

THE WHIRLPOOL

Jaymz
Connelly



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JON sighed and leaned his head back against the seat. He wished he could have found some way out of the situation he'd gotten himself into. But how do you tell your ex, the one you'd agreed to stay friends with after splitting up, that you couldn't bear the thought of him getting married to someone else?

It wasn't that he begrudged Andy his happiness or that he held out any hope of them ever getting back together. It just hurt to have to witness the incontrovertible evidence that Andy had moved on so well while he was still wallowing in misery.

I'm a coward, Jon reflected. If he'd had any balls at all, he would have sent his regrets and gone on holiday to some exotic tropical locale instead of spending his vacation time flying to Canada to attend Andy's wedding.

Idly Jon wondered if it would be too obvious if he spent the whole week blasted out of his mind. But Andy would know. Andy had always known when he'd gotten drunk to avoid facing something. No, he was just going to have to grit his teeth and bear it. How awful could it be? It was only a week, right? Surely he could get through a week without totally losing it.

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JON picked at the label of his beer bottle as he watched Andy and Dale move around the room, talking to the other guests. They were two peas in a pod, really. Like Andy, Dale's hair was carefully styled, and his skin was burnished with the perfect golden glow of a fake tan. The matching suits they wore had been tailored to fit perfectly, and they looked very much like they'd just stepped from the pages of *GQ*. Gay wedding edition *GQ*.

Smiling wryly, Jon realized Andy had finally found his perfect match, which was a good thing considering that he and Dale were about to get married. Dale looked to effortlessly embody everything Jon had tried so hard to be but couldn't quite manage.

Straightening up from his slouch, Jon tried to look happy as Andy and Dale approached him.

"Now why did I know you'd be sitting here nursing a beer and making no effort at all to mingle?" Andy said in slightly condescending amusement.

"Oh, you know me." Jon shrugged. He held out his hand to Dale. "Congratulations, Dale. I hope you and Andy will be very happy together."

Andy frowned as he watched Jon shake Dale's hand. "Where's your watch?" he asked.

"I'm wearing a watch," Jon said a trifle defensively as he pulled his sleeve down.

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Andy rolled his eyes. “I’m not blind, Jon, I can see that. What happened to the Rolex I gave you?”

“Oh.” Jon bit his lip and looked away, “I didn’t want to wear it in case I lost it.”

“God, you are a hopeless case, aren’t you?” Andy said with an affectionate grin as he reached out to ruffle Jon’s already messy curls. He frowned when Jon leaned back to avoid the touch and then consciously relaxed his expression, not wanting frown lines to mar his appearance on the wedding day. “At any rate, I’m glad you’re here, Jon, so please, do try and look a little less like you’re waiting to see the dentist. And it wouldn’t kill you to actually talk to some of the other guests. They’re all very lovely people, and at least half of the single guys here are gay.”

“Yes, all right, thank you,” Jon muttered, visibly restraining himself from sinking down further into his chair as Andy’s casual remarks told Dale just what a boring loser he was. He did slump down in his seat as Andy and Dale moved on, wishing he *were* waiting to see the dentist. It would probably be a more pleasant experience.

ERIC propped his elbow on the table and rested his chin on his hand. He hated weddings. He didn’t care if it was his annoying little brother getting married. He ignored his mother’s death glare, smiling amiably at her before he let his gaze flick idly over the assembled throng of well-wishers.

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Everyone looked depressingly happy and excited to be there.

Well, hello there. Eric sat up straight, focusing all his attention on the man who looked even more like he didn't want to be there than Eric, although how that was possible Eric had no idea. He'd rather have root canal without anesthetic than attend his little brother's pre-wedding, pre-rehearsal, pre-every-fucking-thing party.

"Eric?"

"Later, Mom," Eric said absently as he pushed his chair back and stood up, intent on finding out who the gorgeous gloomy pants might be. He strolled casually across the room, keeping his attention focused on the slender dark-haired man who seemed to be oblivious to Eric's interest and everyone else in the room.

Grabbing two cold beers from a passing waiter, Eric dropped into the seat across from Mr. Gorgeous and put one bottle in front of him. "Care to drown your sorrows?"

"My what?" Jon looked up in surprise when a complete stranger sat down across from him. He wasn't particularly surprised that the guy was a stranger, everyone in the whole fucking hall was a stranger except for Andy, but Andy was rather too busy with his intended to have much time for Jon, although he'd certainly be instantaneously aware if Jon found the nerve to leave.

"You look like your dog just died." Eric grinned.

Jon rolled his eyes. Great. Just what he needed, some

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smart-arse trying to cheer him up. “You mean this isn’t the wake for Fluffy the Doberman?” he said sarcastically.

“Sadly, no,” Eric replied, not the least bit put off by Mr. Gorgeous’s surly attitude. “That was yesterday.”

“Damn,” Jon said with fake dismay, “just my luck. Always a day late and a pound short.”

“You must be a friend of Andy’s,” Eric said, totally charmed by Mr. Gorgeous’s lovely British accent. “I’m Eric, brother of the other groom.”

“Jon, uh, Jonathan Ward,” Jon said, awkwardly holding his hand out to Eric.

“Ah, the ex,” Eric said, engulfing Jon’s hand in his.

“Bollocks.” Jon groaned. “Please tell me he didn’t tell everyone that.”

“Well, not quite everyone,” Eric teased. “So I guess now that I know your name, I’ll have to stop calling you ‘Mr. Gorgeous’, eh?”

“What?” Jon said, and then he blushed, turning even redder as he tried to control the blush and failed. “Shit, bugger, wank! I think I’ll just crawl off in mortification now if I could please have my hand back.”

Eric laughed at Jon’s fluster. “I don’t think so. You’re the most interesting person here. I can’t let you escape; you’re going to keep me from dying of boredom.”

“I assure you, I am a completely uninteresting person,”

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Jon said seriously, “I have zero conversational skills, I’m socially inept, and I’d much rather lose myself in a keg of bitters than attend functions such as this.”

“But can you dance?” Eric asked with a twinkle of amusement in his eyes.

“Sadly, yes,” Jon admitted with a sigh.

“Excellent!” Eric said gleefully. He stood up and pulled Jon to his feet. “Come on then, you’ll have to show off your skills. Dance with me.”

“Oh, I really don’t think...,” Jon protested.

“Thinking is optional.” Eric smirked.

“Oh. My,” Jon said when they reached the dance floor and Eric took him in his arms. He hadn’t realized the other man was quite so big when they were sitting down. “You’re rather on the largish size, aren’t you?”

Eric couldn’t help himself, he giggled.

It was the first time Jon hadn’t had to force his smile all evening. He was enchanted with the incongruous giggle coming from the tall, muscular blond, although he would have rather had his fingernails pulled off than admit it.

“So what do you do when you’re not attending boring wedding festivities?” Eric asked, enjoying the way he and Jon seemed to fit well together, moving as though they’d been dance partners for years.

“I’m afraid my job is as boring as I am too,” Jon replied.

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“Although it does pay rather well. I’m an accountant.”

“It’s a dirty job, but someone has to do it, eh?” Eric said with a smile.

“Yes, I suppose,” Jon agreed. “And you?”

“And me what?”

“What is it that you do for a living, Eric?”

“Oh, I’m a mechanic.”

“Now I would think that would be a much dirtier job,” Jon said dryly.

Eric snorted with amusement. “I like you. What are you doing for the rest of the week?”

“I’m afraid I’m rather committed to attending an endless round of stultifyingly boring social events.” Jon sighed. “I suspect I’d much rather be off exploring the sights.”

“Maybe I can lure you away from a few of the ridiculous events planned?” Eric suggested.

“I’m afraid I can’t do that,” Jon said reluctantly. He really wished he could just toss it all in and spend the rest of the week sightseeing, and to do so with such handsome company as Eric would definitely be a bonus.

“Why not?”

“Andy—”

“Unless I miss my guess, Andy really has no say in your

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life and hasn't had since you guys broke up," Eric said slowly, "So why would you worry so much about what he's going to think?"

"I.... You're absolutely right," Jon agreed. "I have no idea why I'm still attempting to live up to Andy's expectations for me. I'm not a social butterfly, and I never will be. I simply cannot be comfortable in vast crowds of people or talk to total strangers as if we were friends from childhood."

Eric wisely forbore to mention that up until he'd sat down at the table with Jon they hadn't known each other, and yet Jon seemed to have no difficulty at all in talking to him.

"So what do you say? You want to blow off tomorrow's function, and I'll take you to see some of the sights the usual tourists don't get to see?" Eric asked hopefully.

"I believe I would enjoy that very much more than male bonding over mini golf," Jon agreed with a smile.

"Great!" Eric beamed. "You don't have an aversion to motorbikes, do you?"

"I have a Buell 1125CR." Jon grinned. "It's my only flirtation with danger."

"Well, look at you, eh?" Eric grinned back. "Who'd have ever guessed that under that mild-mannered accountant exterior there lives a speed demon bike rider."

"I'm hardly a speed demon," Jon protested. "I really couldn't afford the fines if I were to be pulled over."

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Eric just grinned and pulled Jon closer as the music changed to something a little slower.

JON stepped beneath the shower spray and just stood there, his thoughts whirling madly. He'd had a very restless night, constantly thinking about Eric and what had gone on between them.

He had enjoyed Eric's company last night. It had certainly made the otherwise uncomfortable evening much more pleasant. But it probably wasn't a good idea to spend much more time with him. After all, when the wedding was over, Jon was going back to London, and Eric was going to be staying here.

It was pointless, really. Trying to distract himself from his thoughts, Jon reached for the shampoo. He'd enjoy the day with Eric and see the sights of the Niagara area, but that would be the end of it. Tomorrow it would be back to being by himself. He couldn't afford to allow the attraction he felt for the handsome man to grow.

His mind made up, Jon quickly finished his shower and got dressed, eager to spend the day with Eric in spite of his decision to keep him at arm's length.

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ERIC leaned his head against the shower wall and let the water run over his back. He closed his eyes and smiled when he thought about Jon. He certainly hadn't expected to meet someone so intriguing at a party for his brother. Most of Dale's friends were a pain in the ass with their pretensions and obsessions with looking perfectly groomed at every moment.

Eric straightened up and reached for the soap. He shivered as he replayed again in his mind that lovely soft British accent. Jon sounded a lot different than Andy did. Andy's accent was a bit rough and sharp, but Jon's voice flowed over him like honey. He would be happy listening to Jon talk for hours about anything at all.

Reaching between his legs, Eric stroked his hardening shaft as he replayed the conversation from last night in his head, hearing Jon's voice clearly.

"I really should have been sunning myself on a beach in Majorca, but I found myself inexplicably incapable of declining when Andy requested my presence at his wedding. If I had any bollocks at all I would have told him to get stuffed, that I didn't really want to see him getting married to some prat... oh, bugger. I probably shouldn't have called your brother a prat, should I? You see, I told you I'm socially inept."

"Don't apologize, you're right, I think, if I'm understanding that a prat is an idiot. Dale is kind of an idiot, and a narcissistic one at that, and I'm sorry, but I think Andy is tarred with the same brush."

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Jon snorted in agreement, ducked his head, and then looked up at Eric through his eyelashes. “Don’t apologize. I’m afraid I concur with your assessment.”

Eric groaned and moved his hand faster. He loved the way Jon used such fancy words to say simple things. “God dammit,” he muttered, bracing one hand on the wet tiles as he worked for his release. He closed his eyes, imagining it was Jon’s hand on his dick. “Christ... yeah... like that, baby,” he murmured, twisting his wrist slightly as he increased the speed of his hand. “Gonna... fuck, yeah... close... Jon—”

“Eric! Hurry up, will you? You’re not the only one who wants a shower today, eh?”

Trust Dale to intrude on the best fantasy he’d had in a long time. It was a real mood killer when your brother started talking to you just as you were about to come. He sure as fuck hadn’t missed Dale at all since he’d moved to Toronto, Eric thought with a wry grin. Eric pulled on his cock reaching orgasm as quickly as possible now that Dale had shattered his lovely daydream about Jon giving him a hand.

PULLING his helmet off, Eric grinned at the man waiting in front of the Best Western motel, thrilled that Jon was apparently that eager to see him again that he couldn’t wait in his room.

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“Good morning!”

“Good morning,” Jon responded, smiling nervously. Why did Eric have to look so damn shaggable sitting astride his motorbike like that? “I just... Well, the room... It was so nice and sunny out....”

Eric chuckled and patted the seat behind him. “Come on then; let’s go. If you’re lucky there’ll be a ship in the canal when we get there.”

“A ship in the what?” Jon asked in bewilderment as he caught the helmet Eric tossed him and put it on as he was climbing onto the back of the bike.

“The Welland Canal,” Eric replied as he pulled his helmet back on. “We’ve got to cross over it to get to the falls. It’s the channel ships use to navigate between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie.”

“Of course,” Jon agreed faintly, cursing his complete ignorance of the area. He was glad the helmet hid his embarrassed flush.

Eric’s laugh was muffled by his helmet as he pulled away from the curb and roared down the street. He only barely controlled his shiver of longing as Jon wrapped his arms around his waist and hung on.

JON leaned on the railing and stared raptly at the enormous

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spill of water in front of him. He struggled to comprehend the sheer volume that had to be passing over the brink of the falls every second.

“Hey.” Eric nudged Jon’s shoulder, shaking him out of his focus. “You want to see it closer?”

“Closer?” Jon asked eagerly, and then he frowned with concern. “I really am not one to risk life and limb or possible arrest by the local constabulary, Eric. I don’t think it would be terribly safe to climb over the railing, even if there is quite a respectable grassy area on the other side.”

Eric shook his head in amusement and grabbed Jon’s arm. “Come on, you’re in for a real treat, eh?”

Bemused, Jon followed willingly as Eric dragged him down the street and then down a flight of stairs.

“May I ask where we’re going?”

“Maid of the Mist,” Eric said happily as he pulled Jon up to the ticket booth and paid for two tickets.

“Maid of the... Oh, I see. It’s a boat ride,” Jon said, tilting his head slightly to examine the photo on the leaflet that was displayed at the ticket counter. He wondered if it was just a perspective trick or if the boat really did get that close to the waterfall.

“Not just a boat ride, a real experience.” Eric beamed. “Come on, if we hustle we’ll make this trip and won’t have to wait half an hour for the next one.”

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Captured by Eric's exuberant enthusiasm, Jon hurried after his tour guide for the day, accepting the blue plastic poncho handed to him as he stepped on board the boat.

"You might want to put that on," Eric suggested when he noticed Jon tucking the folded up poncho beneath his arm.

Jon pulled on the poncho as he allowed Eric to steer him closer to the front of the boat. He felt a thrill of excitement ripple through him as the boat pulled away from the dock and indeed headed straight towards the falls.

"This is fucking awesome," Eric promised from his position right behind Jon. He wished he could wrap his arms around Jon, but he didn't want to run the risk of rejection in front of a boatload of tourists.

When the boat drew closer to the falls than he would have ever thought possible, Jon clutched the railing tightly as he leaned into the wind generated by the massive fall of water. The wind blew the hood of his poncho off, but he didn't care that his hair was getting soaked. It felt so fucking amazing to be that close to the most awesome spectacle of power and grandeur that he'd ever seen.

Overcome with the experience, Jon let out a loud whoop of glee that was barely audible over the thunderous roar of the falling water, raising his hands into the air to feel the wind and spray battering them. He felt tiny and insignificant in the face of such majesty, but at the same time totally free and uplifted, like he could achieve anything he wanted.

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Eric grinned happily at Jon's obvious delight and enthusiasm for the display in front of him. When they were well on their way back to the dock, Jon turned to face him, and Eric was completely enraptured by the vibrant sparkle and enthusiasm that lit up Jon's face.

"That was so incredibly amazing and totally fantastic!" Jon enthused, reaching out to grab Eric's arm in his excitement. "This has absolutely made my whole trip worthwhile! Thank you so much for bringing me here, Eric."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it," Eric said, smiling proudly as though he'd engineered the falls themselves and not just the boat ride.

"I really don't know what you're going to do now to top that." Jon grinned as he carefully folded the blue plastic poncho to keep as a souvenir.

"Oh, I have a plan." Eric smirked. "You've seen the Niagara River in all its loud majestic glory; now it's time to see its quiet but no less forceful beauty. Not unlike someone I know, in fact."

Jon blinked as he looked at Eric. Was he flirting, perhaps insinuating that he was quiet but forceful? He refused to even contemplate that Eric might think he was beautiful. The entire day so far had been very platonic, making Jon think that perhaps Eric had reconsidered his hastily spoken words of last night. After all, calling someone "Mr. Gorgeous" didn't have to be true in order to be an icebreaker.

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Pondering just where he stood with Eric, Jon put on his helmet and climbed back aboard the bike, enjoying the feeling of Eric's muscles flexing and bunching beneath his hands as they rode away from the falls.

They didn't go very far at all before Eric pulled into a deserted parking lot.

"Come on, this way," Eric said, barely giving Jon enough time to take his helmet off. He led him down a secluded wooded path to a viewing platform that gave a clear view of the whirlpool rapids. "How cool is that?" he asked eagerly.

Jon stared into the water for a long time, mesmerized by the swirling patterns of the whirlpool. When he finally spoke, his voice was soft and abstracted. "You're right. It's not as loud and vigorous as the water coming over the brink of the falls, but in its own quiet way, it's every bit as compelling and powerful."

Eric waited patiently while Jon studied the scenery. He could sense an increase in tension and see it in the way Jon was holding himself so stiffly, but he didn't know what he'd done to cause it. He'd tried to keep things light and friendly all day, and Eric was pretty proud of the fact that he hadn't even hugged Jon when he was looking so adorable all flushed with excitement on the Maid of the Mist.

Gripping the railing around the viewing area, Jon struggled to sort out his conflicting emotions. He could admit to himself, at least, that he was very attracted to Eric, and he rather thought Eric might think he wasn't too bad either.

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But nothing good could come of them even voicing their attraction, let alone acting on it.

He would be going back home to England after the weekend, and Eric would be staying here in Canada. No matter how much he might wish it, the facts would not change, and even if they did, wouldn't it be rather awkward and uncomfortable if he and Andy were to somehow wind up in the same family? Not that he thought Eric would want to marry him, but even if they just dated, there would be inevitable meet-ups at family gatherings.

It was too confusing to try and sort out, and Jon began to wish he could just thank Eric for a lovely day and walk away from it all.

Eric leaned against the railing with his back to the river and looked at Jon, who was very carefully not looking at him. He couldn't bear to see the worry and anxiety reflected on Jon's face and sought a way to ease it.

"So why did you and Andy break up?"

Jon shrugged. "The relationship had run its course. Andy was bored and didn't really want to settle down." He certainly hadn't expected *that* line of conversation!

"And what about you?" Eric asked curiously.

Jon shrugged again. He really didn't want to discuss this, but he couldn't find a polite way to tell Eric to mind his own damn business. "When you're a boring person, you don't really notice if your relationships are boring, do you?"

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“I don’t think you’re boring,” Eric replied, “I think you hide behind that. Someone may have once told you that you were boring, and you latched onto that as an excuse to not even try.”

Jon stared at Eric as though he had two heads. No one had ever figured that out about him.

“The truth is you’re scared,” Eric continued softly. “You’re scared that you won’t measure up to some impossibly high standard that some dickhead set a long time ago, and so you don’t even try.”

Shading his eyes, Jon looked out over the swirling river below them, anything to not look at Eric and reveal the truth of his words.

“You don’t have to be afraid, Jon.” Eric reached up to brush away the lock of hair the wind had blown across Jon’s face. “I don’t expect you to be something you’re not. I like you just fine the way you are.”

“How can you see what no one else ever has?” Jon asked, afraid to turn and look at Eric.

“I dunno.” Eric shrugged. “Usually I’m pretty dense about stuff like that. But you’re different. I think I see a lot of me in you. I haven’t really tried in past relationships either. People take a look at my appearance and figure I must be dumb just because I’m big.”

“I don’t think that,” Jon said softly.

“I know,” Eric agreed. “You know what else I think? I

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think you're a lot like the whirlpool rapids. You're strong and beautiful in your own quiet way, but you often get passed over for the flamboyant, noisy falls."

"And who do you see as the falls?" Jon asked, suspecting he already knew the answer.

"You know who." Eric smiled. "Because your quiet strength is never going to be compatible with the loud brashness of Andy's personality doesn't mean you're a boring person, Jon. You and Andy just weren't suited, but I bet you gave it everything you had to try and make it work."

Jon finally turned his head to look at Eric, trembling slightly at the respect and admiration he could see in the big man's eyes. "Andy was... I know it will sound awfully trite, but he completely captivated me from the moment we met. I think I saw in him the person I wished that I could be. He was so full of life and energy with boundless enthusiasm for everything he did and always looked... perfect. I yearned to be more like him, and I was quite stunned when he actually asked me out. I did try my very best to be the sort of person Andy wanted, but try as I might, I just couldn't whip up enthusiasm for some of the things that consumed him," he admitted quietly. "I think somewhere along the way I forgot that before Andy and I met, I'd been quite happy with who I was. It was Andy that broke it off, you know. I would have tried until the end of time to be the sort of man he wanted. Andy got tired of waiting for me to catch up to him."

"Andy is a fool," Eric said firmly, reaching out to brush the curls back from Jon's face. "You're an amazing man just

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as you are.”

“You barely know me,” Jon protested. He couldn’t bring himself to move away from Eric’s caress, aching instead to move closer, to wrap his arms around Eric and hold on tightly.

“True,” Eric agreed unperturbed. “But what I do know about you, I like very much. And I know that I would really like to kiss you now.”

Jon licked his lips, unable to tear his gaze away from the dark brown of Eric’s eyes. His breathing quickened as Eric leaned in closer, and Jon was mortified over the soft whimper that escaped when he felt Eric’s lips against his.

Eric leaned in slowly, giving Jon ample time to move back if he really didn’t want it. When Jon made the soft sound of longing, it was all the encouragement Eric needed to wrap his arms around the smaller man and increase the pressure of his lips, parting them in invitation.

Jon circled his arms around Eric’s broad shoulders, unable to resist for another moment the desire he felt for the big man. When Eric’s lips parted beneath his, he flicked his tongue out in entreaty.

Deepening the kiss, Eric groaned when Jon’s tongue met his ,and they dueled back and forth, neither wanting to forsake the erotic touch. When Jon pressed his body flush against him, Eric was completely lost in a red haze of longing, no longer caring in his desire to consume Jon if anyone happened to see them.

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Gasping for breath, Jon tore his mouth away from Eric's and tilted his head back, drawing Eric's mouth down to his neck, aching to feel the sensual touch of Eric's lips all over his body.

"So fucking beautiful," Eric murmured, one hand holding Jon close while the other mapped the slender, muscular contours of Jon's back and ass.

"Oh God, please," Jon moaned, grinding his throbbing groin against Eric, shivering with need when he felt the other man's hard length pressing against his thigh.

At last, realizing that if they didn't stop he was going to come in his jeans like an oversexed teenager, Eric tried to pull back, smiling happily when Jon refused to let him go.

Jon panted desperately, sure he would never be able to draw in enough oxygen again as he hung on to Eric and stared into the brown eyes, now black with lust. "You have no idea how badly I want you right now," he said softly.

"If it's anywhere near as much as I want you, it's a wonder we're still standing here with our clothes on," Eric replied.

"We can't do this, Eric," Jon said reluctantly.

"Not right here," Eric agreed. "But you've got a perfectly good motel room."

"Don't," Jon begged, aching to do just what Eric was suggesting: hurry back to his room and shag the stuffing out of each other. "We can't."

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“Why not? Do you have a boyfriend?”

Jon shook his head and looked away, not wanting to see the hurt he was about to cause Eric. “I’ll be going back to England on Monday, Eric. I’m sorry. I can’t do one night stands.”

“If we want it bad enough, we can make this work,” Eric said, determined that he wouldn’t lose Jon before he had him. “I’m willing to do anything to be with you, Jon. Don’t you feel even a little bit that way?”

Jon remained silent but didn’t resist at all when Eric pulled him back into a tight embrace.

“Talk to me, Jon,” Eric pleaded, “Tell me what you’re feeling.”

Jon closed his eyes, knowing he had to tell Eric the truth, even if it was never going to happen. “If circumstances were different,” he said, his voice almost a whisper, “nothing could keep me away from you. But you live here, and I live in England. I cannot consign us to a life spend pining for our love, only really truly living for possibly two weeks every year when we have holidays and can be together. And I can’t expect that you would want to uproot your life, when I don’t want to. I... I was quite enjoying the thought of Andy living on the other side of the Atlantic from me,” he concluded wryly.

Eric tightened his grip on Jon and smiled as he pressed a soft kiss to his cheek. He could deal with this. “I moved to Toronto a couple of years ago to get away from my family.

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The truth is, they annoy the living shit out of me most of the time, and even before I met you I was contemplating moving again to put more distance between us. My folks, well, let's just say that they really aren't too impressed with a son who's a grease monkey when he could be an IT consultant for twice the money. Having been subjected to the dubious pleasure of seeing Dale and Andy carry on together, I can totally understand your wanting to keep as much distance between you and Andy as possible. Do you think there's much call for a really great mechanic in London?"

Jon's eyes flew open in amazement. "I would think a really great mechanic could get a job anywhere in the world where they have cars, but you would uproot your life, and for me? We've only just met." He stared at Eric in wonder and then reached up to caress his cheek. "You really are serious, aren't you?"

"Very," Eric agreed. "Don't you feel the sparks between us, Jon? Do you really want to give that up without even trying to make it work?"

"I don't...." Jon paused, running his fingertip along the seam of Eric's lips. He smiled when Eric took the opportunity to kiss his finger. "I am struggling to comprehend why someone as wonderful as you would want to abandon your life here to be with me, but oh God, how I want to try, Eric. I want to hold you to me and never let you go."

"I won't let you go," Eric vowed, burying his face against Jon's neck, loving the way his lover's curls tickled his face.

JON rolled his eyes as he opened the door to his room to the sound of the telephone ringing. He would have no problem betting an entire year's wages on who was calling, if he were a betting man. Tempted for a moment to just ignore it, Jon tossed the helmets onto the bed before finally picking up the receiver.

"Where the bloody hell have you been?"

"Good afternoon to you as well, Andy."

"Don't be such a twat, Jon! Where the fuck have you been? You missed the mini golf."

"Oh, really?" Jon said sitting on the edge of the bed to unlace his shoes. "What a shame that, because of course I couldn't possibly miss my one opportunity to play mini golf with a group of people I don't know. I was sightseeing, Andy. You do know what that is, I trust?"

"In St. Catharines?" Andy snorted in surprise. "Aside from the Welland Canal, which is interesting for oh, about five sodding minutes, there's fuck all to see here. It certainly shouldn't have taken you all day!"

Jon shook his head, bemused. He'd never really realized before what an annoying and superficial prat Andy could be. He truly had been infatuated with him. Some lingering nostalgic fondness made it possible for him to stay calm as he withstood the flow of Andy's insistence. "Has it escaped

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your notice that this lovely city you have chosen to live in, and which you seem to be completely oblivious to the charms of, happens to be a very short drive from one of the true wonders of the world?”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Niagara Falls, Andy,” Jon replied, “I’ve spent the day enjoying the glory of Niagara Falls in the company of a most congenial companion and had a simply splendid time, thanks for asking.”

“Yeah, whatever,” Andy replied dismissively, “Look, I can’t come over and get you, but I’ll get Dale’s brother Eric to pop around and pick you up in about forty-five minutes.”

“What on Earth for?” Jon asked, ignoring the little leap his heart took at the thought of seeing Eric again.

“It’s the rehearsal tonight, you dolt!”

“I’m well aware of that fact,” Jon said dryly, “What I don’t understand is why you feel that I need to be there. I am not part of the wedding party, Andy. As I recall, you explained that it would be far too awkward if you had an ex-boyfriend in your wedding party.”

“But you have to be here,” Andy protested.

“No, I don’t,” Jon declared, “If you invite the guests to the rehearsal, there really isn’t much point in then having both a rehearsal and a ceremony. You might as well just turn the rehearsal into the actual wedding and be done with it. I am only a guest, and one that I suspect you invited

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simply to pander to your own ego and try to rub into my face the fact that you are getting married while I am still single.”

“That’s not it at all!”

“No, of course not,” Jon agreed insincerely, “I’m done with it, Andy.”

“Done with what?”

“I will no longer be the whirlpool to your waterfall. I understand that you need the loud splash in your life, but that’s not me, and it never has been. I won’t try to be something I’m not again. I wish you and Dale the very best in your life together, but the very last time I will do as you demand is tomorrow when I will attend your wedding. Have a lovely evening tonight.”

Calmly and quietly, Jon hung up the phone, feeling a great satisfaction that he’d finally taken a stand against Andy.

JON got off Eric’s bike and pulled the helmet off. He grabbed the second helmet that hung on the back of the bike before heading off across the grass to where the pavilion had been set up. Eric’s instructions on how to get to Lakeside Park, where the wedding was to take place, had been very simple to follow, and he’d found it with no difficulty.

He grinned when he saw Eric standing next to a lady

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Jon assumed was his mother. She had the same blonde hair, although hers was styled to within an inch of its life. Eric had his hands stuffed into his pockets, looking for all the world like he'd rather be anywhere else on Earth. Jon, on the other hand, no longer looked upon the wedding as an ordeal to be gotten through, and it was all thanks to Eric.

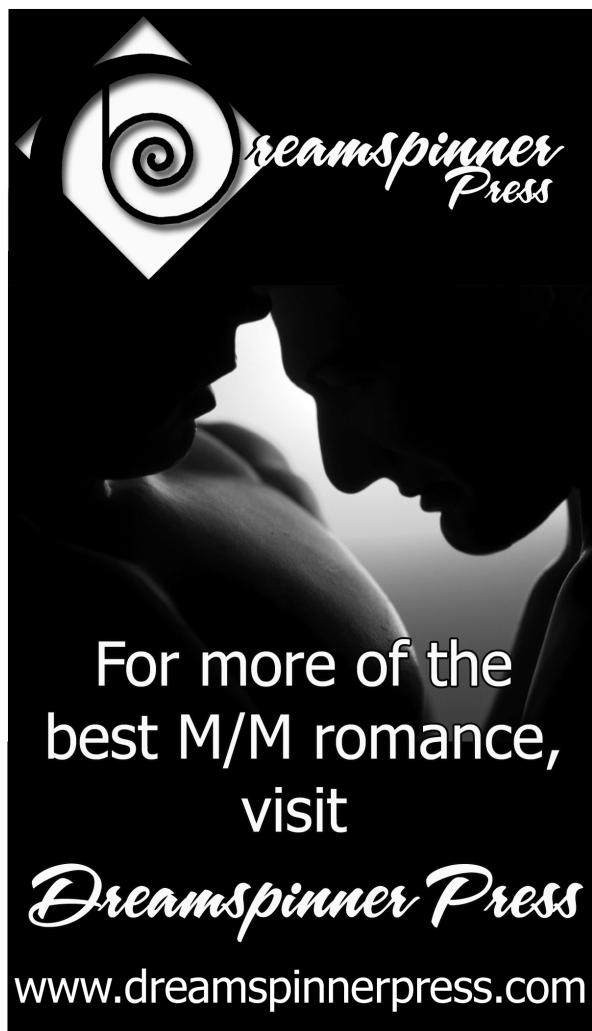
Eric grinned when he saw Jon striding confidently across the grass towards him. He'd been listening to his mother having hysterics about "losing" both her babies all morning, ever since he'd told her he was going to be moving to England as soon as possible. Seeing Jon looking so relaxed and happy made it worth listening to his mother complain for days on end—or at least until he boarded the plane.

Jon winked at Eric as he moved to take a seat in the chairs set up for the ceremony. He couldn't wait for the wedding to be over so he could feel Eric's arms around him again. He couldn't stop himself from staring at Eric, who was looking positively resplendent in his tux, and he didn't even try.

The wedding itself passed quickly, and Jon soon found himself on the back of Eric's bike with his arms hugging his lover's waist as they headed off to the reception. He had to laugh as he wondered who would have ever guessed that he would meet the man of his dreams at his ex-boyfriend's wedding.

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