

PHAZE FLARE

FREE FICTION



SPRING CLEANING

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Spring Cleaning
A gay romance short

By
James Buchanan

Mark sat on the steps of the apartment building surrounded by his stuff. One suitcase of clothes propped up his back. The collection of Justice League Comics, double bagged and boxed in two long white cardboard cartons, rested next to him. It was all he'd managed to salvage before Charles tossed him out on his butt.

What a way to begin spring cleaning. About ten minutes too late he realized Charles really was serious about getting rid of all the old junk. As usual, he'd just ignored the jibes as he headed out to work that morning. Hell, Charles had on his rattiest clothes and a giant sized roll of garbage bags. That tended to mean big time house work. Like always, he'd laughed off Charles' suggestion that he dump his *old junk* and grow up. He figured it meant he'd have to high tail it home and pull a few things out of the bin, shove it under the bed for awhile and bring it back slowly. Charles always hit that mood around this time of year. Clean up, clear out, move on.

Mark just hadn't figured that Charles had meant Mark as well this time.

"Hey, what's up?"

Mark looked up from studying his hands in his lap and found a green eyed pair of eyes right in front of his own. "Shit!" He started back, knocking over the suitcase. Jake, their upstairs neighbor rocked back: slipping and almost falling off where he knelt on the step. Oh crap, Mark didn't want to explain to Jake or anyone why he was sitting on the stoop with his junk. "Sorry you startled me." He swallowed. "Not much. Just doing a little housecleaning. Out with the old, in with the new." He smiled.

With green eyes and soft brown hair, Jake was a nice looking guy. He'd moved into their building right after Mark and Charles

started living together. Mark had ogled the new tenant every trip up and down the stairs the day he'd moved in. It had been Mark who'd made the effort to introduce himself, Charles couldn't be bothered. And it was Mark who'd pumped Jake for what he did, where he came from and all that getting to know you type of thing.

Charles made fun of Jake behind his back because he was an animator on a kids' network. It wasn't a *serious job* according to Charles. Still, they'd been good neighbors and invited Jake, plus one, to the Christmas thing, and the New Years thing. Jake never brought a date and never stayed long. But he was always around when Mark needed something. He'd never failed to help out with a lift somewhere or hauling up another bookcase for Mark's treasures, or when Mark needed a running buddy in the mornings... well before Mark's shift had changed.

Jake looked like he was about to say something when the sound of a window opening caused them both to look up. Charles' voice flew out of the window. "God I hate this piece of shit!" The sound was followed by a poster in a black wood frame. That would be the one with the vintage snapshot showing the atomic bomb blowing up behind the 1950's Vegas Skyline. It sailed through the air to land in the street. Two bounces carried it right into the path of a station wagon. With a screech of brakes and a crunch, the poster earned a place in the dumpster.

Righting the luggage, Jake parked himself next to Mark. "Housecleaning, huh?"

"Yeah," Mark nodded as his razor scooter followed the path of the ill fated poster. "Cleaning the house of everything that reminds him of me." The scooter only made it as far as the side walk. Wasn't quite as aerodynamic as the first missile.

Jake set a grocery bag at his feet. "You guys never seemed right for each other." Fishing out a packet of chips, he popped them open and offered the first grab to Mark.

A handful of Salt and Vinegar potato chips would at least make thing bearable for the moment. "What do you mean?" Over their heads sailed a tin of DVDs a Puss & Boots bobble head, his Sin-City coffee mug and the wall clock that told time backwards.

Too bad, that clock had been given to him by his physics advisor when Mark had landed his job at JPL. Varying degrees of crashes sounded at impact.

“Well, he’s just kinda uptight. Everything was just so... so, you know?”

One by one, paperbacks flew. He crammed the chips in his mouth and mumbled. “No. I don’t know.” At least the books would be salvageable.

“So *designer*.” The voice out of Jake’s mouth sounded like one of the cartoon characters he drew. Mark knew ‘cause he recorded all the shows on TiVo and watched them when Charles wasn’t around. He sure as hell didn’t want to listen to any snarky comments while he enjoyed laughing his ass off. Jake added in a woman’s over-earnest falsetto, “There is a motif... we will not deviate from the motif.”

Mark snorted down a laugh. “Okay.”

“It all coordinates.” While doing a tradeshow model presentation dance with his hands he teased more. “It is sold as a set so that it all matches.” Then Jake shoved a chip in his mouth. “Blech.”

“Yeah, he’s a little like that.”

“A little?” Jake almost choked. “That’s like saying Jerry Fallwell has some gender issues.” Finally able to breath again he managed another question. “I don’t know what the hell you saw in him. He couldn’t have that big of a dick. Come on, you two just didn’t seem to be right for each other.”

“True. He says I’m immature.” Mimicking Charles’ voice, Mark tried not to laugh. “I have a childish, pedestrian sense of humor. No grown man, no one with a job designing space-probes and satellites should collect Three Stooges memorabilia.”

“He’s an ass.” Jake shook his head. “I almost told you that the first time I met you... actually the first time I met him.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“Well, you were living with him.” He rolled his eyes. “Didn’t seem right to get in the middle of somebody’s life.”

Mark gave Jake a sideways glance. "And..." Jake was grinning.

He swallowed and shrugged. "Now you're not."

"And now I'm homeless."

"Hey, I have a couch." Jake stood and offered his hand. Almost embarrassed he added, "And a big bed."

Staring up at the other man, Mark considered the offer. Charles had been comfortable, well used and, mostly, there. They hadn't had much of a relationship for a long time, probably even since before Mark had moved in with him. "A bed for the night might be nice." He took the proffered grip and let Jake pull him to standing. A china cat arced above their heads and impacted with an explosion of pottery shards. "I wonder if he realizes that was his. Never liked that piece of crap anyway."

That set them both laughing as Mark hefted the boxes. The clothes were replaceable... vintage Bronze-Age comics not so much. A little lighter in mood than before, he bounded up the stairs. "Here," Jake stopped at the door and fished something out of his grocery bag, "you need this more than me." He tossed a blister packed toy back toward Mark.

Almost fumbling boxes as the package landed on the top of the pile Mark asked. "What is it?"

"It's a cow that shits jelly beans." Jake pushed the door open with his butt. "I guess that makes two of us with a juvenile sense of humor."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Buchanan is a multi-published author of homoerotic romance. James grew up in a small Southwestern town, hours away from any other small Southwestern towns. A stint at the State University, where he ostensibly majored in English, garnered him a degree useful for being someone's secretary. The absolute lack of employment opportunities led James to Southern California. After a stint in County Mental Health (administration, not client) he ran screaming into the field of Law. James has been practicing for nine years and someday he might even get it right.

Visit James at www.james-buchanan.com for more information on his books



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