



Cinnamon Dreams

By Vic Winter

He dreamed of the East. Of markets that spanned street after street, as far as his eye could see. He dreamed of spices, savory and sweet, filling burlap bags, the fragrant powders spilling out, drawing the eye as well as the nose. The dark, burnt red of paprika, the bright yellow of curry and green of every shade he'd ever imagined. His favorite of all of them, though, was the brown of the cinnamon.

Cinnamon smelled so good and added a savory sweet mix to any dish. And yet, if you ate it on its own it burned the tongue; it was unruly and wild and at the same time: comforting, happy-making.

Of all the spices, only cinnamon smelled of home.

Digby Waters hated his job. He hated it with a growing passion that was beginning to take over his life. He was a mid-level drone, one of thousands, tens of thousands, millions even. Nothing special, nothing vital, just another guy at a desk like all the others. It wasn't even the being one of millions that bothered him. If he'd found any happiness at all in what he did, that wouldn't have mattered. This job brought him no joy, though. Something important was missing.

He spent his days waiting to be done so he could go home, and then once there, he'd talk himself into going back in the morning. So far he'd managed to convince himself the job wasn't that bad - he certainly liked the money -- and he could put in yet another day without going completely insane. So far.

This morning he was late and couldn't quite work up any sort of giving a shit. He figured that was a bad sign. He took a shortcut, making himself hurry, even if his heart wasn't in it.

His nose caught it first, his stomach falling in headlong immediately after, growling loudly.

Yeast – rising dough – and cinnamon. Someone was making cinnamon buns and the smells drew him like a moth to a flame, hopefully without the same end result. The bakery store front was simple, almost plain even, but that made the help wanted sign on the door stand out all the more.

Taking a deep breath, he grabbed the sign and went right in.

The place was packed, the harried girl behind the counter serving people as fast as she could. And no wonder it was so busy, the wonderful smells that had drawn him into the bakery in the first place were even stronger inside and he had no doubt the confections sold here would be nothing short of amazing. You'd be the hero of the office if you brought in something that smelled this good.

Digby strode right up to the counter, earning himself glares and grumbles and several, "Hey, buddy, line start back there". Only it hadn't been "buddy."

He ignored it all and waved the sign under the girl's nose. "I've come about this."

"Keith!" shouted the girl over her shoulder as she continued doling out the goodies and filling the cash register. It was an amazing little dance; the girl would take the customers order and fill up a bag or a box with goodies, almost always the fragrant cinnamon buns. She'd take the cash and hand over the goodies along with the change, throw out a "Thank you, have a nice day," and move on to the next person in line.

Digby watched and after some time had passed with no sign of Keith, Digby waved the help wanted sign at her again. "Still here."

"Look, why don't you go around to the kitchen?" She pointed to the double doors at the far end of the counter. "I doubt he heard me, and I can't exactly leave the counter unattended." No, there probably would have been a riot if she paused anymore in her baked goods dance than she already had. Advice given, she promptly began to ignore him again.

Digby was nonplussed. Oh, that was a great word. He loved it when he could describe his mood with words as wonderful as nonplussed. He stared at the girl for a moment, but she made no indication that she even knew he was still there. Several customers glared at him, as if worried he was going to slow the line down even more.

He had finally decided to go ahead and take her advice when he did something stupid; he looked at his watch. He was late. If he didn't get his ass in gear and get in before Petty Tyrant Will Smith, no relation -- which was a stupid thing to say because Will wasn't even black, but the guy still said it every time he was introduced to someone new -- he was going get demerits and reprimands. In the plural, spread out over time and almost worse than being fired. At least if he was fired, he wouldn't have to listen to Will go on and on about loyalty and work ethics ad nauseum.

Looking at his watch again, Digby made did some mental calculations, ignoring the looks he continued to get from the customers in line; he could still make it in before Will Smith. If he ran.

Screw that. The little dictator Smith could do his worst, Digby was getting out. He was going to find the perfect job for himself, even if he had to test drive a few dozen before he found the right one, and he didn't see any reason why he shouldn't start with a job at the best smelling place on the planet.

Help wanted sign clutched in his hand, determination making his back straight, he went to the end of the counter and crossed the line which separated customers from employees. It was a momentous thing and he stopped a moment, there at the door to the kitchen, caught right there between his past and his future. Here was where he moved forward, where he did something about the way his life had become so humdrum and boring and monotonous.

Momentous indeed.

What a load of shit, said the little voice inside his head. Rude asshole, that's what his little voice was. It was also right, so, taking a deep, cinnamon filled breath, Digby Waters pushed through the door into the kitchen and the rest of his life.

The rest of his life was pretty small if the kitchen Digby walked into was anything to go by.

Small and rather dominated by the linebacker in chef's whites who was subduing huge balls of dough with his bare fists.

Digby stood there, frozen to the spot, watching as the linebacker kneaded the dough and then split it into four smaller balls. Then, one by one, the balls of dough were rolled out into a rectangle. Each rectangle was slathered in butter, the butter covered with brown sugar and then liberally sprinkled with cinnamon.

It was as much of a dance as the one the girl up front had been doing, only this one ended with the rectangle rolled up and cut into large buns. Each bun went into a square pan. Once it was full, the pan sat on the oven, the linebacker -- Digby thought that suited the man more than baker -- covering it with a towel and turning to the next ball of dough.

The man had huge hands to go along with the huge rest of him. Tall and wide, he definitely seemed better suited to a football field than the kitchen. Those big hands looked right at home with what they were doing, though, as if they were made for it.

When the last doughy rectangle had been turned into a pan of cinnamon rolls, the linebacker looked up, straight at him. "So what do you want?"

Startled by the sudden attention and sharp, blue eyes, Digby was momentarily speechless. He had, in fact, forgotten, just for a second, exactly why he was here. A hint of annoyance flashed in those blue eyes and Digby snapped himself back into it. He held out the sign he'd taken out of the door window like it held all of the answers to the universe.

"Are you trying to tell me you need help, mister?" Wow, the linebacker's voice was deep.

"No! No, of course not. It's your sign." He waved the sign in question again. He was here to answer the call.

"My sign? So you're here to help me."

"Well... yes." He guessed he was. At least he assumed that Keith was the one who needed help -- it was his sign, after all. And the girl at the cash registered had referred him back here.

"Why?" asked the linebacker.

"What?" Digby looked at the sign again. It definitely said help wanted; did this guy not want help?

"Why do you want to help me?" Now the guy was talking slowly, clearly, like he thought Digby was an idiot. Who knew, maybe he was; he certainly was not acting sensibly, what with the throwing away his perfectly good, if mind-numbingly boring, well-paying job for God only knew what here at the bakery of the gods. Maybe all he'd be doing was washing dishes. And so what? Dishes needed washing and he couldn't think of a better-smelling place to do it.

Money doesn't buy happiness. The words echoed in his head in his mother's voice. *No, but happiness never paid the rent.* That was his rude little voice again. He liked his mother's better.

Digby realized the linebacker had begun to look at him like he truly was an idiot, and he hurried to answer the question. "You do need help, don't you?" If this was just a joke to this guy, Digby would rather know now than to get his hopes up.

The linebacker folded his arms and leaned back against the counter next to the stove. "I do, but I'm not going to just give it to the first man who walks through my door during the busiest part of my day and waves the sign at me."

"Oh. Of course not. I'm here to apply for the job." He thought he'd been clear, but obviously not.

"Okay. I got that. Really. Now you need to tell me why."

"You mean why do I want the job?" As interviews went, this wasn't Digby's finest.

"I mean why do you want *this* job."

"Because it smells so good in here. And out on the street. The smell is leaking out and pulling people in." Okay, he hadn't meant to say that out loud, but it was out there now; he couldn't exactly take it back. And it was the truth, even if it was likely the stupidest reason ever to apply for a job. Ever.

One of the linebacker's eyebrows went up. "You ever worked in a bakery before?"

"No."

"You ever worked in a store before?"

"No."

"As a salesman of any kind?"

Digby had to be honest. "No," he said again. He had to admit, he'd have liked to have answered at least one of this guy's questions with a 'yes.'

"Let me get this straight."

But I'm not straight, thought Digby, clamping his mouth shut tight in case the thoughts tried to make it out as words. He was having trouble with his impulse control and his brain's ability to censor what came out of his mouth; it was probably a good thing he wasn't facing Petty Tyrant Will Smith right now.

The linebacker went on. "You've never worked as a baker or a cashier or a salesman, but you want to work for me because it smells good in here."

"That's right." He had to admit to himself that it sounded pretty lame, when it was put like that. This had to be the worst interview in the history of interviews and he'd managed some pretty lame interviews, so that was saying something. Digby wondered if it was too late to call in sick so he wouldn't get reamed for being late to the desk job. Or maybe he should bring a couple boxes of the cinnamon buns; he'd bet not even dictator Will could resist that smell.

"Times must be tough."

"Uh. I have a job. I should probably give them some notice." He was just knocking them out of the park here. Maybe the chipped black and white tiled floor would open up and swallow him whole.

"You have a job." Linebacker chef looked, well, nonplussed. It really was a great word. "Well. I have to warn you, I won't be paying you any better than they are. I can't afford to give you more than minimum wage."

"Oh, I'm making far more than that at the company." Digby closed his mouth again. Man, he needed to learn to keep it shut. Like really. Today. Maybe even yesterday.

His potential boss -- although that was looking less and less likely as he kept blurting out every little thought that went through his head -- frowned at him, not looking particularly happy at all. "Then why? I don't get it."

Digby figured he should just tell the truth. It wasn't like he hadn't blurted out all sorts of truth already and he probably couldn't keep this in, even if he'd wanted to, if his track record so far was anything to go by. "I hate where I'm working. I have to force myself to go in every day." Digby pointed around the kitchen. "Today I didn't manage to do it."

"And you think you could talk yourself into coming here every day?" The man sounded skeptical.

"I wouldn't have to talk myself into it at all. I want to come here." He was able to say it with absolute certainty. He took in a deep breath of cinnamon flavored air and nodded. Yeah. He wanted to come here every day. He did.

"Because it smells good."

"Yes." It was more complicated than that, but Digby knew he couldn't possibly explain it. He just knew it to be true.

"The hours will be long."

Digby nodded. He wasn't afraid of working hard; he just didn't want to be bored or hate his job.

"You'll have to run the cash register."

He nodded again. He wanted to be where the action was with the cinnamon buns, but he was willing to put in time on the register, as long as he could do it here.

"The person I get in to help will eventually need to learn how to do the baking, too."

"Yes." That was the part he was most looking forward to, the part he really wanted. He could imagine his fingers smelling like cinnamon and brown sugar and yeast from the dough. God, it would be like the best cologne ever. Ever.

"You'll have to come in for six a.m. to run the cash, five a.m. once you start baking."

Okay, that part was not so much on the great side, but it wasn't like he was doing so much with his evenings that he'd have a lot to give up if he started going to bed earlier. He'd have to tape Private Practice, his guilty secret TV show, but that was about it. He wasn't exactly a social butterfly who went out partying every night. "I'll manage."

"Then I guess you have the job." The linebacker tossed him a huge apron. "There's hairnets in the little box on the table there."

While Digby found one and put it on, the linebacker pulled four pans of cinnamon buns out of the oven and piled the buns onto two trays. "Here, take these out front before the mob gets too unruly for Jessica to handle."

Digby grabbed the trays and went back out.

As a cheer went up among the crowd waiting in line for the sweets and Jessica flashed him a relieved smile, Digby realized his new boss didn't even know his name and what was more, he didn't know the boss' name, either.

Three weeks later found Digby working full time at the Buns and Stuff Bakery. He'd offered a week's notice, but Will had sneered and terminated him on the spot. He'd even had a security escort when he cleared out his desk. Digby'd never been so happy to leave a place for the last time as he was when he walked out the company's door.

So far, he'd seen very little of his linebacker. Whose name was Keith. It turned out he did know it -- Jessica having hollered it out when he'd first come in with the help wanted sign, but by the time he'd finished with the interview, during which he'd been calling Keith 'the linebacker' in his head, he couldn't remember that he knew it.

Of course the advantage to not having seen Keith was that he hadn't had to go in for five a.m. yet. He showed up at six to help Jessica with the morning rush, and then went home at nine and came back at three so Jessica could go home. It was quieter in the late afternoons, though, and Digby would close the shop at six and count out the cash.

It was too busy for any sort of socializing in the mornings, and Keith was always gone when Digby got back to the bakery for the afternoon. It shouldn't have mattered, but Digby found himself thinking about the linebacker in the kitchen more and more often.

The guy was good-looking, if you went for the six foot five, two hundred and fifty pounds of muscle baker type. Which it seemed Digby did. He'd started going to bed at night and thinking about Keith, his prick eager to have him imagine what Keith looked like without the chef's whites. Pretty damn impressive was Digby's guess, given that Keith was pretty hot in the baker's outfit.

Of course he would never find out if he and Keith never had a chance to do more than say hi in passing. Or rather, he'd say hi and Keith would grunt a reply.

The phone rang as Digby was cashing out. Damn it, he wasn't paid for any time he put in past six o'clock and it was already five past. It wasn't that he was a clock-watcher, not here, but after a quiet afternoon, he was usually ready to go. He debated answering, and then decided he should. He still liked this job, even if it was just working the cash; he was still doing it at the best smelling place in town. He picked the phone up on the fifth ring.

"Buns and Stuff."

"I didn't think you were going to answer." Though he'd really only heard it that first day, Digby would have recognized the gruff voice anywhere: Keith. The linebacker baker. The owner.

It was a good thing he'd answered. "It is after six," he pointed out, trying not to sound too defensive. If he'd been faster with counting, he might have been gone already when the call came through.

Keith chuckled, the sound like a rumble washing over the line. "So it is. Brad is back from holidays on Monday. I want you to start coming in at five and working with me in the kitchen."

Digby's heart sped. "The cinnamon buns?" He thought working in the kitchen was going to be so much better than running the cash. His clothes already smelled amazing when he got home, but his hands didn't. Yet. He tried not to bounce. Most people wouldn't be thrilled about having to

come into work for five a.m., but Digby wasn't most people. He just wanted in on the cinnamon buns.

"I'll probably have you doing cookies to start with."

"Oh."

"Is there a problem?"

"No, no, that's fine." The cookies all looked amazing, tasted that way, too; he'd sampled his fair share and God, that was one of the best bonuses to working at the bakery. Although, he was probably going to have to start hitting the gym if he didn't want to pudge right out. The thing was, he wanted to do the buns. That wonderful smell that filled the bakery, that pulled in more customers than they could keep up with -- more than one customer went home without the cinnamon buns they'd come in wanting. "There's no problem. The cookies are good." They were. They just weren't the cinnamon buns. He managed to not say that out loud this time and patted himself on the back for that little triumph.

"Okay. See you Monday at five," growled Keith before hanging up.

"Yeah... Monday." Digby stared at the receiver, the dial tone sounding.

For a long minute, he just stood there, and then he remembered where he was and he hung up the phone and went back to counting out the money in the cash register.

On Monday he would be working in the little kitchen in the back. One step closer to the cinnamon buns. Life was good.

He dreamed of dirt the color of cinnamon. The scent it carried filled his nose, flavored the very air on his tongue. It was there in every breath he took, every bite of food he ate.

It should have been too much, it should have felt like he was drowning in it, but it didn't.

It felt like home.

He breathed deeply in his dreams, becoming one with the spice. He was the spice.

Keith was already there when Digby arrived at the ass crack of dawn on Monday morning. Actually, considering that the sun only rose at five eleven, it wasn't even near dawn yet when he let himself in a few minutes before five. Still, Keith was already there and the lingering scent of cinnamon that seemed to always live in Digby's nose now ramped back up to full force.

He'd never smelled anything like it and so far, he hadn't gotten sick of it at all. In fact, he thought he was having cinnamon dreams. It sure beat the ones he used to have when he worked under the hostile management of Will Smith at the company, dreams where he was caught in an endless maze of cubicles and matter how fast of hard he ran, he couldn't make his way out.

He put on his apron and hairnet as he went into the kitchen and Keith gave him a grunt that he assumed meant hello. It was just an assumption, though, for all he knew, it meant get the fuck out of my kitchen. He wondered how long it would take before he spoke Keith-ese and could translate each grunt and click. The thought made him smile

Keith finished up the last pan of the batch of cinnamon buns he was currently rolling and put the batch that had been sitting on the countertop rising into the oven.

"You ready to cook?" Keith asked, proving that Digby's assumption about the meaning of Keith's grunt had been correct, more or less.

"Yeah, looking forward to it." He truly was. Running the cash register was all well and good, but he wanted to be right here, getting his hands dirty. Literally.

"I'm starting you off with the white chocolate and cranberry cookies. The base dough is the same for those, the chocolate chip, the chocolate chip nut and the toffee chunk cookies, but the white chocolate and cranberry ones are selling the best, so we'll start with those." Keith nodded at the industrial mixer in one corner. "Use that. The recipe is taped to the wall next to it. Any questions, just ask."

"You're not going to show me first?" Digby was a little surprised to be thrown right into the deep end like this.

Keith gave him a look and he winced inwardly. Damn it, he didn't want Keith to think he was an idiot and he just kept saying things to make it look like that was exactly what he was.

"I'm busy doing the buns. I'm right here if you need me, though, man, and all you have to do is follow the recipe."

"Yeah, okay, got it."

Keith rolled his eyes, but didn't say anything else and Digby had to figure he should count himself lucky. The truth was, he would have liked to have an excuse to watch Keith's hands at work and he'd been looking forward to hearing more of that great, deep voice. It felt like it sank into him whenever Keith talked and he'd been hoping for a blow by blow on the cookie-making.

Which, upon looking at the recipe taped to the wall, he could see that a blow by blow was exactly what he was getting. Just not in that linebacker deep voice, but in what he guessed was linebacker scrawl. He started making the cookie base, following the directions carefully as he went.

Just as Digby was getting to the part where he added the white chocolate chips and cranberries, Keith opened the oven doors and Digby was hit by a wall of cinnamon bun scent. He nearly got hard just from that smell. Groaning, he breathed deeply, and then went back to the cookies, feeling renewed, reinvigorated.

You didn't get that at a drone's desk job, that was for sure.

Digby managed to get all the way to the "drop cookies on trays" part before he had to ask for help. Keith didn't say so, but he seemed happy about that and he showed Digby how to use the spoon and the side of the mixing bowl to make the cookies the right size. It was easy enough to do, although he found himself having to throw a few back and start over as the cookies had a tendency to slowly grow bigger. It was subtle at first, too, and then all of a sudden the cookies were too big when compared to the first ones.

He finally filled a half dozen cookie trays and passed them off to Keith for inspection.

"Looks good, nice job."

Digby had to resist the urge to bow and say "Thank you, sir." Man, he was losing it. Maybe it was the cinnamon. "What next?" he asked instead.

"Try the regular chocolate chip ones next. Same base, just a different addition at the very end."

"Sure thing, boss." That was better -- it didn't have the same connotations as saying sir would have, but was still respectful. And look at him, keeping his mouth closed instead of just spewing everything that came into his head. It was an improvement.

Keith gave him a look, but didn't say anything, just went back to making those magical cinnamon buns. Speaking of buns, Keith's looked nice and firm. Digby forced himself to turn back to the recipe taped to the wall. He wasn't looking at any buns, cinnamon or otherwise. Nope, not him.

Only he had been, looking that was, and even as he carefully measured out the ingredients, he was thinking of Keith's buns. The ones connected to Keith's legs rather than the ones in the oven this time. Even the next waft of cooking dough and cinnamon couldn't distract his mind from them and he found himself glancing over often as he worked side by side with Keith.

He was nearly finished dropping the next six dozen cookies when Keith growled. And wasn't that just the greatest sound? Digby found himself smiling as he dropped the last few on the tray. It was only when Keith growled again that he realized the noise was directed at him.

He looked up, trying not to think about how that noise had made his cock go ahead and firm right up, just like it had been wanting to do all morning long. Just look at his eyes, look at his eyes, Digby told himself over and over.

Like he's not going to see it in your eyes that you want to look at his cock. Man, his little voice needed to get a life. One that wasn't his. Maybe he could fire it.

"What?" he asked, going for innocent. He was pretty good at innocent. He'd honed it at the company, although near the end, dictator Will had started to see through it. Keith had never seen it, though, so, really, he should buy the look.

Keith snorted and then went back to his baking.

Oh, boy. Digby figured sooner or later he'd figure out what Keith's grunts and snorts all meant. Hell, he already knew the 'hi' grunt. He had that one down. And he was pretty sure that particular snort meant that Keith saw right through his innocent act and knew that he had the hots for his boss and the man's badass buns -- both the ones that made up Keith's ass and the cinnamon ones.

Digby wondered if there was a special layer of hell for men who were turned on by cinnamon buns.

After a week of getting to the store for five a.m., Digby was pretty sure it wasn't the cinnamon buns that were turning him on. No, it was the linebacker baker who made them. He did associate the smell of cinnamon with Keith, though, so now whenever he smelled cinnamon, he got a woody.

Which meant he was hard a lot at work.

It would be embarrassing, except that Keith didn't seem to even notice. Which was kind of depressing. He thought maybe embarrassing would be preferable.

Still, he got to go in every morning to a job he really liked, work with a man who turned him on, and he went home smelling delicious. He even got paid for it, so he couldn't complain; he didn't want to complain. And linebacker Keith was a way better boss than dictator Will any day of the week. Even Sunday.

How do you know? You don't work Sunday. Digby told his little voice to shut the hell up already, it was an expression.

He was a little early on Monday morning, finding himself awake and eager to get in to work. He laughed as he rounded the corner of the street at four-thirty, the smell of cinnamon and baking hitting him full in the face. The cooler fall weather seemed to give an extra edge to the smell of cinnamon buns that came from the bakery, almost like you could smell warm coziness within it. His cock immediately began to firm and there was a spring in his step. Look at him; he'd never been so eager to get to work, ever.

Letting himself in, he headed for the staff room to hang up his coat and grab his apron and hair net. The good feeling increased and he was whistling as he went into the kitchen.

Keith looked up from his newspaper, one eyebrow raised. Grinning, Digby waved and went over to the sink to wash his hands.

"You're early."

He turned, leaned against the counter and nodded. "Yeah. I was awake and figured what the hell." He liked being at work, he liked spending the day with Keith in the warm, fragrant kitchen.

"And you're whistling."

"I'm in a good mood." He tilted his head; it wasn't like Keith to ask questions. It wasn't like Keith to say much of anything. "Is that a problem?"

Keith had a really nice laugh. It was deep and rich and sent a lovely jolt to Digby's balls. "I guess you like the job then."

"I really do." No question, no hesitation. The job rocked.

"Good." Putting down the paper, Keith came over to the sink and washed his hands.

Digby didn't back away. This close he could smell Keith. The cinnamon was strong, but there was much more than just that spice there. Keith smelled, well, like Keith. It was musky and spicy and yes, cinnamon-y, but it all rolled together into a great scent, better than any aftershave. He breathed in deeply, pulling the scent into his lungs and trying to be a little bit subtle about it. He wasn't sure how successful he was, but that didn't stop him from continuing to do it as long as Keith was close enough to smell.

"So you still don't have to force yourself to come in."

Digby hadn't realized Keith was still worrying about that, worrying about how Digby'd said he had to drag himself into the office at his old job. "Not at all, I love this job." Why else would he wake up at four a.m. and come in early? He wasn't a masochist. Hell, if he was, he would have stayed where he was and let Will browbeat him on a regular basis.

Keith smiled and Digby realized that he'd not seen Keith smile before now, not real smiles anyway. It had been mostly clicks and grunts up 'til now and, obviously, fake smiles. This one went right to Keith's eyes and warmed Digby right up. "Glad to hear it."

"I'm glad to be saying it." It was true -- hating what you had to do every day sucked. He was just sorry it had taken him so long to figure that out, although maybe there'd been a reason for that. After all, if he hadn't still been worker-bee-ing at the company, he might not have been walking by Buns and Stuff on the day Keith had put out the help wanted sign.

With a nod and another genuine smile, Keith dried his hands and began taking out pans. Digby turned back to the counter and started grabbing the ingredients he needed for the cookie base.

"Once you've got that started, I'll show you how to make the brownies."

Keith's voice startled him, and Digby laughed, nodded. "Sure thing." Look a him, graduating to brownies.

"The chunky chocolate ones and the blond ones."

Wow, both kinds. Keith must be really happy with his work. "Awesome."

Digby focused on his cookies, eager to get everything right and not screw up in case that made Keith change his mind. Not that he usually screwed up, but it would just figure if, today of all days, he forgot some ingredient or mixed it wrong or make the cookies too big or something. So he was extra careful as he made batch after batch of cookies.

And if his hard-on just wouldn't quit, well, he'd gotten used to going home and jacking off in the shower so he didn't get blue balls.

As the weather grew colder, it became better and better to walk into the bright, warm kitchen at Buns and Stuff. Digby could see how it might be hard to work back here in the middle of a heat wave, but with snow threatening and the windchill at sub-arctic temperatures, it was wonderful. It was just one more thing in the plus column for this job. Digby still hadn't really found anything for the minus column.

"Brad called in sick," Keith grumbled by way of a greeting.

"Oh? I hope he's okay?" He didn't interact all that much with the front of the store, so he hadn't gotten to know Brad nearly as well as he knew Jessica. Of course, she was never sick because she was extremely macho, and macho chicks didn't let germs get in their way. At least that's what she'd told him one day when they'd been working the cash register together.

"Yeah, yeah. Just a cold, but apparently he's sneezing and coughing constantly and that isn't exactly compatible with a bakery. So, I'll need you to help Jessica at the front from six 'til nine and then go home, come back at three and close up. Just like old times."

"Ah. Okay, I can do that." He sighed. He was going to miss being in the kitchen, miss making the cookies and brownies and watching Keith work on the cinnamon buns. And just when he'd gotten the hang of doing the brownies. He hoped Brad wasn't sick for long.

"You knew helping out front was a part of the job when you took it."

"I know, I know. I'm just going to miss baking."

That earned him one of those rare, real smiles. "You can make a few batches of cookies before the rush starts."

Digby couldn't help but grin back, and somehow, being able to do some baking, even if it was just the cookies, made him feel better and he was soon humming and mixing ingredients together, jonesing on the smell of cinnamon. He thought maybe he could make out that scent that was Keith, too, under all the yeast and sugar and cinnamon.

His little voice thought it was just his imagination, but he reminded it that *it* was just his imagination, so glass houses and stones and all that. That shut the voice up pretty quickly and he went back to humming happily.

They worked amiably together until Jessica stuck her head in. "Help! I'm swamped and if someone doesn't come help me, there's going to be a riot." No doubt led by Jessica herself.

"I'm coming." Timing was everything, and it seemed that Jessica's was pretty good. Digby had just dropped the last of the cookies onto a tray. "These are ready to go," he told Keith, who just grunted in reply. Digby took the sound as a yes and wiped as much of the flour from his apron as he could. He grabbed another batch of cinnamon buns and headed out the double doors separating the kitchen from the store front.

He waded out into the fray up front, Jessica giving him a grateful look, and they worked efficiently together until nearly nine when the crowd finally thinned, everyone needing to get to their jobs.

"Thanks." Jessica offered a smile as she wiped down the counter.

"No problem. I'd almost forgotten what a madhouse it could be up here."

She laughed and tossed her wet cloth at him.

"I'll be back at three," he promised. Jessica had two little girls who finished school at three-twenty, so he knew how important it was for her to get off right at three.

He went and got his coat from the small employee room and debated going to say good-bye to Keith. He never had back when he'd originally worked the front, but he'd been working closely with Keith since then. Besides, he wanted to; he didn't want to just go without getting another glimpse.

Shaking his head at himself and firmly squashing any comments his little voice might think to make, he headed for the kitchen. Poking his head in, he smiled as he was assaulted by the full scent of the kitchen and the sight of Keith rolling out a new batch of dough.

"I'm going now."

Keith grunted without looking up.

"I'll be back at three."

He got another grunt as answer.

"Okay, bye." He waved and headed out.

He wasn't sure, but he thought maybe Keith had given him a half-smile just before the door closed. He'd take it.

One cold, snowy day, Digby got to work and the help wanted sign was back in the window. His heart started pounding and he thought maybe he was going to throw up. He grabbed it and marched right into the kitchen. For once, the smell of cinnamon and the sight of Keith didn't make him hard.

"What's this?" He thrust the sign under Keith's nose, cutting off the man's view of his cinnamon buns.

"Help wanted sign."

"I can see that!" He flung the sign down on the table, flour rising up in little dust clouds around it.

"Then why did you ask?"

"Because the last time this sign was out you hired me on. I thought I was doing really well, but if I'm doing something wrong, tell me and I'll fix it. I like this job a lot -- no, I love this job -- and I don't want to lose it." Digby wasn't quite shouting, but his voice had risen and really, he probably shouldn't have been talking to the boss like that, especially given that he really did love the job, but he was upset. Really upset.

Keith made a noise that wasn't a grunt and at first, Digby thought he was about to get a reaming the likes of which Petty Tyrant Will Smith could only aspire to, but he realized that Keith had started to chuckle. The sound rose and rolled into guffaws.

"Hrmph." Digby crossed his arms and glared. How could Keith laugh at him like that? This was serious business; he really didn't want to lose his job and he especially didn't want it to be stolen away from under him.

"This is for a new cashier. We're always extra busy between now and Christmas. You're going to be working overtime with me in the bakery just to meet the demand and the special orders. And just two cashiers won't cut it. So we need someone else."

"Oh." Digby's anger deflated, sheepishness rushing in to take its place. God, one of these days he'd engage his brain before he engaged his mouth around Keith. "I guess I jumped to conclusions, huh?"

Keith snickered. "I guess you did."

"Sorry about that. It's just, well, I really do love this job."

Keith grunted and smiled and checked his watch. "Better get to it, then."

Nodding, Digby went to the employee's room to change out of his coat and into his apron and hair net, and then set to work making the very best cookies and brownies he could.

He didn't dream anymore, but his sleep was filled with the scent of spices. Cinnamon was the strongest, the spice filling his lungs and his nose. He floated in it. He flew on it. It made him feel good.

He woke with a smile, even if the smell of cinnamon had faded by then. He'd return to it soon.

Digby figured that, given they were going to be extra busy, maybe he should come in a little earlier than his usual, which was now sometime between four-thirty and five. With that in mind, he set his alarm for three fifteen and managed to be in the bakery by four the next morning.

Keith was still there ahead of him, but he could tell from the current progress on the cinnamon buns, or rather the lack of progress, that Keith hadn't been there long.

"Morning," Digby called out, receiving Keith's usual grunt in reply.

Keith didn't say anything about his coming in early, but Digby got the feeling that Keith was pleased he had, so he did it again the next morning, and then the next.

By Friday, he'd come in early four days in a row, and Keith was standing at the big chef's block, all his ingredients on the table, waiting.

"Hurry it up a little. I haven't got all day to teach you how to make the buns."

"What? Really? You're going to teach me how to do them?" Keith's lips began to pull down and Digby hurried to get the strings on his apron tied and his hands washed; he wasn't going to have Keith change his mind because of something Digby said, or because he took too long to be ready or any other reason that could possibly come up. In short order he was at Keith's side. "Ready, boss."

Learning to make cinnamon buns with Keith was both heaven and hell. The buns were what Digby had wanted to learn to make all along and he was thrilled to pieces to be finally allowed to know the secrets of it, and working so close to Keith felt great.

Working so close to Keith was also torture. Keith was warm and still smelled as good as ever. Their bodies brushed as they worked side by side, and every now and then, Keith would wrap long arms around him, put big hands on top of his and show him exactly how to knead or roll out the dough.

Whenever Keith did that, Digby's cock did a solid sproing. He could feel Keith all up along his back; it was very intimate and Digby wasn't sure he wasn't going to totally embarrass himself before it was all over.

Somehow, he didn't. He didn't come just from having Keith show him the proper kneading and rolling techniques for baking cinnamon buns, and he didn't moan or groan. He did stay hard most of the day, though, and he knew he needed a shower and a visit with his hand in the worst way.

It looked like he wasn't going to get one.

They finished up for the day around two and Keith patted him on the back. "Good job. How about staying and learning how to bake the Christmas Logs? If it's anything like last year, we're going to have to make over a thousand between special orders and walk-ins."

"Sure." He was tired and horny, but he wasn't about to turn down an opportunity to keep working with Keith, to learn new things on the job. The fact that Keith had trusted him with the cinnamon buns and was now going to teach him something else new meant Keith had a lot of faith in him. He wanted to make Keith proud.

"Good." It was a grunt, but it was accompanied by one of those special smiles that Digby liked to think of as just his. He smiled back and settled in for an afternoon of delight and torture at being so close to the man he was falling for.

By seven, tired and horny had turned into exhausted and hornier than ever, but he'd managed to roll several cakes into logs without them falling to pieces, and he now knew how to make the butter cream icing that went with them.

Keith clapped him on the back as they got to the little employee room. "Good job. I have to admit, I thought you were a flake when you first walked in here, but it looks like I was wrong. You're a natural."

Digby beamed. He couldn't have gotten better praised. He smiled up at Keith as he reached behind himself and tried to undo his apron strings. "Thanks."

Man, Keith was close. Almost as close as they'd been when they were baking. Only they weren't baking anymore and the air suddenly seemed thicker. Digby's fingers fumbled with the strings behind his back and they became hopelessly tangled. "Um. I. I seem to be stuck." God, that was smooth. Just like him. Why change now?

Keith smiled, the real smile, and stepped even closer, arms wrapping around him. "Let me see if I can help out with that." Keith's fingers brushed his aside and Digby didn't know what to do with his hands as Keith moved even closer to look over Digby's shoulder to see the knots.

Digby swallowed and tried very hard not to moan. The jig was definitely up, though. Even if by some miracle, Keith had never noticed his hard-on while they were baking, there was no way the guy could miss it now. Not with the way it was mashed up against Keith's big old thigh. Shit, that felt good and he wanted to rub. He wanted to grab hold of Keith's shoulders and hump against that thigh until he came. Given how hard he'd been since morning, he didn't think it would take long.

"There," murmured Keith, pulling back enough to look into Digby's face. The strong arms stayed wrapped around him.

Digby looked up into Keith's eyes and swallowed, his head moving without his permission, mouth headed right for Keith's. He managed to stop himself, somehow, but a little whimper escaped him.

Keith smiled and this time it was a new smile. This one was slow and quiet and very intimate. Digby felt like he was the only man in the world with Keith smiling at him like that.

Then Keith pushed a hand beneath the apron and cupped Digby's cock through his jeans. "We should take care of this before it falls off."

Heat rushed to Digby's cheeks, half embarrassment, half pure need. He couldn't make any words come out, so he nodded his 'yes, please.' Then he tried to pull away. Keith was his boss, he shouldn't... Keith had started it, though, and it looked like Keith was going to finish it. Thank God.

His apron was pulled over his head and tossed away, and his hairnet joined it, along with Keith's. Then Keith's big baker's fingers opened his jeans and tugged out his cock, started kneading it just like he was a batch of dough for cinnamon buns.

Sexy image, muttered his little voice. Digby ignored it completely and gave himself over to how good it felt to have Keith touching him, rolling his cock in that big hand. He also gave in to the urge to wrap his hands around Keith's shoulders. Then he gave in to the urge to hump. He rolled his hips, pushing into Keith's hand rather frantically.

He'd been right, too, it wasn't going to take very long. He might have been embarrassed by how quick he was off the mark, except that once he'd come, Keith's mouth descended on his and Digby didn't have the capacity to be embarrassed, or anything else but extremely thoroughly

kissed. Keith brought everything to that kiss, and having a hundred percent of the man's focus was heady, dizzy-making.

When the kiss was over, Keith brought his hand up to his mouth and licked Digby's come away, making a pleased noise. Digby whimpered and his cock twitched.

"Let's save that thought. Come home with me."

Digby shook his head. Not that he didn't want to go home with Keith, but it wasn't fair that he'd come and Keith hadn't. "What about you?" His hand went to the crotch of Keith's chef white -- which hid a lot, he'd had no clue Keith's cock was that big -- and he squeezed.

"I haven't been hard quite as long as you were -- I can wait."

"Yeah, but you don't have to." Giving Keith a little grin, he went to his knees. He couldn't quite believe this was real, that Keith had just jacked him off and now he was going to suck his boss' cock.

"You don't have to," growled Keith, repeating his words back to him.

"I want to, though. I want to know what you taste like." And smell like, and feel like, and sound like when his cock was being sucked.

Keith didn't make any other protests, so Digby went ahead and fished the ample cock out of Keith's pants and right there, in the bakery, with the smell of cinnamon deep in his nose, he blew Keith.

Closing his eyes, Digby gave Keith the best blow-job he knew how. He took his time to explore the taste and shape of Keith's cock. He rubbed his lips and licked his tongue over the hot flesh. And whenever Keith jerked or made a noise, Digby would revisit that spot, stay right there and make more of those little noises come from the big man. They were the best noises he'd ever heard. This blow-job was the best he'd ever given, and the one he'd enjoyed the most.

Big hands wrapped around his head and Keith warned him with a tight, needy sounding "gonna." That was just fine with Digby. He sucked harder, his fingers pushing into Keith's pants to fondle his balls and when Keith shouted and came, Digby swallowed it all down.

Keith tasted great. He tasted spicy and salty and yes, like cinnamon, though Digby figured that was probably because that smell was in his nose all the time. He liked it.

When he was done and Keith was tucked back into his chef whites -- the man didn't wear underwear which made Digby's cock twitch again -- Keith pulled him up and took a kiss. The flavor of both their come merged as they kissed, along with the cinnamon and spices and Digby sank against Keith, letting the big baker hold him up.

"You don't live far from here, do you?"

"Why?"

"I'm not sure I can walk very far. You pretty much melted me." He didn't bother to wish he hadn't said it, clearly his brain just wouldn't engage when he was with Keith.

He did love Keith's laugh, though. "I live upstairs."

Digby pulled back to look up into Keith's face. "Upstairs. All this time when you're not in the store you're just upstairs."

"Yep."

"Do you even need to go outside to get here?"

Keith's eyes twinkled at him. "Nope."

"Cool. I might be able to make it up a flight of stairs." Possibly.

Keith's arm wrapped around his waist and he was tugged in against the solid body. He changed his assessment from possibly to definitely. As long as Keith kept holding him.

Digby wanted to be curious about Keith's place, and the truth was that he was. He was just more curious about what they were going to do next, and he had no problem with Keith dragging him off to the bedroom where there was a bed big enough to suit a linebacker along with heavy, masculine furniture: a dresser, a pair of bedside tables and a wardrobe. The whole place smelled just like the bakery.

It only took a moment to take it all in, which was a good thing because Keith drew him back into the strong arms immediately and Digby raised his head for the kiss that was coming.

Kissing Keith felt amazing. Their tongues tangled as Digby opened wide. Keith bent him back over one arm and Digby moaned, going on his toes and pushing his hips forward. It brought their cocks together and they rubbed through their clothes. He wrapped his arms around Keith's shoulders and held on. It gave him more leverage and he used that to rub even harder.

"Let's take it a little slower this time." Keith's growls had always been sexy, but they went straight to his balls when he was this close while he heard them.

"There's nothing wrong with fast." Feeling good and doing stuff that got them off was feeling good and doing stuff that got them off, whether they were fast or slow or somewhere in between. He was a fan of fast.

"No, but I want to take my time to explore you." And didn't that sound like the kind of fun he wanted to encourage? "And as tired as you are I have a hunch a second orgasm will put you to sleep."

Digby hated to admit it, but Keith was probably right. If he gave himself time to think about it, he was utterly exhausted. He decided not to give himself time to think about it.

"So how does this going slower work?"

Beginning to pull off his clothes, Keith offered, "It starts with naked."

Digby could get behind slower if it involved naked. His little voice was of the opinion that if Keith suggested it, Digby could get behind just about anything. Digby might have told it to shut up, but it was right and he didn't really care. He liked Keith. A lot. And whatever got them off and together worked for him. Slow, fast, naked, not naked, semi-naked, he just wanted to touch and to feel good.

Instead of helping to take his own clothes off, Digby reached for Keith and started stripping the man out of his chef's whites. They were pretty damn sexy and Keith filled them out well. Keith looked even better out of them.

The broad shoulders were even more impressive when you could see that they were pure muscle, and Digby couldn't remember ever seeing a real six-pack abdomen like Keith's, certainly not in the flesh. Then there were Keith's thighs. Digby'd always thought the expression "thighs like tree trunks" was a gross exaggeration that only served to make him laugh. He wasn't laughing at Keith's thighs. And tree trunks was a good comparison; they were thick and solid.

His gaze found Keith's nipples. They were almost light brown against Keith's skin, some hair foresting out around them and over Keith's chest. He didn't have to be as close as he was to see that the little nibs in the center of both nipples were hard, filled with blood. Another thing filled with blood lived further south. Digby glanced at Keith's prick and then his gaze was caught. It was a large prick, full and hard, pointing up at Keith's belly.

This was definitely the better view.

Digby started to drop to his knees again, more than eager to give Keith another blow-job. He loved blow jobs for the flavors, the things he learned about his lover while giving them. There just weren't too many negatives in blow-job land.

"No." The word wasn't a grunt, this time it was a full-out growl.

"What?" Digby froze half-way down, looking back up along the amazing body to Keith's eyes. "You don't want me to blow you?"

"I didn't say that, but I had something else in mind."

"You blowing me?"

Keith laughed. "I was thinking more bed. Kissing. Mutual exploration. Making love." The laughter faded, replaced by a serious, heated look. "If you want."

"Oh, I want." Digby popped back up and pushed at Keith in a mock tackle. "Come on, then. Bed."

Keith went down, though not because of anything Digby had done, bringing Digby with him, both of them laughing as they bounced, Keith on the mattress and Digby on Keith. Digby had never felt so easy with a new lover before and he didn't know if it was because they'd spent so much time together already, or if it was because they just fit together really well. He decided that for now it didn't matter. What did matter was the hard cock poking at his belly and the way Keith's tongue felt against his.

Keith rolled them and dragged him higher up on the bed. Pillows arranged under their heads, they found the perfect way to lie for kissing. Digby lost himself in it, so much so that he didn't even realize he'd started rocking against Keith's body until those big hands grabbed his hips and stopped him.

"Gonna make me go off again."

Hello -- naked and in bed together, it kind of went with the territory. "Hush," Digby told the voice in his head before giving Keith a smile. "That's kind of the idea."

"It's still too fast."

Digby shook his head. "Only if tonight is all we have." Oh, he hadn't meant to blurt *that* out. Not that it wasn't how he felt. And if he'd said that, well... "I'm hoping not. That tonight's not all we have, I mean."

Keith's fingers pressed against his lips, effectively shutting him up. "I figured that's what you meant."

"Oh. Okay. Um. So what are your thoughts?" He couldn't help but notice that Keith hadn't rushed to assure Digby he felt the same way.

Of course the slow, quiet smile Keith gave him was an answer all of its own. "I've never thought of you and one-night stand together. Not since the first day you walked in with that stupid sign, not a lick of experience, and some weird story about being bored at work and having to force yourself to go in."

Digby rolled his eyes -- it wasn't some weird story, it had been the truth. "I worked out, though, didn't I?"

"You sure as hell did." Keith rolled him onto his back and began rocking down against him. Their cocks slid and ground together, and Digby was pretty sure that if he was going to die right now, then at least he'd go while he was really, really happy. The mattress was solid but not hard, and he didn't sink into it as Keith humped him.

He gasped and tried to meet Keith's movements. His lover was a lot heavier than he was, though, not to mention it felt so damn good, and it was all Digby could do to hold on to Keith's shoulders and go along for the ride. That wasn't such a bad place to be, but he couldn't help teasing.

"What happened -- to slower?" he asked before moaning as his cockhead bumped against the ridges of Keith's abdomen.

"You were right. This is slower enough."

Digby might have laughed or made a retort, but that would have taken effort and thought and he had none to spare. Everything in him was focusing on his cock, Keith's cock, and how good they felt bumping and pushing and sliding together.

He reached up and grabbed the back of Keith's head, bringing him down for a kiss. Keith answered Digby's kiss with one of his own, sloppy and wet and good enough to start Digby on the way toward his orgasm. His kiss became desperate, his tongue fucking into Keith's mouth as everything inside him swelled.

He hung there for a moment, suspended between almost there and coming. Keith's eyes met his, heat and pleasure and happiness in their depths. Because of Digby; he'd made Keith feel like that. It didn't get much better than this moment.

Crying out, Digby came, his body convulsing like he was having a fit. Okay, this moment was pretty good, too.

The spunk that flew up between them eased the way and Keith was suddenly sliding easily against him. "Your turn," Digby urged, using the last of his energy to move his body up against Keith's.

"Unngrrr." It was an odd noise, and Keith made a weird face as he came. It almost looked like pain, but there was a sexual, hungry quality to it. Digby knew because he watched every second of it.

He patted Keith's back and then his hand fell back to the bed, his arms and legs feeling like limp spaghetti. The exhaustion wasn't creeping back in; it was on a full-blown attack mission. He could hardly keep his eyes open.

"Hey," he complained when Keith didn't roll over next to him, but got right up out of bed.

"Relax. I'm just getting something to clean us up with."

"Oh. Okay." He chuckled and lay there looking at the ceiling. It smelled good in here. It smelled like the bakery. And like Keith. He turned his head on the pillow, breathing in. Yeah, good. It was comfortable, too, much more comfortable than his little single bed in his little apartment.

He'd nearly drifted off when Keith came back, a warm cloth passing over his belly and cock. His prick actually twitched and he heard Keith laugh. He grinned. "What can I say, you're inspiring." Keith laughed some more and Digby sniggered.

"Tomorrow." The way Keith said it, Digby knew he could trust the words.

Then Keith came back to bed and curled around him. It was warm and good and smelled like coming home. He let his eyes close, he let himself drift off.

Digby fell asleep to cinnamon dreams.

End.

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