back. "We are not talking of the workshops?" he tried again, fighting the urge to run from the aggressive man.

Havalon seemed to consider the question but still didn't speak, grinning and shaking his head from side to side, tugging at Vanya's zipper.

Still quiet, Havalon pushed the man he knew as Yakov to the bed and stripped his pants and shorts off. Before the younger man could make a sound of disagreement, Havalon had him in his mouth, firmly holding a thin, muscled thigh in place.

Vanya, trying valiantly to get the other man to incriminate himself in some way asked loudly, "What are you doing? You're--what?"

Dr. Havalon kept him in his mouth and sucked and manipulated him, dragging Vanya's hands to his own privates and thrusting against them.

"You want me to touch your penis?" Vanya asked. "Make you come that way?"

Without answering, the older man continued to suck on Vanya's flaccid penis, growing hard and coming in Vanya's hand and on his body. He never seemed to notice that he was alone in his pleasure.

Vanya was relieved when Havalon finally stopped kissing him and moved away to get up. "I have an early call in the morning before the workshops so I should go," The older man said reluctantly, running a hand up Vanya's bare thigh to his abdomen where the hem of his t-shirt fell.

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“Is research?” Vanya bit back the bile in his throat as Havalon leaned over him for one more kiss.

“I have to check on my assistant,” he answered. “Can I see you tomorrow?”

“Many seminars tomorrow. Is banquet at night,” Vanya evaded, reluctant to agree to more manhandling. Even though he was relieved that the doctor’s sexual proclivities hadn’t so far included penetration, he hadn’t enjoyed the evening’s events.

“I love the taste of you, Yakov,” Havalon moaned in entreaty. Vanya tried not to flinch. “Let’s have lunch together and talk about it, okay?”

“*Da*, okay, lunch,” Vanya gave in, as much to get rid of his abhorrent guest as to pretend interest.

“See you tomorrow, Yakov,” the other man purred warmly, pinning Vanya’s torso to the bed for one more dominant kiss.

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Chapter Ten

The shower was still running more than a half an hour after Havalon's departure when Lancelot let himself into Vanya's room. Before he could decide definitively to go into the bathroom, he heard the water stop.

Settling into a vacant chair, he surveyed the room. Admittedly, he'd loathed every second of listening to what had happened between Vanya and Dr. Havalon. Glancing at the naked bed, the stripped pillows, and the mound of bedding near the door, he felt a newfound surge of hate.

Vanya barely made his way into the main room, thin hotel robe wadding on his wet body, when Lancelot swept him off his feet and carried him through the still-open connecting door. Any worries regarding Vanya's sensitivity to being carried melted away when the younger man refused to let go as he laid him on the bed in his own room.

"Shhh, Love, let me get ready for bed, I won't go anywhere," he promised, answering Vanya's inarticulate cry as he stepped away, quickly taking off his own clothing. "Here, Love," he whispered, "Here I am," he promised crawling under the covers and pulling Vanya against him.

"I am so dirty," Vanya whispered, "I cannot get clean."

Lancelot pulled him closer, wrapping his arms and legs around the shaking, balled-up body. "You are always clean, nothing can make you dirty." He cuddled the young man still closer, rubbing his back and kissing his hair.

Vanya pulled back in his arms and whispered, "Please will you kiss me?"

"Mmm, yes," Lancelot agreed, finding the younger man's mouth with his own, tasting and savoring, kissing him warmly.

When he pulled back, Vanya's mouth followed him and he covered his lips again in a lingering, cleansing kiss. Vanya still clung to him and Lancelot continued to kiss him. First long, urgent kisses to eradicate any taste or feel of the interloper. Gradually the

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kisses became more tender, and then lazy, ultimately ending in clinging lips and mingled breath as the two men whose heads shared the pillow drifted off to sleep.

* * * *

“Was a fiasco,” Vanya’s disgusted mumble notified Lancelot that he was awake.

Lancelot had been awake for hours, staring down at the sleeping face of his little partner, even younger and more innocent looking in sleep. His thoughts had vacillated between the strengthening feelings he had for the young man and the best way to proceed with their mission.

The threat to countless innocent people was real and Lancelot couldn’t discount that. Vanya would still have to interact with the overbearing and repugnant doctor. While admitting to himself that he didn’t like the thought of further physical contact between them, he assured himself that his preferences had no bearing on his new plan.

“Yes, honey, I guess it was,” he leaned down and kissed Vanya’s moue of disgust.

“Honey? Is food? I am food?” Lancelot was delighted to see a hint of the mischievous twinkle in those hazel eyes.

“It’s an endearment,” Lancelot kissed him again, “Food for the heart,” he informed him, pulling Vanya closer against him. “Today, my heart, you will learn a new lesson.”

“I failed in my lessons,” Vanya murmured dispiritedly. “My *statevyy chlen*, um, my penis—it did not work for Dr. Havalon.” He looked up hopefully, “Is broken?”

Lancelot’s hand made its way between them, feeling for Vanya’s cock. When his fingers touched it, the organ began to grow and harden. “Working perfectly,” Lancelot announced, giving it a squeeze.

“Why for you and not him?” Vanya inquired as he thrust helplessly into Lancelot’s manipulating hand.

“It likes me much better,” he grinned, sliding down to take the hard tool into his mouth.

Vanya threw his head back and shouted, writhing in Lancelot’s firm grasp and bucking mindlessly. The large brunet continued his ministrations, sucking and licking until, with a choked cry, Vanya erupted into his mouth.

“Mmmm, tastes like honey,” he proclaimed, kissing his way back up the limp body and pulling him back into his arms.

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For many long minutes, Vanya lay spent against him, unmoving. After a time, Lancelot saw the exotically tilted eyes open and fix on him in the predawn light of the dim room.

“Okay, is not broken.” Lancelot thought he detected gratitude in those gold-flecked eyes. “And new lesson to teach me?”

“Ahh, that’s the easy part,” Lancelot said smugly, pleased with himself. “I’m going to teach you an important American dating tactic. It’s called, ‘hard-to-get’.”

Chapter Eleven

Lancelot kept his mind firmly on their mission as he attached the wire that was not a wire to the underside of Vanya's collar. The young man looked dapper and carefree today in olive khaki pants and a dark-rose colored polo shirt.

Vanya had stayed in his room enjoying a hearty breakfast while Lancelot had jogged over to one of the shops, citing gifts for a nephew to the clerk. He'd picked up several changes of clothing hoping to make Vanya look more at ease and desirable.

Not that he thought the younger man needed help in that area as he was imminently desirable to Lancelot and apparently Dr. Havalon as well. Their theory, mostly *his* theory, was that the more Vanya/Yakov made the doctor want him and the less available he was, the more likely it was that the frustrated older chemist would tell him what they needed to know.

"There," Lancelot said, patting the shirt collar back into place. "Perfect. You look good. You know what you're going to do now?" he asked, looking expectantly at Vanya.

"I shall walk in late to workshop. Then I smile at him, but sit apart from him. Be polite but distant all morning. Maybe smile and speak with other men, yes?"

"Yes, you've got it. And will the doctor be touching you?" Lancelot had more than one reason for bringing that up.

"No!" Vanya grinned happily. "Hands off merchandise. Is for looking only!"

"Very good, young man," Lancelot grinned back, not resisting the need to drop a feather-light kiss on the smiling mouth. "You get an 'A' on your pop-quiz. Now let's see how you do on the final exam."

"You will be proud of your student, my teacher," Vanya declared, practically bubbling over as he left for the workshop.

Lancelot was pleased that the young man was so relaxed. He was sure that knowing he was safe from the doctor's unpleasant attentions had more than a little to do

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with the good mood. As he called down to room service for his own breakfast, he considered to himself that a happy Vanya was a beautiful thing, indeed.

* * * *

Following the schedule closely, Lancelot made his way into a lecture being given in which Vanya was to attend but not Dr. Havalon. Although the young chemist never looked directly at him, Lancelot was sure he'd been spotted.

Shortly after he'd entered the room, Vanya's face had split in a grin. He wasn't positive, but he didn't think T-cell transduction was all that amusing. Apparently though, it was a positive thing because one or two others, seeing Vanya's smile, nodded and smiled at him in some manner of agreement.

Just before the lunch break, Lancelot returned to his room, ready to settle in and listen to Vanya's next exchange with Dr. Havalon.

"*Are you ready for lunch, Yakov?*" There was the doctor. He sounded close but Lancelot knew he wouldn't be too close since Vanya had been quite determined about that.

"*Yes, I am ready,*" Vanya responded, moving toward the hotel's busy restaurant now, Lancelot could tell by increasing volume of voices and the ringing clatter of cutlery.

"*Let's go to my room and order in, shall we?*" Dr. Havalon got an "E" for effort Lancelot decided, waiting impatiently for Vanya's response.

"*Please do not grab me!*" Vanya snapped. "*I wish to eat here for lunch. Is public so you may not touch me.*"

Lancelot grinned. *Yeah, that's the way, Love. You tell him!*

"*I want us to go to my room, Yakov, why are you acting this way?*" Dr. Havalon sounded angry and mean and Lancelot sprang to his feet.

He was halfway to the door when a third voice joined the transmitted conversation.

"*Hey, son! Is this guy bothering you?*" Apparently a security guard had entered the picture. "*We don't take kindly to having our students or our guests manhandled around here, Pops!*" The deep and officious voice growled.

Lancelot heard Vanya begin to speak but Havalon beat him to it. "*No, no, officer, I was just a little alarmed at something he said. Everything's fine here.*"

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“Be as alarmed as you want but if you can’t keep your hands to yourself, then everything is not fine. Understand? What about you, son, you okay? You going in there to eat? With him?”

“I am okay, sir. Thank you,” Vanya answered politely. *“I am sure my colleague will behave like gentleman now that you have spoken.”*

Lancelot could hear the edge of amusement in Vanya’s respectful voice and wondered what Havalon was thinking and feeling. He hoped the older man was humiliated. It would do him good.

The restaurant noises grew louder and Lancelot heard a woman, maybe a hostess, promise to be right with them.

“Yakov, what’s wrong, why are you behaving so badly?” The older man’s voice was nearly pleading now, confused and still angry.

“Behaving badly? Me? You make joke, yes?” Lancelot could hear the incredulity in Vanya’s voice and he grinned to himself. *“Perhaps you should go. You are mean to me.”*

He wondered if Vanya had gone too far for a moment until he heard the other man’s response. *“Yakov, I’m sorry, I must seem like such a bully. I thought you liked when I took charge. You seemed to like it last night,”* Havalon wheedled.

“You told me lie last night and did not worry with how I like our...activities.”

“What?” The doctor’s voice was alarmed now. His answer was prevented by the arrival of the hostess showing the men to their table. When she walked away, the other man began speaking rapidly. *“Yakov, I am so embarrassed. Do you mean to tell me that you weren’t satisfied last night? Look at me, Yakov!”* came the harsh whisper.

“Do not touch me. This is public. I will not be pawed in restaurant.” Vanya did sound quite disgruntled.

“Give me another chance. I know I can satisfy you.” When Vanya/Yakov didn’t answer, Havalon tried another tack. *“Did I tell you how wonderful you look today?”*

“Spasybi, um, thank you, Pavlo,” Vanya responded, making the other man’s simple name sound exotic by using the Ukrainian translation. *“You do not know me, Pavlo, nor I you. Is why you cannot know what I like.”*

It sounded imminently reasonable to Lancelot and apparently to Dr. Havalon as well. *“Why don’t we enjoy our lunch and then sit together at the banquet? Perhaps then you will feel like we know each other well enough after that to give me another chance?”*

RUSTY CHEMISTRY

Lancelot imagined Vanya considering the suggestion carefully. Finally he seemed to make up his mind. “*How did you think of studies performed with nerve cells?*” he asked the doctor enthusiastically. “*Brilliant it is, yes?*”

After that, Lancelot couldn’t understand a word that passed between the two scientists. He did, however come to the conclusion that he’d been right about one thing. A happy Vanya is beautiful to behold.

Chapter Twelve

“He is feeding from my fingertips!” Vanya crowed to Lancelot as he entered the Men’s room at the back of the restaurant. “Do not listen now,” he added to his listening friend, explaining, “I must urinate.”

Vanya felt pretty good about the day’s events thus far. In fact, since he’d awakened early this morning, this day had been one of his best ever. He blushed, looking at his face in the bathroom mirror.

He didn’t look any different now than he had last week, did he? Peering closely at his happy face and sparkling eyes, he murmured, “*I do* look different now, is true?”

When Lancelot touched him, he felt shiny inside like twinkling lights and Christmas presents, not that he’d ever gotten or even given one. He gasped. Maybe this Christmas he would have someone to present with a gift.

“Do you like presents, Lancelot?” he murmured, his voice loud in the empty bathroom. “Never have I given gift for birthday or holiday. Can I gift you something?”

Another man entered the bathroom and Vanya finished washing his hands, smiling happily at the newcomer as he made his way out the door. Few people smiled at him usually. Lancelot—it had to be Lancelot and the way that he touched him, of that Vanya was sure.

As he was making his way up the narrow hall back into the main part of the restaurant, he met Havalon coming toward him. He stopped and arched a brow, his suspicion that the doctor was looking for him confirmed when a dark flush stained the older man’s cheeks.

Vanya stepped aside, making room for the other man to pass but instead, he stepped in front of him. “I was looking for you, Yakov,” he purred, obviously ignoring the certain knowledge that Vanya/Yakov had known that right away.

“And so you have located me. How may I be of service?” Vanya suspected he knew what the other man wanted.

RUSTY CHEMISTRY

“How about a little kiss, hmm? Just one to hold me over until I see you tonight?”

“Hold you over what? No! You have no intention of getting to know me or I you! You are not trustworthy,” Vanya felt his own face heat in anger now.

“Yakov, don’t be angry, I’m sorry, please, I just wanted a taste of you,” Havalon entreated, apparently realizing too late that reminding Vanya of the previous night was a mistake.

Vanya, for his part, closed his eyes and remembered Lancelot’s kiss and taste and touch, making it take away the unpleasant memory of the overbearing doctor.

“I will see you in workshop,” he told the Dr. Havalon, turning on his heel and walking away.

Without regard to direction, Vanya turned left out of the restaurant pausing long enough to pay his bill. Head down, he wasn’t watching where he was going when he walked into someone.

“My apologies, please,” he began, realizing belatedly that he’d run into Lancelot.

“Your apologies are accepted,” the agent said warmly, holding him firmly by the shoulders for a moment longer before dropping one hand. “Don’t look now but I think we’re under surveillance,” Lancelot warned.

Vanya bit the side of his finger nervously. “He sees us then? Will it be bad?”

“Look at me and think of what we did together this morning,” Lancelot instructed and Vanya felt his face heat. “I wanted to tell you that you have given me many precious gifts in the short time I have spent with you. Nod your head,” he ordered, surprising Vanya who complied immediately. “I hope to be exchanging gifts with you these next holidays, without a doubt. Okay?”

Vanya felt his blush deepen but nodded again, feeling shy. “I want to give you Christmas present with shiny green bow,” he confessed, raising his eyes to look at Lancelot and lowering them quickly in case--just in case.

Lancelot laughed out loud, his deep baritone filling Vanya like hot cider on cold nights or a crackling fire fed from fragrant oak and making him feel safe and warm. With both hands now, Lance brushed over Vanya’s neat shirt and straightened his very straight collar.

“If the jealous doctor should ask you who I am or what we spoke about, tell him that you bumped into me, literally. Tell him that we met the first night you were here. He did see us sitting close to each other, I know,” Vanya shrugged and nodded. Lancelot

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took one of Vanya's hands into his two much larger ones. "If he tries to trap you into something later, say that you're meeting a friend for a quick drink and turning to bed early. Okay?"

"Yes, okay," Vanya agreed with another shrug feeling unsure of what to do next.

Releasing his hand, Lancelot trailed one long finger down Vanya's nose, tapping the end. "I think you look wonderful, Love."

Not waiting for a response, Lancelot turned and strode off, leaving a dazed and grinning Vanya standing in the empty hall. With a start, he realized that the next workshop had just started and he should have been in his seat already.

Thankfully, he didn't have far to go. As he reached for the handle on the door, it opened to reveal a peeved Dr. Havalon.

"You're late, you know, Yakov," he snapped.

"No, Pavlo. I am exactly on time," he smiled happily at the frowning man and moved past him to take his seat.

RUSTY CHEMISTRY

Chapter Thirteen

Lancelot was a wreck. The last lecture and workshop had ended over a half an hour ago and Vanya hadn't returned yet. What was even worse, Lance was pretty sure he'd done something to obscure the wire. He couldn't hear a word that was being said.

When had the little genius managed to worm his way so deeply into his heart? He'd only really known Vanya for four days. Yet every hour, the little guy became more and more important to him. And now he was out there somewhere where anything could have happened to him and Lancelot couldn't help him.

Finally the key card sounded in the room next door and Lance waited for the outer door to close. When it did, he wrenched open the connecting door. He noticed Vanya swinging a small blue shopping bag and grinning, but he was just *so* angry.

"Damn it! Where were you?" The younger man opened his mouth to answer but Lancelot, driven by his fury, went on. "What did you do to the wire? Did you block it? Don't you even care about this mission?" he shouted. He could see that Vanya was paling right before his eyes but he couldn't seem to stop his mouth. "I ought to beat you!" he bellowed.

Vanya's chin trembled and his eyes went moist but he said nothing for several seconds, obviously trying to get control of himself.

"Well?" Lancelot demanded in an incensed bark.

Vanya pressed the blue gift-shop bag into Lance's chest, holding it there until he took it. "Is sou--souv--is memento. Gift for someone who must stay inside to not enjoy trip. Lady explained to me."

Lancelot looked from the bag to Vanya and back again. Before he could speak, the younger man turned quickly and strode to the bathroom. He heard the door close behind him, the lock click audibly, and after a few seconds, the sounds of running water could be heard.

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Dropping into a nearby chair, Lancelot opened the blue bag with something like dread. Hesitantly, he reached in and found an extra-large black t-shirt. Shaking it out, he saw that the front had a caricature of the quintessential scientist emblazoned on it with the legend “CHEMISTS DO IT PERIODICALLY” written underneath. On the back he found a stamped line drawing of the university and the words “Biochemical Research Consortium, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada”.

With a groan, he buried his face in the soft cotton, feeling like the worst bunny-kicker on the planet. He heard the lock click on the bathroom door and Vanya walked out, feet bare and naked from the waist up.

Not looking at Lancelot, he strode to the bed and pushed his pants and shorts off. “You will punish Vanya now?” he laid front down on the bed, face turned away. “You must hit me for I make mistake. I am ready.”

Tears filling his own eyes now, Lancelot stepped over to the bed, sitting next to Vanya’s hip. Reaching out, he stroked the satin soft, pink rust colored hair. He trailed his hand down the smooth and silky skin of the younger man’s back and over the plush, perfectly rounded globe of one cheek, so firm.

“Vanya, I’m sorry. I’m sorry, Love.” He began at the top of the little professor’s head and stroked down again. Lowering his face into the feathery mop of hair, Lancelot pulled his lover against his fully clothed body, stretching out alongside him.

“My fault. I forgot....” the young man took a deep breath, struggling to articulate. “I forgot,” he said again, tugging bodily away. “You must hit me, I understand. Will use belt?”

“No, Vanya, I won’t hit you. Shhh, come here,” he reached for the stiff body again. “I was worried, that’s why I behaved like such an ass, I was afraid something had happened to you.”

Vanya relaxed his rigid posture slightly, but made no other move. “Is okay. I deserve punished. Often I think of things and forget others. Is, um... Is absent headed I am. Is bad thing.”

“Ohhh, God, Vanya, listen to me okay?” The other man still had his back to Lance. He hoped he was getting through. “Nothing about you is a bad thing. Nothing! I will never hit you, you understand? Not unless you want me to. The point is that I got upset because I care so much about you and I panicked when you were late.”

RUSTY CHEMISTRY

Vanya rolled over to face him, awe and wonder in his face. “Me? You care about me?”

Lancelot, so grateful that he had Vanya’s attention and hopefully his understanding, answered, “Yes, you little wing-nut, I care deeply about you. I am most probably in love with you.” He leaned down to kiss the younger man.

Vanya’s eyes were wide and his mouth was slack in the perfect expression of deer-in-headlights stunned. Lancelot grinned and wrapped both arms around him, kissing his cheeks, his chin and his nose.

“Me? Is not possible.”

“It is. I do,” Lancelot answered gently.

“What is wing-nut? Why would I want you to hit me? Is because I feel happy inside and shiny? Is I love you, too?”

Lancelot began to laugh. Maybe it was the relief of the strain and self-loathing he’d felt from shouting at Vanya. More likely, it was his dry and rusted heart, beating love and hope again. For so long he’d kept himself distant, sure that there could be no one for such a tired old warhorse.

“A wing nut is a nut with wing-like protuberances that allow it to be turned by hand.” He shook his head in amusement when Vanya nodded and then the perplexed look came back. “It also means you’re silly sometimes.” The other man opened his mouth to speak but Lancelot covered it with his hand. “Sometimes during love-play, a spanking can be fun if it’s done right.” He shook his head from side to side when Vanya tried to speak. “And yes, I think it’s very likely that you love me, too.”

He removed his hand and waited, sure that Vanya would ask another six or seven questions. To his surprise, the younger man only uttered one word.

“Good.”

* * * *

Vanya floated into the banquet on a cloud. He knew he looked good because Lancelot had told him so. He knew that Lancelot would always tell him the truth. Besides, while he’d rested for the banquet, the handsome agent had gone out and bought him a new tuxedo.

It was the nicest clothing he’d ever owned. It was heavy worsted silk, Lancelot had said, calling the color taupe. Vanya didn’t care, he felt very handsome in it. After the banquet, he was to meet Lancelot in the bar and they would have a drink together.

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“Yakov, hello! You look... *amazing*,” Dr. Havalon had arrived, looking down at him.

“Thank you, *Pavlo*,” Vanya replied politely. “You also look nice.”

The older man did look nice, neat and maybe handsome if you didn’t know him as Vanya did. “I’m sorry I was so difficult before, Yakov. Let’s have dinner together and enjoy the speakers, shall we? Perhaps you’ll want to come to my room later for a nightcap?”

“Maybe--maybe not, too. I saw friend before. I said I might have drink with him after banquet.” Vanya expected Dr. Havalon to object strongly or at least seem a little annoyed.

“Well, we’ll see, won’t we? I can be very compelling sometimes.”

Although a bland enough statement on its face, Vanya felt a ripple of unease snake up his spine. Havalon tendered a mysterious smile and talk shifted to the workshops they’d attended and things biochemical related.

Although the older man acted the perfect dinner companion, Vanya could tell clearly that he was marking time. It was as if he was waiting for something.

“I couldn’t eat another bite, could you?” he asked Vanya/Yakov. “How about some more wine?”

“I am quite full,” Vanya agreed. “No more wine please,” he said quickly, moving to stay the doctor’s hand before he could fill his glass again.

“Oh no!” Havalon gasped. “I believe I got a drop on your sleeve,” he lamented, pulling Vanya’s arm toward him.

“No, is no drop there.” Vanya looked closely at the pristine sleeve. He didn’t want his magnificent new tuxedo ruined.

“Will you have a drink with me after the banquet, Yakov?” Havalon asked in a soft, almost challenging voice.

“Um--not tonight I think, Pavlo,” Vanya/Yakov began, then, “Ow! You scrape me? What is that?”

“That, my dear Yakov, is my latest breakthrough in nerve suppressives. So it seems that you *will* be joining me after all.”

“What? You drugged me?” he tried to make sure he spoke into the microphone embedded in his left collar stud, feeling a chill wash over him, as if he had the beginnings of a cold.

RUSTY CHEMISTRY

“I think it’s time we moved this upstairs to my room, don’t you?” Havelon murmured. “Before you’re unable to walk at all. Then I’d have to carry you.”

“People would...” he was having trouble forming words now. “Someone would see.” He sounded quite slurred.

“It’s a college, Yakov. Young men like yourself,” he slid an arm across Vanya/Yakov’s back, and under one arm, “are always drinking too much. Thankfully, I’m here to see that you don’t hurt yourself or anyone else.”

“You--” Vanya struggled to stay upright. He had little control of his limbs and could just barely form words. “You will hurt...”

They were on an elevator now. “Well, a little, I like to get rough you know. You’ll feel it.” The doctor looked at him coldly. “Don’t act like a virgin, Yakov. You knew what you were getting into. I know your kind. Nothing but a cock tease, that’s all.”

“Not--not so. Choice...” he could barely force anything out now. “Your room?” they barely sounded like words to him. He hoped Lancelot could understand.

They were heading down a long hall now. Vanya couldn’t lift his head to see the number on the door Havalon had stopped in front of. He couldn’t have spoken it if he had seen it, anyway.

“There’s an antitoxin Yakov. If you’re good... what am I saying? You’ll have to be, won’t you? You’ll be whatever I want you to be.”

Vanya/Yakov was shoved unceremoniously onto the bed. With studied precision, Havelon stripped off one new Italian leather loafer and then its mate, tossing them behind him as he continued his task. One formal dress sock and then two.

Before Vanya knew it, his suspenders and silk bowtie were gone, his elegant ivory silk shirt with the wingtip collar, stripped off roughly and then he was naked. When the older man roughly rolled him over onto his stomach, he knew that Lancelot would not arrive in time to save him.

“Oh yes, so beautiful, Yakov. And such a bad boy to lead me on the way you have.”

He felt the first stripe of burning pain across his back and was incredulous. The second, cutting viciously into the tender flesh of his rear end, erased any lingering disbelief. This wasn’t Lancelot’s fun love play. This wasn’t even a spanking. He was being whipped, it hurt ferociously and he couldn’t even flinch.

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Several fiery strips later, the agony stopped. At least that brand of it did. Vanya heard the rasp of a zipper and felt the doctor grab his abused cheeks, parting them. He knew what was next. He hoped the toxin killed him.

RUSTY CHEMISTRY

Chapter Fourteen

“Will you have a drink with me after the banquet, Yakov?” Lancelot heard Havalon ask Vanya. He waited. They had talked about this and he knew what the other man would say.

“Um--not tonight I think, Pavlo,” he heard Vanya/Yakov answer, then, *“Ow! You scrape me? What is that?”* Lancelot furrowed his brow, alarm turning his blood cold.

“That, my dear Yakov, is my latest breakthrough in nerve suppressives. So it seems that you will be joining me after all.”

“Oh my God!” Lancelot muttered to the empty room. “Oh, my God!” he chanted. “Oh no, oh my God!”

“What?” Vanya’s voice sounded—something. *“You drugged me?”*

It was clear. He had to go. Vanya was in trouble and needed him. Lancelot ripped the earpiece off and yanked on his jacked, sprinting through the door. As panicked thoughts warred in his brain he found time to be pleased that he’d already pulled his shoes on.

Ignoring the elevators he ran for the stairs, taking them three, four, six at a time if he could until finally, he was on the lobby level. He burst through the double doors of the banquet hall only to see a few startled waiters and a few scattered groups of stragglers, standing around talking.

Once, twice and he was sure, neither Vanya nor Dr. Havalon were in the room. His room, he realized. The doctor had wanted Yakov as Vanya to go to his room and of course that’s where he’d be.

Finding Dr. Havalon’s room had been one of the first things he’d done upon arriving at the hotel and he knew exactly where it was: five floors up. He glanced at the elevators and saw that both were up past the lobby and headed for the top of the building. Once again, he sprinted for the stairs.

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As he made his way up the flights of stairs, he cursed all scientists and their drive for a healthier cardiovascular system. He'd elbowed and excused his way through three groups of people. When the fourth group blocking the stairs eyed him disdainfully with a derogatory comment, he ran out of what little patience he'd had.

He reached into his jacket and pulled out his gun. Holding it muzzle up, he bellowed, "Move!"

The health-conscious group of stair climbers scattered like nervous chickens, squawking just as loudly. He didn't care if they ran to the manager for the police. In fact it might be a very good idea.

Finally, after what seemed hours but was certainly no more than fifteen minutes from the time he'd first heard Vanya say he'd been drugged, Lancelot arrived at the fifth floor. Running full out again, he traversed the long hall, passing the elevators and then stopping long enough to kick the door open. He'd found Vanya.

Surprised, Dr. Havalon, pants around his knees, turned. Both hands holding Vanya's nether cheeks apart, he'd been on the brink of entering him dry when the door had imploded. Bellowing like an enraged bull, Lancelot sprang forward, backhanding Havalon with the hand holding the gun.

Before the shocked and bleeding man could so much as twitch, Lancelot stood over him, and aimed the gun at his forehead. "The anti-toxin, Doctor, now."

"You won't shoot me," Havalon croaked. The shaking voice echoed with false bravado and oh, how Lancelot wanted to shoot him in the most available target. Moving the gun so that the barrel pointed at his exposed and now mostly-flaccid penis, Lancelot pulled the hammer back.

"You sure about that?" Lancelot growled.

Dr. Havalon's eyes were whiter than any color as he pointed with a shaking hand.

"What's going on here?" demanded a deep voice at the doorway. "Drop your weapon, mister," the man shouted.

"This man has drugged and abused my partner over there. I'm an Agency agent. He's a chemist. Not an agent." Lancelot barked out the distinction knowing the officer at the door would understand. He did.

"I'll be damned. Hey, that's that little guy--I *knew* that piece of shit was bad news. Too oily." The newcomer moved to stand next Lancelot, weapon drawn now.

RUSTY CHEMISTRY

Quickly, Lancelot moved to Vanya wincing, his blood boiling at the raised welts across the young man's back and buttocks. "Call medical!" he shouted to the room at large, squatting in front of Vanya's face. "I'm here, Love," he murmured, his heart sinking when he saw that Vanya's eyes were closed.

He ran his fingers through the froth of unkempt hair he loved so much, pressing his forehead against Vanya's cool one. Was there a pulse? Maybe, yes, he thought there was. The young man's breathing was so shallow that he at first didn't feel the faint puff on his skin.

"Vanya?" he whispered, and then those beautiful, precious hazel eyes opened, cloudy, confused, but not unconscious, not dead.

Chapter Fifteen

Vanya awoke to the memory of pain. He had the worst headache he could imagine but that was reassuring in a way. The last faint remnants of agony had led him to believe that he wouldn't be waking up at all. This headache was a distinct improvement. Inhaling deeply, he tried to pick up the clues that would tell him where he was.

Alcohol and sterile air, he wrinkled his nose against the smell of the harsh antiseptic. Ah, he must be in a hospital.

A sharp jagged shard of intense pain seemed to be separating him from the events of the last few--days? Maybe longer? He had no idea.

"Vanya?" He flinched and the voice dropped to the softest of whispers. "Sorry, I forgot the doctor said some of your senses would be a little hypersensitive."

"Lancelot." That's who the voice was, he thought with a gleam of satisfaction.

"Right here, Vanya. As soon as the drug is finished with you and the doctor is sure that you're all better, then we can go home." He could hear the pleasure in the other man's voice. "What's the last thing you remember?"

Vanya thought back over the shards of broken glass that were his memories. "Someone stood--um, stood over me." He shivered, suddenly cold. "Someone angry. He hit me? He hit me."

He felt Lancelot's hand over his, warming his frigid fingers with a barely there touch. Vanya moved his head and then cringed as pain exploded behind his eyes.

"Shhh, it's all right, Love. It's just the effects the drug still in your system." Soothing warm fingers traced gentle circles at his temple and he felt some of the pain go away.

"So tired..." Vanya could hear the slur in his voice before he fell back to sleep.

When he awoke the next time, he moved his head gently and found it not quite as painful as before. Lancelot's faint aftershave teased his nostrils so he knew he wasn't alone. "Lancelot?"

RUSTY CHEMISTRY

“Right here, honey. The doctor will be here soon and if he says you’re okay, I’ll be able to get you out of here.” The voice was so soft that it couldn’t possibly hurt him.

He must have dropped off again because this time the fingers were dry and smelled of alcohol as they turned his head to the right then to the left. Brow furrowed, he tried to open his eyes but somehow they’d been glued together while he was sleeping.

“This is Doctor Peters, Vanya. He’s the nice gentleman who’s going to release you soon.” Lancelot’s voice came from his other side and Vanya stopped trying to force his eyes open.

If Lancelot was with him then everything was all right, he thought vaguely. Lancelot’s warm hand was back on his and this time he decided to hold on to it.

“Well, Mr. Ambrozak, there’s nothing more I can do for you here. You’ll need to make allowances for your changed circumstances. You’ve sustained permanent neuropathy. That is, your nerve fibers have been damaged.” It sounded to Vanya like one of his own lectures had come back to haunt him.

“At times, you’ll experience pain from stimuli that is not normally painful,” the doctor droned on, “There will be increased sensitivity to temperature and possibly even light touch, and often you’ll experience pain that radiates to the arms and legs. Your activity level and quality of life will be severely restricted. You’ll tire easily and never be as strong and fit as you were.”

He seemed to realize that his direct approach could cause the patient distress and hurriedly added, “You’ll need to visit your own local doctor and he, or she, will help you devise a plan of care so that you can define your new parameters and live within them. I’ll let you help your friend change into street clothes while, I go out and finish the paperwork to release you.”

“Thank you, Dr. Peters.” Lancelot took his warm and comforting hand away and Vanya heard what he guessed was the two men shaking hands over his body.

His body. He’d forgotten that he was more than just his head and his hands, but now, trying to move, he found several places that hurt. Most of the various aches and pains he dismissed as minor.

Unexpectedly, a warm wet washcloth began to bathe his eyes gently.

“Lancelot? What are you doing?”

“I saw how you tried to open your eyes earlier and thought this might help unstick them.”

J.J. Massa

Suddenly, Vanya felt better. "You take good care of me, Lancelot."

"Not good enough," he murmured. "Okay, try to open them now." Lancelot moved the cloth away and Vanya scrunched up his face and tried hard to open his eyes.

With a pop, they flew open and he saw Lancelot through blurry eyes. Considering him for a minute, he blurted, "Um, you look tired, also worried. Why?"

The handsome face relaxed a little and that smile was back, the one that made Vanya feel fresh and new inside. It was the smile that belonged just to him alone. "Well, I was very worried when you wouldn't wake up."

"But I have awakened and you are supposed to get me dressed to go from here. So cold." Vanya shivered a little. "I do not think they heat this room at all."

A line appeared between the dark eyes he so loved. "I expect you just haven't been moving much, Vanya. It will be better when you get up and walk around."

"If you say so, Lancelot." Vanya was only too happy to agree in the hopes of making that little line disappear. "This--this thing I wear is yuck."

"Yuck?" Lancelot chuckled at him.

Vanya tried to sit up but when he did, the room began to spin madly. "Make it stop, please," he begged.

Warm, strong arms slid around him, propping him upright against Lancelot's solid shoulder. He was wearing black jeans and a steel gray polo shirt that made his dark eyes look fathomless. He smelled like warmth and safety so Vanya took a deep breath in while he waited for his stomach to settle down.

"Better?" Those comforting hands were rubbing circles on his back where the gown gaped open.

"Uh-uh. Please not to do that anymore," Vanya entreated.

"I promise, Love. Now do you think you can sit up by yourself while I get your clothes?"

"Yes, I sit." Vanya did miss the strong arms when they drew slowly away but he concentrated on sitting still.

Cautiously, he opened his eyes and watched the other man unfasten a small suitcase. Pulling out a brown polo shirt, Lancelot laid it on the bed along with a pair of tan khaki pants and the rest of his clothes.

"These are some of the clothes I bought for you before. Do you mind?"

"Is fine. Um, Lancelot, could I finish dressing? Is cold."

RUSTY CHEMISTRY

“Sure. Swing your legs over the side of the bed and I’ll get your socks on.” He pushed the covers away and slid his hands over Vanya’s knees to pull them around to the side of the bed.

Vanya clutched at the broad shoulders before him and hung on while the room swirled again. “Nooo, no.”

“Sorry. I’ll go slower. Damn it! Your feet are completely frozen.” Lancelot sounded angry and that frightened him a little.

“I am most sorry, Lancelot,” he whispered, hoping that he wasn’t in trouble.

Startled dark eyes met his downcast gaze from where the big man knelt by his dangling feet. “It’s not your fault, Vanya. You’re right, Love, this place is much too cold. These socks will help.”

Now that he knew that he wasn’t in trouble, Vanya managed a weak smile. “Yes, Lancelot. They feel much warmer.”

“Okay, now let me slide these boxers up so we can get your pants on. Then we’ll sign some forms and get out of here. Can you lift your hips a bit?”

“Nope,” he said definitively, “Makes room wobble.”

“Hmm.” Lancelot shook his head and pulled the shorts as far up Vanya’s legs as he could. “Now, I need you to slide off the bed so I can finish getting you dressed.”

Vanya promptly slid off the bed into Lancelot’s arms. With his nose buried in the agent’s broad chest, he took another deep breath. “Did I tell you how you smell is good?”

The muscles beneath his cheek rippled and a rich chuckle sounded by his ear. “No, Love. I think you left that out. Uh, Vanya, can you back up just a bit so I can get your pants zipped?”

Vanya nodded but that made his head throb so he stopped and leaned it against a solid shoulder. “It hurts, Lancelot,” he moaned quietly. “Make it stop.” Lancelot rubbed his back and kissed his forehead, pulling a blanket around him.

The trip to the car was a fuzzy study in torture for Vanya, as the required wheelchair bumped and hitched its way to the door of the hospital. After an eternity, they reached the curb where a dark blue sedan waited.

Lance lifted him easily and placed him in a reclined bucket seat, tucking him securely with blankets before fastening his seat belt. Sweeping a lock of hair from his

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face, Lancelot smiled at him and leaned down to brush a kiss on his cheek. Exhausted, Vanya was asleep before the car left the hospital parking lot.

Sometime later, the cessation of movement awakened him, disoriented and unsure. “Lancelot?”

“We’re here, Vanya. How does your head feel?” The baritone voice was warm and caring, making him feel safe and loved.

“Is better--I think.” Vanya moved his head a bit and then turned it all the way to the window. “Just dizzy, not bad.”

“Good. The doctor said that sleep was good for you. And as soon as we get signed in, you’re going straight to bed.”

“Nope. As soon as inside, I find bathroom.” Vanya wondered when the last time was that he’d used a toilet. His bladder felt as if he’d swallowed a liquid gallon.

A rich chuckle hummed around him as strong hands unfastened his seat belt for him. Then car doors opened and Lancelot moved around to his side to help him out of the car. A young man was removing luggage from the trunk and someone else was holding open the door of what appeared to be a fairytale castle.

He was so bemused by the quaint architecture and tall stone turrets that he barely even noticed the walk inside. Lancelot sat him down in a wingback chair near the oak desk. “Is castle,” he stated the obvious, bewildered. “Why are we in castle?”

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Chapter Sixteen

Lancelot fumbled with the key in the old-fashioned lock until it clicked open. The door swung wide to show the circular room with a hanging tapestry over the large four-poster bed.

“I knew you'd like the tower room, Vanya. For the next week, this is our home.”

“Is beautiful, Lancelot,” Vanya whispered, his voice tight.

“Yes, it is,” Lancelot glanced down at the scrunched face, studiously concentrating on putting one foot in front of the other. “Now, here's the bathroom but I'm going to lend a helping hand for now. I don't want you to fall.”

“You take much good care of me, Lancelot.” Vanya blinked rapidly, tears of emotion filling his eyes.

“I haven't Love, not at all. From now on I will, though,” Lancelot swore, balancing him against a marble sink and undoing his pants for him. “I'll be right back.”

He left the antique looking bathroom and hurried to find a warm outfit for the shivering young man. He knew Vanya would appreciate a bath. The little professor was nothing if not fastidious about his hygiene. He wondered if it had anything to do with his years in the orphanage. Hopefully, he'd have a lifetime to find out.

Vanya was leaning precariously against the sink, waiting patiently for Lancelot's return. “Would you like a bath now, Love?” he asked, laying warm sweatpants, a t-shirt, and a robe out on a clothing rack.

“Can it be hot, Lancelot?” Vanya murmured in a quiet, cold-stuttered voice.

“Absolutely,” Lancelot smiled at him, turning knobs and filling the bathtub with the hottest water he could stand. “I have this special lotion from the doctor that we'll put on your back and legs when you're finished, okay?”

Slowly and carefully he eased Vanya into the steaming water, wincing at the angry welts across his back and buttocks. Once he had his lover settled, he reached over and grabbed a bar of soap and a washcloth, carefully soaking the rose-russet strands.

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“What happened to me, please?” Vanya asked after a few minutes.

Lancelot glanced at his face. Although the tilted eyes were closed, he could see that tension there.

“You remembered that Havalon hit you, right?”

“Yes, is what burns now. I--Did he....” Vanya stammered but didn’t finish his thought. What could be the cause of such agitation, Lancelot wondered, rubbing the soapy cloth carefully across a vicious weal on a nearby shoulder.

“Vanya? Honey?” No answer. “What is it Love? Talk to me.”

Vanya’s hazel eyes cracked open, full of moisture, a tear dripping down one cheek. “Is--am I still? Did he....” He took a deep breath. “Did he put himself inside me? Do you still love me?”

Lancelot leaned forward and bodily pulled the shaking and tearful man out of the bathtub and into his arms, soaking himself completely. For his own comfort, he didn’t care, but he was mindful of Vanya’s weakened condition, dragging towels over both of them as they sat on the plush bathroom rug.

“Oh, honey, no! No, he did *not* put himself inside you, no. I got there before he could rape you. But, I would love you even if. Nothing could ever stop that, Vanya, nothing.” He stroked and petted and rocked the shivering body, kissing him and hoping his words were getting through.

“He pushed me on my belly after he took my wonderful suit away. I tried to die first. I hoped to die when I knew he was... He hit me much, then I heard his pants and his hands were on me....”

Vanya was gasping for breath now and shaking like a leaf. No doubt the cause was equal parts chill and reaction.

Lancelot rubbed him dry as best he could with a fluffy towel, divesting himself of his wet clothes at the same time. Hurriedly, he pulled the warm sweatpants and t-shirt over Vanya’s quaking limbs and swung him up into his arms.

In a few short strides, he had them both huddled in the bed, all the while he continued stroking and petting his small love.

Finally, Vanya’s tremors ceased and he cautiously eased one hand over Lancelot’s waist. “What has happened to him? The ugly Dr. Havalon.”

“Well,” Lancelot sighed, “I wanted to inject him with his own toxin. I thought he should suffer what he did to you.” Those hazel eyes were riveted on him, Vanya just

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waited. “He’s in an underground, Agency-run prison. His job is to make trays. Prison trays.” He saw a fleeting smile grace the serious face of his Ukrainian.

“What will happen now? Will I get better?” Vanya asked after a second.

“You will get some better.” Lancelot explained carefully. “You won’t ever... This chemical affected you, Love. It took too long to get the anti-toxin in you. He gave you such a high dose of the drug.”

Vanya nodded, probably understanding more than Lancelot did. “What will happen to me now?” he asked again.

“You’ll stay with me and be my love and we’ll live happily ever after?” Lancelot was a little nervous now. Those wide, exotic eyes were staring at him as if he’d sprouted a horn. “I’ve requested a transfer to administration and analysis. There’s always a need for experienced people there. I’ll have some traveling but not like going undercover.”

“Me? And You? And happily ever after?” Vanya asked as if he’d never heard the words before.

“Castles are great places to start a happily ever after,” Lancelot said hopefully. “You can still teach and do research. I’ll just be there to take care of you and love you and make sure you don’t overdo it.” Vanya was younger than he was by about twelve years. Maybe... “Is it because I’m so much older than you, Vanya? I won’t be stiff to live with... And I’m very wealthy.”

“I can choose? Is up to me?” Vanya’s voice was a cracked whisper now. The hand on Lancelot’s waist clutched at him convulsively.

“Yes, Vanya, it’s all up to you,” Lancelot said softly, hoping, dreading.

Vanya’s tilted eyes tilted a little more as the grin bloomed across his face. “I choose yes,” he declared, “I choose happily ever after so please you can kiss me now,” he blurted in a rush.

Relief washed over Lancelot; sweet, soul cleansing relief. “Yes,” Lancelot pulled him closer, not that he could get any closer. “Yes,” he repeated, kissing the smiling face, the neck, the tears, not even sure whose eyes they’d started from as he leaned over Vanya.

“My lessons were good, yes?” Vanya murmured between kisses. “I get A?”

“A plus,” Lancelot snuggled his sleepy lover onto his shoulder.

“Is good, A plus?” Vanya yawned.

“The best,” Lancelot informed him.

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“Next I will find way to fix nerves and you will give me more lessons?” Another jaw-cracking yawn split the young man’s face.

“You’ll get lessons every day, honey,” he murmured, smiling as he watched Vanya fight to stay awake.

“We’ll gift each to other?” Vanya mumbled.

“What gift can I give you, Vanya? What would you like for a present?” The tilted hazel eyes had closed now. His only answer was a sleepy snore.

Lancelot smiled. Vanya could put a shiny bow on an old drainpipe. He didn’t care. He gathered his bundle of wine-haired genius close against him. He’d be delighted with whatever happened next. He had everything his no-longer rusty heart desired.

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About the Author

J.J. lives on the Jersey Shore with her husband, her teenaged daughter, his nine-year-old daughter, and his thirteen-year-old son. To complete this eclectic family, she has her writing partner and yellow lab, Cosmo, at her side all the time for plot twists and character advice. There are some visiting cats, aquatic turtles, and an assortment of hermit crabs just to keep things interesting. There's never a dull moment in the Massa household. Maybe that's why there's never a dull moment in J.J. Massa's books.