

I knew. I knew from the moment he dropped his bags in front of the door on move-in day. The breath caught in my throat, and I reached for a pillow to hide certain other physical signs. *Great*, I thought, *I'm that gay guy who falls in love with his straight college roommate*.

I had successfully averted crushes on my straight friends in high school. I secretly hated it when girls were attracted to me, especially when they tried to pull that "if only you were straight" line. I wasn't straight, and they knew it, so I never wanted to be that guy who stands too close to some hot jock type and makes uncomfortable jokes about the things his girlfriend won't do. It's just not my style.

So I was in quite a quandary here. I was already mentally scanning for other places on campus where I could go to study and hang out. I needed to be anywhere he wasn't as often as possible to maintain the illusion that I wanted nothing more from him than beer pong and the occasional bro hug.

The blood split in my body between two opposite poles, and I had no idea what to say other than "unghh" when he walked up to my bed and stuck out his hand saying, "I'm Jeffrey. You must be Jason." Oh no, both our names start with J. That's incredibly cute.

"Yeah," I finally managed to stammer, still unable to move my pillow from its strategic location. "I'm Jason. It's nice to meet you."

"You too," he said, turning and starting to move his bags into the room.

I panicked when I saw him from behind. A movie montage of all the things I wanted to do to him started rolling in my head when he turned around and bent over to place a heavy suitcase on his bed. I imagined that ass slipping out of the denim of his jeans, out of the jockstrap that (I imagined) covered his musky and generous sack. I pictured the curve of his ass against the curve of my face, and I fear I may have gasped audibly.

Somehow we got through the pleasantries. Home town, what classes we were taking, how much we hated the paint in the hallway. I had to be reminded of the basics later, since my brain couldn't, at the time, process a thing he said. His voice turned into a stream of baritone notes at my ear, rumbling at just that pitch that short-circuited my higher reasoning abilities.

But of course, it wasn't just the voice. His shining, healthy black hair fell onto his forehead where old-timey square glasses framed his gemstone green eyes. He was wearing a tight black T-shirt, and when he stretched after putting away some socks, I caught a glimpse of the happiest happy trail I had ever espied up close (well, from about eight feet away) and personal. The black hairs were slightly matted

from the late-August heat, and I noted the matching stubble when he yawned, absentmindedly scratching at his abs.

"Phew," I heard him say a few moments later. "I sure do smell like move-in day." He sniffed at his pits, and there I was, in my mind, licking up his day's sweat, burying my nose in his pit hair, my left hand gripping his right nipple, kissing him forcefully with a mouthful of his man smell. "I'm going to have to take a shower when I get done unpacking," he said, bringing me back to the present.

I was scheming escape lines. I've got to go to talk to a prof about a book. I need to call my sister from the hall phone. I need to sneak into the bathroom and release this load so we can continue to have this conversation. Nothing worked; nothing stuck; and I still would have had to walk past him at full mast.

All I could do was keep looking, stealing glances between my eyes wandering around the room, desperately willing my erection to subside. He was wearing skinny jeans and high-tops with green laces. The collection of bright sweaters he was sliding into the bottom drawer confirmed I had a genuine academic hipster on my hands. *On my hands*, I thought. *I should be so lucky*.

"Have you been into the bathrooms here yet? I bet these Hale Hall guys could get into some real shenanigans," he said, blowing at a lock of hair that had fallen into his eyes. "I lived in Mary Stark last year, pretty wild bunch."

Marry me, I heard echoing from somewhere within the recesses of my brain. I could see us, years and degrees later, making the best jokes at a bad cocktail party. "The only reason I even go to these things," I hear some Upper East Side dentist's wife telling her husband, "is to see Jeffrey and Jason. "They are the life of the party. Seriously, it would flat line otherwise." He grunts and fumbles around for his Milk of Magnesia.

I'm a writer who makes just enough to have good shoes and to never actually be able to eat, while he's a lecturer in some history department, battling with the chair to teach the Battle of the Bulge in a way he saw fitting. He'd get home from classes, and I'd rib him about the nubile, passionate, blossoming, and bespectacled youths who went to his office to linger over the finer points of the Church's arts policy during the Dark Ages. He'd light his tobacco pipe and gaze out our window, which would have an excellent view, and I'd put aside my draft to walk up behind him and draw him near in a spooning hug, taking a puff off his pipe and coughing dutifully.

"It was like nudity made them all suddenly really stupid. Good guys, though. God, have you noticed how good everyone looks today?"

He had moved to the window. It was admittedly not the view I envisioned for our future *pied-à-terre*, but it did look out over a campus green populated with the finest (in every sense of the world) students that the city could draw.

"Everyone's all sweaty from moving boxes, little beads of sweat clinging to their chests and eyelids."

"Uh-huh," I managed, shifting away from him to the other end of my bed.

"You know, I've noticed that pillow you've got there. Were you thinking about your girl when I walked in?"

I was, as some Cape Cod writer might have put it, gobsmacked. Some sort of line had been crossed, the line that says one guy does not point out another guy's hard-on. Was this not in the manual somewhere? It was my own fault, though, as everyone knows that a pillow over the crotch is international code for "I have an erection I don't want you to know about."

"Ha ha, no, I'm not really seeing anyone." I was doing a play-by-play in my head. The answer was evasive, but was it appropriately evasive? Did it contain just the right amounts of both "fuck you" and "I want to fuck you"? Just get through this one, and you can spend the rest of the year in the library.

"Really? That's surprising. Me, I broke up with my boyfriend this summer. We didn't want...."

I know he kept talking, but pretty much everything after the word "boyfriend" was lost in a sonic boom centered in my reptile brain. Boyfriend? *Boyfriend?* The room was suddenly unbearably stuffy, but I was trapped; he was already at the window, and there was no place left to go but out.

He kept right on talking, and suddenly he was peeling off his shirt. The sweaty cotton clung to his chest with all the force of static electricity, and as he lifted the shirt over his head, I noted the twin black patches under his arms I had just moments before mentally devoured. He was a little overred from the summer: clearly, shirtless was a look that worked for him.

"We were tired of doing the weepy three hours on the phone practically every day, oh-I-miss-you and I'm-so-into-our-long-distance-relationship sort of thing, so we decided...."

Uh huh. That's when it dawned on me that he was going for that shower he had been talking about. While gathering up a handful of essential toiletries, he let his hands slip to the button-fly of his jeans, deftly pushing them to the floor and kicking them back up onto his bed. I could, and would, get lost at a moment's notice in that leg hair, I thought; it ran thick and wiry from his ankles all the way to the edge of his plaid boxers. Not a jockstrap, I noted, but nevertheless, when he bent over to snatch a bottle of conditioner off the floor, the fly parted, and I caught a flash of pink heft, a wrinkling of foreskin, and a bush to match the rest of him. "I'm Italian," he said, noting my gaze. "Puberty hit hard."

I was immobilized. My erection was straining to the ceiling, and I wasn't entirely sure why I was hiding it anymore. Do you like cats? I wanted to ask. Don't you want to find out how hard puberty hit me?

He wrapped a towel around himself, still talking, and moved out the door. Ducking his head back inside the door, he asked cheerfully, "You *are* okay with having a gay roommate, right?" I felt like a character in a Rod Serling nightmare. "Uh huh," I said again, echoing the eloquence I had so far managed.

When he was gone, I stuck my hand straight down my pants. I jerked once, forcefully, all the way to the tip of my cock. I was faced with a decision: close the door and finish or think about my rabbi naked and try to get another kind of hold on myself. I picked the latter, and my hard-on, bulging now, probably purple with tension, started to subside, but when I pulled my hand back out of my shorts, I could smell my own sweaty low-hangers and saw a lone drop of pre-cum, smeared now across my hand.

I RELATED this—well, except the last part—to him several months later as we were studying together for exams in a coffee shop. As per usual, the studying was minimal; living with the man of your dreams can really hurt your GPA.

We had been seeing each other since around the time he came back from that first shower. I had decided for once to seize what I wanted, and it had paid off beautifully. When he came back from the bathroom, I told him I was gay, and that, moreover, I found him ridiculously attractive. "I noticed," he told me, toweling water out of his ear. He seemed to think for a minute and then closed the door.

I prepped myself for the coming rejection. I had made an ass of myself, and I compounded it by spilling a pretty big bowl of beans. He was going to say I was crazy and ask for a room reassignment. He was going to—

"I broke a posted dorm rule while thinking about you in the shower. And I wanna have, like, ten million of your babies," he said, breaking out into tender laughter. I started laughing too, and before I knew it he had embraced me.

"And ever since then I knew I never wanted to let you go," he said, smiling, pecking me on the forehead before heading off to get a refill.

He hadn't let go. That first day together had melted away in bed—after he sent me out for a shower. When I came back, he was still in his boxers, slowly rubbing his hand around his furry stomach. I closed the door behind me and stood before him for a moment, taking the sight in.

He was so beautiful. He had donned his glasses again, and the smart cut of his jaw impressed me. He hadn't shaved, and there were beads of water left over from his shower shining in his stubble. He flashed a cockeyed smile at me, and I noticed now, in his prone position, the half-moon bulge at the fly of his fresh shorts, from which his sharply sloping hip-bones appeared.

"Well," he started, "are you going to drop that towel?"

I realized I was still clutching it around me, balled up at the top in my right hand. I let it go casually, artlessly but not urgently, and I stood before him, now unafraid of any tricks my body might pull on me. "We're like an ethnic bar joke waiting to happen," I said, laughing nervously.

"How about: a Jew and an Italian walk into a bed?" he said, raising an eyebrow.

I laughed again and then bounded into the bed. The cheap dorm mattress rocked beneath us, settling as we rolled into each other's arms, face to face, chest to chest. I felt the cool of his back beginning to sweat again and breathed deeply the scent of a man even a shower can't take away. My hands were kneading his shoulder blades, and legs crossed over each other, locking together. We were pressed fully together now, and I felt his soft mouth start to kiss my ear. I could feel his stubble even through my developing beard, and I also felt the movement happening at our joined, gently moving groin. I felt his hands now on the back of my head, and he leaned in to whisper: "Just one favor? Never, ever make a non-kosher meat joke."

"You know," I said to him as he returned to the table, "we've made it almost five months now without making a single kosher meat joke."

"Ay gevalt," he intoned, clutching at his chest as he eased into my impression of my mother, "what would the rebbe say? My son mit a goy-oy!"

"My mother always said to marry a Jewish doctor. Of course, she was talking to my sister, but I think the message applied across the board."

"Well, maybe I'll convert."

"Oh, no no no, we *can't* sacrifice that beautiful foreskin to some silly old tradition."

"They really make you do that?"

"Mmmhmm. We were the people chosen to travel with no luggage."

"Grooming the Shar-Pei."

"That's the general idea."

He smiled at me, his head turned slightly, and he motioned towards his cup. I looked into it and started to smile broadly. The foam in the top of his latte was shaped into a heart with two big J's swirled into it. It was the kind of gesture I would have sneered at before it happened to me, but I was realizing that the whole world wasn't constantly looking over our shoulders, waiting for a syrupy sweet cliché to drop, and it was all right to savor the moment. "Someday when we're at a terrible cocktail party, I'll make olives into a J and slip them into your martini," he said, taking my hand.

"I love you, Jeffrey."

"And I love you, Jason Horowitz," he said, drawing out my name with my mother's Brooklyn inflection. WE had taken to making love during the day when his très chic indie music collection could be used to cover up our sounds.

In case you have any doubts, a thousand hours of Boys Gone Wild bonus footage has nothing on two college sophomores in love. In the battle between the allure of the new and the mastery of the familiar, we found the beauty in the latter. The exploration was amazing, but all the more so because we understood without saying that that exploration was obviously important—it was lessons in pleasuring someone I was always going to love.

You don't have to ask a lover where to put your hands. You know the measured manipulation it takes to raise the hairs on his chest into gooseflesh by gripping and sucking the pink of his nipples. You learn just where to press along his pubic bone to bring his orgasm into the realm of the eyecrossing. The depth you can reach your tongue, your nose, your fingers into his ass becomes a dangerously fun benchmark you can toy with, taking every step with the knowledge that you'll have the chance to do this again. You memorize the feeling of him moving inside you, feeling as though his penis were inside your own as you dig your nails into his back and move back against him to start the little spasms in the small of his back.

You learn the smells and tastes of his body, and you take them with you when you rise in the morning. You think about the way he flattens his tongue against yours, feeling your taste buds, dampened with the salt of sweat, enmeshing together, and the tense muscularity of finding a motion you know you should repeat that resolves as you both make a mental note of it.

There's a freedom you attain in lovemaking when you have the sense memory of sharing a cigarette while your sheets, the sheets that belong to you both, are tumbling in a dryer beyond the big glass wall of the laundromat. On one such day, both of us shivering in the howling February wind, trying to keep one Marlboro lit between us, Jeffrey turned to me and said:

"Someone's got a birthday coming up soon, no?"

"George Washington?"

"I'm thinking cuter. I mean, I love a national leader in tights as much as the next guy, but I'm thinking someone a little less electable."

"Harvey Fierstein?"

"Getting warmer...."

"Is it... me?"

"Ding ding ding, we have a wiener!"

"We have two."

"Aw, ya sucha kidda!" he exclaimed, truly outdoing himself in imitation of my mother.

"You should really meet my mother some time," I said. "You two could nose it out until only one brash Brooklyn accent was left standing."

"I picture your mother as Barbra in Funny Girl."

"Think more like Estelle Getty in Torch Song Trilogy."

"And so the joke comes full circle."

"Fuck, it's cold. Are we done with this fag yet?"

"I certainly hope not."

"Ha ha ha. Hey, why did you bring up my birthday?"

"Oh, no reason. Just thinking about things."

"Things, huh? The engorged, well lubricated kind of things?"

"Engorged is a horrible word. Jason Horowitz, I'd love you even if your tumescent member fell straight off."

"Let's hope we don't have to face that potentiality. And tumescent is much worse than engorged."

"Come on, college boy, let's go get our sheets so we have to do this again next week."

And we made love that afternoon while February beat up against the windows. "Engorged," I whispered in his ear. "Tumescent," he whispered back. THE morning of my twentieth birthday I woke up to Jeffrey smoking out our dorm room window—more specifically, to the horrendous gust of wind this caused to whip through the room. "Jeffrey," I said sleepily, "what the hell are you doing?"

"I'm nervous," he said blankly, "I've got a midterm this morning."

"Jeffrey, throw out that cigarette, close the window, and get back in bed. I'm using my first birthday wish."

"Oh yeah? Who's the genie?"

"As my boyfriend, you are appointed honorary gigantic blue mythological creature, and I am rubbing your lamp."

"Aha," he said, pitching the half-smoked cigarette out the window.

It might have been the cold, but it seemed to me he was shaken by something as he crawled back under the comforter. "I'm really sorry, baby," he said, "you should go back to sleep; it's your special day."

All the color had drained from his face, and he hadn't looked at me once. "Are you all right?" I asked. "Do you feel okay?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm okay, it's just this test. Don't you worry your pretty head, you'll get frown lines," he said,

finally looking me in the eye. I thought I saw a tear roll down his face.

"All right, I have to go," he said, jumping up suddenly. "Today's my long day, you know, but we're going to have a great time when I get back," he choked out, and I saw he was quite upset. "I love you," he said heavily as he threw his jacket around his shaking shoulders.

"I love you," I squeaked out as the door slammed behind him.

I was so confused. Why was he so bothered? That wasn't pre-test jitters; that was an emotional outbreak. Was he going to break up with me on my birthday? Was my dream-world bubble going to burst in an illicit cloud of cigarette smoke in a dorm room?

I sat around the café up the block for most of the day, thinking. I remembered our initials in the foam of his latte, and I wondered what else I could have done. The half-Italian, half-Jewish brats I had fantasized about lost their faces. The unreality of my time with Jeffrey started to sink in as I thought about the kids I had wanted to have with him at nineteen, the ridiculous shared future memory of brightening up a terrible cocktail party with our mutually tangy wit.

God, I thought, pulling the book I was reading from my bag. Venus in Furs, Sacher-Masoch. "The world's greatest erotic novel for my only fantasy, forever," he had written in the front of the book. I envisioned the book on a long shelf of

books, inscribed with unrealizable hyperboles from all my future lovers, forever. I took another tea, to go, and left, crossing to the bench outside our dorm. I smoked one cigarette and then another. And another.

When he finally came back early that evening, I was lying, draped over the side of the bed, finishing *Venus in Furs* for the second time. He looked terrible, totally wrecked. I thought for sure he was going to break my heart in the next five minutes, but I made myself go on, just like Sacher-Masoch's self-punishing lover.

"How did it go?"

"I couldn't write anything." He stared blankly off to the left, still wearing his coat and carrying his bag.

"Oh baby," I started, "I'm so sorry—"

"I... couldn't... write... anything," he repeated, zombielike, cold. I wanted to walk over to him, to drape him in my warmth and care, but he seemed so distant from the man I had spent the last months loving. "I looked at the paper; I gnawed my pencil, but *everything* was your face."

"Oh, this is my fault, eh?" I asked, trying to trigger a laugh in him.

"Don't say that," he droned. "Don't... make this harder."

"Jeffrey," I said, trying to fix his gaze. "Out with it. I've been sitting around like a jackass all day just waiting for this. If you're going to—"

"Jason Horowitz, will you marry me?"

The room started to spin. I felt myself rocking with the disruption of gravity, but I saw him pull two T-shirts printed to look like tuxedoes out of his bag. He stood there, physically exhausted by the power of his own wanting, but I found myself leaping off the bed, running into his arms, releasing the petty hurt I had harbored all day. He was sobbing, shaking with relief, and soon I was crying too. I had been so quick to believe that he would abandon me that it hadn't occurred to me that his strange mood might signal the best-case scenario.

Soon, we had fallen onto his bed, and we kissed as we had never kissed before. For the first time I felt the full weight of him under me, his tender, trusting, exposed vulnerability, and the force of his love. I tasted the tears at the corners of his mouth and felt the smile begin to form across his wet face.

He cleared his throat and began to speak. "I was... I was terrified that you were going to—"

"Don't even say it," I rushed, cutting him off. "Never think that I want anything other than to be yours forever."

"Just like the book."

"Just like the book," I echoed, melting into him.

"Well," he said, "I didn't buy these tuxes for nothing."

We stood, clearing the tears from our eyes, laughing, pressing our mouths together, and slowly undressed. I pulled the sweater from his body, heavy with his nervous sweat of the day, and he reached with his teeth under my T-shirt, unsnapping my fly and pulling the hairs of my stomach between his tongue and top front teeth. I felt his chest shake as he lifted the cotton shirt over my head, fixing my gaze with his still watery eyes. He wiped a stray tear onto his finger and placed it on my tongue. I tasted the salt, never taking my eyes form his. "When I say forever, I mean forever," he said, now unwavering.

"I do too," I said, meaning it. "I want to raise the next generation of obnoxious academics who will be the bright spot of cocktail parties on the Upper East Side with you. And I want a cat, and we're going to name it Oscar."

"Whatever you want, Jason," he said, tugging the tux tee over his head and shedding his boxers. "Only we have to wake up very early tomorrow."

"Why's that?"

"Because I've thought of everything," he said mysteriously, putting my tux tee on me and sinking to his knees. "Absolutely everything."

I felt his fingers spread out over my thighs, gently tugging at the sparse hairs that were still growing in there. "If your legs were any hotter," he said, "I think my heart would beat out of my chest." He kissed my inner thigh and

pushed me back onto the bed, my legs and ass dangling over the side. His tongue washed over my sack, taking the left, then the right, and then both balls into his mouth. I ran my fingers through his hair and started dreaming again of the future.

Pulling him up on top of me, I tasted myself in his mouth. I licked my right hand and took our two cocks into my palm, feeling his foreskin flex and rub against my cut meat. The weight of our bellies insulated us, and a deep calm settled over us. I looked down and saw the faux tuxes stretched out on our torsos, and I broke out into another wide smile. He caught on, and the look he gave me made my shoulders squeeze together, a body rock of pleasure soaring through me. We were playing for keeps, and we both knew it.

"We better take these off," he said, motioning to the tees, "if we don't want to ruin them." I chuckled and took that as my cue to slow down. I took my hand away from our cocks, still pressed firmly together, and started to take off his shirt. I ran my hands along his stomach and pecs, feeling the black hairs slip and glide through my fingers as I did. He sighed deeply and his whole body shook.

He tore off my T-shirt, hesitating as it clung to my wrists, taking my lower lip in his teeth and pulling so slightly, our cocks still rubbing between our hard, sweating stomachs. Throwing the shirt to the side, he told me to roll over, and I was happy to comply. His hands worked my back, easing away and raising more little spasms as I felt my cock swell against the sheets. I lifted my ass in the air, and I

felt his cock brush me, hovering at my hole, pushing forward gently.

It was replaced by his tongue, which I felt start to explore the pucker of my ass. Here, too, I felt his teeth lightly grip the hairs, and I reached to grab my own cock, growing wild with need. He dug still deeper with one, two fingers, and the tip of his tongue disappeared inside me, swirling gracefully to hit all the right places. He heard me start to moan and pulled my hand off my cock, knowing I could blow at any moment. "Not yet," he said, reaching for a condom.

I lay now on my back and looked him straight in the eyes, rubbing his arms, waiting for him to enter me. I saw his cock pointing straight toward his chest as he worked his foreskin back and forth over the head, sliding the condom over, lifting my legs to his shoulders. I felt him press now against me, and he rubbed my stomach, leaning down once more to kiss my hairy belly.

"I love you, Jason."

"I love you too, Jeffrey."

I FELT him tugging at my morning wood. "Get *up*, he said, you already slept through the alarm, and now we've only got fifteen minutes!"

"What... in... great... fuck... are you talking about?" I asked him, blinking through the last layer of sleep still settled around my head.

"We have to go," he said. "People to do, things to see."

"Oy, already mit dem affair," I muttered, unable to stop my mother's Yiddish sarcasm from rising to the surface. But I blinked once or twice more and realized he was wearing a tux, a real, honest-to-God tuxedo, and that he had another one dangling from a hanger on his right forefinger.

"Hey now," he rejoined, "there'll be plenty of time to accuse me of ugly deeds. For now, you're putting on this tuxedo—within the next ten minutes—and then we are going, going, gone!"

"You really are wearing a tuxedo," I said, "so I am not hallucinating."

"If this tux were any more real it would sew itself onto your body so I wouldn't have to poke and prod you anymore."

"Funny, that didn't seem like too much of a concern last night," I quipped, still feeling the warmth of the best fuck of my life lingering in my spine.

"A brach auf dir!" he shouted in flawless Yiddish and in perfect imitation of pretty much every woman I was related to. I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I had picked the right one, and, moreover, that he meant business.

"Well, I'm going to need underwear," I said, finally rising, rubbing the sleep from my eyes.

"Like I told you, baby, I've thought of everything." He slid a pair of his boxers up my legs, dodging around my still hard cock, and instructed me to sit so he could put on the tux pants and my socks.

"Ay, now this is the full service you don't get from any old Minsky on the corner," I joked, yawning.

"Arms out!" he barked, sliding the shirt onto my frame. I'm sure he broke the land-speed record for dressing your boyfriend in a tuxedo that morning, leaving us enough time, he said, for me to go into the bathroom and engage my own "Battle of the Bulge."

Still perhaps a quarter asleep even as I left the restroom, I followed Jeffrey down the hall of our dorm, both of us in tuxes at nine in the morning. I had the vaguely queasy impression I had forgotten something, but then why did he keep saying he had thought of everything?

We reached the end of the hallway, and he veered right, turning into the student lounge, which I noticed had been rearranged. I started laughing even before the sight fully registered with me: one priest and one rabbi, standing under a makeshift chuppah and shrine to the Virgin Mary.

"A rabbi, a priest, and an interfaith gay couple walk into a dorm," he started, beaming from ear to ear.

Still laughing but now holding Jeffrey's hand very, very tightly, I asked, "and where did you find progressive clergy so early in the morning?"

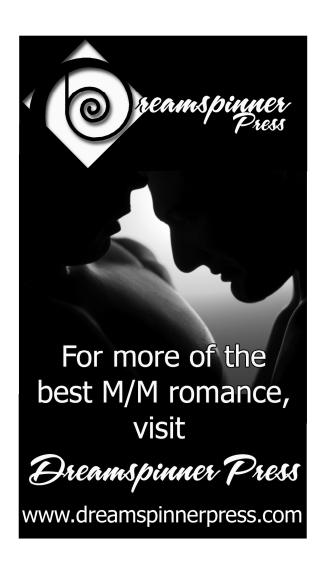
"Like I said, baby, I thought of everything."

Still clasping his hand, I bounded up to the altar. I couldn't wait to say I do—and, of course, consummate the new union.

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Published by Dreamspinner Press 4760 Preston Road Suite 244-149 Frisco, TX 75034 http://www.dreamspinnerpress.com/

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Released in the United States of America June, 2009