

STRONGMAN
CELEBRATION: A VIGNETTE

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Male Nudes Wrestling, John Singer Sargent (1856-1925)



Available from Ellora's Cave

<http://www.ellorascave.com/productpage.asp?ISBN=9781419914973>

Celebration: a Vignette

Part One

Almost a year.

Griff glanced across the interior of the lamplit van as Fort ran a hand through his hair for what had to be the hundredth time. He was glaring down at the papers spread across the table, the end of an ink brush clamped firmly between his teeth. Gods, he had no idea what he looked like, not even now, after Griff had told him Twister knew how many times. Big and tough and oh-so-serious. Not handsome, not by any stretch, but with his own rough beauty.

Griff's chest went tight. Blinking rapidly, he drained the last of his Aetherian brandy. And all his, since that day in the hidden valley, almost a year ago. Some sort of celebration was definitely in order, but what?

Fort frowned more ferociously than ever, one big finger running down a column of figures.

"You need spectacles," said Griff absently.

Fort's head jerked up. "Nonsense."

Griff lay back against the pillows and grinned. Fort's bark was worse than his bite and to be honest, he had no objection to either. "Then why are you squinting?"

"Am not," said Fort automatically, but his storm-gray gaze skimmed over the other man's body in the skintight costume, lingering on Griff's fingers, drumming casually on one muscled thigh.

"Are too." Chuckling, Griff fluttered heavily mascaraed eyelashes like a doxy on the make. Fort refused to watch him perform in the Big Top, said his nerves couldn't take it, but his lover in full makeup and spangles – oh yes, that never failed to fascinate him. Taking his time, Griff stretched, undulating on the bed.

Fort scratched the stubble on his chin, his gaze delightfully hungry. But he went on, "There's no doubt this merchant's been dealing with the Hsrda, the ledgers make that clear, but as for his bookkeeping –" He shrugged. "He's definitely dishonest, but I can't work out if he's an idiot into the bargain."

"Jan can wait another day to find out." Griff waggled his toes. "Help me off with my boots?"

"You're spoiled," said Fort severely, but his slow serious smile dawned as he pushed back the chair, the expression unguarded, even a little shy. Griff's heart turned a painful somersault in his chest. Fort only smiled like that for him.

"I like it," he murmured. "Being spoiled."

Gods, they'd come a long way, he thought as Fort tugged at the first boot. Out in the Empty Lands, under the open sky, they'd fought for dominance, no holds barred, brutal and unforgiving. So good to let go like that. The result had been a foregone

conclusion — after all, Fort outweighed him by a couple of stone, and he'd been a mercenary besides, a seasoned warrior. But Griff flattered himself he'd acquitted himself well. He was an athlete, an acrobat for the gods' sakes. He'd make Fort work for it.

Blood spilled into his cock at the memory. He arched with the pleasure, pushing the sole of his foot against Fort's palm, comfortable in the knowledge there was no rush. They had all night — and the rest of their lives.

Fort had fucked him that day, hard and gloriously. He was pretty sure he'd screamed like a woman, though he'd rather die than admit it. What he hadn't expected had been the rough tenderness of it, Fort's care and concern. Hell, his love.

Another six months of cajoling, wheedling and downright trickery and he'd returned the favor. It wasn't something he got to do often, but when he did... His breath hitched as Fort grabbed the heel of the second boot. Buried to the balls inside his lover, making him fly... Gods, it was beyond anything, that big body responding so sweetly, Fort making himself vulnerable, trusting Griff with everything that he was. And Twister take him, the man was so tight, so deliciously, decadently tight, and he made the most wonderful noises, groans and whimpers through clenched teeth.

Definitely a celebration. Griff raised his hips as Fort curled his fingers into the waistband of the sequined leggings and peeled them down.

"When's your natal day?" he asked.

"No idea," said Fort, bestowing a quick peck on the hopeful head of Griff's cock. "Why?"

He returned for a more leisurely lick, completely derailing Griff's train of thought. With a considerable effort, he regrouped. "What do you mean, you don't know? How can you not know the day you were born?"

"The Straight Church doesn't celebrate natal days. Wouldn't want a kid to be happy or too full of himself."

Shit. The fucking Brethren, kill-joys, sanctimonious bastards. Griff's erection faltered. He reached down to brush his fingertips across a thick wrist.

"Sorry," he said. "That stinks."

Fuck, what a childhood, and it kept coming back to bite them. No wonder Fort loved to snuggle. All those years deprived of love and affection. Griff smiled. Fort might still be a warrior, all the way to bottom of his grim commander's soul, but in the post-coital cuddling department — Twister, he was mushier than a girl.

The only time he'd been stupid enough to mention it, Fort had pulled back, buffeted him so hard across the back of the head that he saw stars and stumped off to his own little van. It had taken Griff a whole week to persuade him to stay the night again.

Don't make the same mistake twice. One of Griffid Ringman's mottoes. These days, when he curled into Fort's massive body, he kept his mouth shut, though he did tend to sigh a bit. In any case, it didn't matter because as they settled, Fort's breath would

whistle out of him, long and soft. He'd relax, throw a heavy leg over Griff's and bury his nose in the curve of his lover's neck. After a little while, the gentle snores would start, riffling Griff's hair. And he could sleep.

A double celebration then, one for the day of Fort was born, the other for the anniversary of his rebirth, that day out in the Empty Lands.

"Forget the Brethren," rumbled Fort. "I have." He shoved his trows down, and his meaty cock reared up, rosy-dark and thick with blood.

"Me too," said Griff, reaching. "Bring that here." Party planning could wait.

Griff was acting strange. When he first noticed it, Fort spent the better part of a day fighting a vicious battle with his own insecurities. It was over. Griff was tired of him – too old, too grim, fucked up by what he'd been, what he'd seen – so much killing, so much blood and hate and death. He told himself it was stupid, not to worry, that Griff had the guts to face him with it – Lufra's tits, the tumbler had the guts to face bloody anything.

But that night, Griff had loved him so fiercely, given himself so completely, that Fort had relaxed a little. And then, after he'd come twice to Fort's once, the little shit, he'd burrowed and squirmed until he got himself nicely situated on Fort's shoulder, wrapped an arm over his chest and promptly passed out. When Fort brushed the hair away from Griff's face, he discovered a satisfied smile on that elegant mouth. Lufra, the man was worse than a girl for cuddling.

But he had to admit it was a relief. A day later, Fort had forgotten all about it, caught up in the daily life of the Ten Nations Fair.

They'd arrived in Valaressa, and as usual in that town of easy money, the crowds were thick, the concourse buzzing. In any case, between constructing extra seating for the Big Top and keeping the menagerie supplied with fresh hay for the vranee and meat for the fellwolves, Fort was too busy to worry about whatever bite-me Griff had in his pants. With considerable satisfaction, he leaned against a wagon and watched the citizens of Valaressa trickle back to the city. In the light of the torches their faces were tired, sticky and smiling.

"Hey!" A grubby child tugged at his sleeve, he couldn't tell its gender. "Griff says..." The little brow corrugated, then cleared. "Meet you at the Big Top. Supper with the tumblers."

Fort's brows rose. He'd been looking forward to a quiet meal with Griff and a back rub and a long luxurious fuck. Ah well. Suddenly he grinned. There'd be another time – and another and another.

Rolling his shoulders, he set off for the glow of the huge red-striped tent. He'd drawn level with Magrit's food stall when Ember stepped out of the darkness, a covered dish in her hands.

The glassblower smiled at him, her long serious face brightening. "Going to the Big Top?" she said.

Fort grunted an affirmative. He sniffed. "What's that you've got?" Ember was a superb cook with a knack for preparing extraordinary dishes out of vegetables, cheese and noodles. Fort didn't eat meat.

"Nothing much," she said airily. "I thought I'd try a Feolin rarebit. It's got that blue Sereian cheese in it, the one you like."

Fort's mouth watered. Gently, he took Ember's arm. "It's bit rough here. Don't trip."

Still in costume, Griff stood chatting with a group of tumblers and roustabouts. When their eyes met across the sawdust of the ring, Fort's step slowed, his breath catching in his chest. Would he ever grow used to it? That heart-stopping combination of vulnerability and strength, the masculine beauty that stared him down, giving no quarter. "I'm yours," it said, "if you're strong enough to take me."

Griff winked, his sloe eyes glittering with mischief. The little devil, what was he up to?

Before Fort had the chance to speak, the concourse reverberated with the beat of mighty wings. What the—?

Voices rose in laughter and conversation, and abruptly, the tent was full of jewel-colored velvet and shiny plumage and handsome faces.

"Fort!" Mirry strode over to clap him on the shoulder, the glorious tawny wealth of hair and wings shining under the lights. "You look well. What did you find in the merchant's ledger? Anything of use?" His tail twitched with impatience.

Bemused, Fort opened his mouth to reply, but someone small and soft barreled into his midriff, almost knocking him back a step. "For Lufra's sake." Fledge rose on tiptoe to peck Fort's cheek. "Let the man enjoy himself. Work can wait."

Enjoy himself? He could do that. Grinning over her shoulder at Jan, who'd walked over to join Mirry, Fort bent his head and kissed Fledge full on the mouth, making a production out of it and relishing every second.

Fledge giggled, but Jan's face darkened. "Here," he said, stepping forward brandishing an elegantly wrapped parcel. "This is for you. From the—" he yanked Fledge back with an admonitory glare "—*three* of us." He tucked her, now limp with laughter, under one jet black wing.

"What?" said Fort stupidly, turning the package over in his hands.

"Open it," said Griff, appearing at his elbow.

"But—"

"Happy Natal Day," said Fledge.

"I don't have a Natal Day," said Fort automatically.

"You do now," said Griff and Fledge together. They exchanged a glance brimful of satisfaction and conspiracy.

"Happy Natal Day, Fort." Katahaya, the tumbler, pressed her lithe body against his in an inhibited hug.

"Best wishes, man." Big Cizmar seized his hand and attempted to crush it.

Before Fort had a chance to gather his wits, he was besieged — Leo the roustabout was followed by Bruise and his mother Naretta, First among the Governing Ring of the Fair. Fort was hugged and kissed. His back was slapped and his hand wrung. His head spinning, he managed to acknowledge greetings from what seemed like everyone he'd ever known.

In the first lull, he wrapped his forearm around Griff's throat and, none too gently, gathered him in. "Happy?" he growled in his ear. "You set me up, you little shit."

Griff grinned, unabashed. "Worked like a charm too." He waved a lordly hand at the crowded ring, the makeshift bar, the benches piled high with food.

So many people. Even the back of Fort's neck felt hot. Fuck, his cheeks must be incandescent. He ground his teeth, ambushed by the strangest mix of feelings. Embarrassment was chief among them, followed closely by amazement — who'd have thought he'd collected so many people? Let alone people who ... well ... cared.

His jaw dropped. There was Lady Chrizariel, the Winged Envoy herself, deep in conversation with Magrit, owner of the filthiest food stall at the Fair. For Lufra's sake, what were they talking about?

His gut churned, his eyes burned. Had to be the smoke from the torches. Fort blinked hard. "You'll pay," he hissed, aiming a fellwolf grin at Griff.

"Oh yeah. I'm counting on it." Griff's teeth flashed. The air between them thrummed.

Part Two

After a moment, Griff gave himself a shake, like a man waking from a dream. "You going to open that?" he asked, nodding at the parcel Fort still held.

"I guess so." Fort sank onto a bench. Slowly, he pulled at the colored ribbon that held the wrapping closed. But though he concentrated hard, the sense of unreality refused to leave him.

He looked up at Griff. "How?" he said. "I don't understand. How? *Why?*"

Griff shrugged. "I asked and they came."

"But— For me?"

Griff cleared his throat. "Yes, Fort, for you. Now open the fucking thing or I will."

The pretty paper fell open to reveal a box of polished inlaid wood. Feolin work. Costly. His big fingers suddenly clumsy, Fort fumbled the lid open. Inside were two compartments, each containing a cluster of small round objects like pebbles. The box itself was hinged to fold out into a flat checkered board.

"A set for Black and White," said Griff. "I didn't know you played."

Speechless, Fort picked up one of the white stones, turning it over and over in his fingers. It shone with fugitive gleams, as if fine oil slithered beneath the milky surface.

Griff leaned forward. "Is that—?"

"Top grade opalore," said Jan's bell-tenor. "Good players deserve the best. The black pieces are Feolin ebony."

Griff's brows rose. "He's that good?"

"He beat me once," Jan said dryly. The merest hint of color darkened ivory cheekbones. "Took me by surprise."

Fort chuckled, suddenly giddy. "In your dreams, Aetherii. I can do it again too."

Jan bared his teeth. "Any time, *Brother*."

Someone distracted Fort by pressing a beer into his hand and Jan moved gracefully away. His place was taken by Magrit, carrying a plate piled high with trintri pastries.

Her shy smile revealed two lonely teeth in an expanse of gum. "Yer favorites," she said. "Made 'em special. Take a couple, go orn."

Averting his gaze from her filthy fingernails, Fort selected one of the few pastries not decorated with a grubby thumbprint. Mumbling his thanks, he ducked his head, exquisitely aware of Griff's amused stare. The weight of it had such a physical impact, the man might as well have reached out and laid his warm palm flat against Fort's belly. Godsdammit.

The moment Magrit drifted away, he dropped the pasty into his ale jug. Better to ruin his liquor than pollute his insides.

The roustabouts had clubbed together to buy him a belt of good sturdy leather, while the tumblers gave him a sledgehammer with his name burned into the handle. Almost speechless, all he could do was mutter his thanks, over and over.

It seemed like no time at all before the Aetherii were climbing the ladder to the high platform and launching themselves into the air, one by one. Mirry circled, swooping low over people's heads so Fledge, secure in his arms, could blow farewell kisses. Jan and the others streamed out behind him, while the Fair folk watched with their heads tilted back and their mouths open.

"Come on," said Griff. "The others will clean up." Determinedly, he herded Fort out to the concourse and into the cool night air.

"You did well," he said, nodding at the pile of objects in Fort's arms.

Fort shook his head, still bemused. As they approached the van, a sudden thought occurred to him. This whole Natal Day thing had been Griff's idea, so where was the tumbler's gift? Curiosity moved sharply within him, followed immediately by uncertainty, then irritation.

Fine. He wasn't going to pout. Lufra's tits, he wouldn't mention it, not even if it killed him.

"I'll make us a cup of roberry," he said, the moment the door closed behind them.

"All right." Griff relieved him of the gifts and placed them one by one on the small dresser of polished wood. He turned, his hands braced behind him, and Fort could feel the tension coming off him in waves.

What the — ?

Griff was still dressed as if for the ring, his sloe eyes accentuated with kohl and mascara. He looked like a hard-muscled faery, tough and delightfully wicked. Hunger

roared through Fort, accelerating from slow and deep to ravenously carnal in a split-second. Even after all these months, it still had the power to shock, a feeling so strong he felt compelled to rein it in out of sheer self-preservation. Digging deep for his military discipline, he breathed carefully through his nose, busying himself laying out the Sereian cups, measuring the precise amount of robbery powder into the pot and lighting the brazier.

"Thank you for tonight," he said, not looking up. "For the, ah, party. Do it again and I'll beat you 'til you cry, but...it was a kind thought."

"It wasn't just for your Natal Day." Griff sounded oddly hoarse. "You've forgotten, haven't you?"

Shit. "Forgotten? Forgotten what?"

Griff pushed himself away from the dresser and took a step closer. "It's been a year, Fort." He smiled crookedly. "A whole year since we fucked for the first time."

Fort almost poured boiling water over his fingers. "Fuck! I mean, it is?" Willing his hands not to shake, he set the kettle down on its little iron trivet.

"I thought we should celebrate." Griff walked forward, right into Fort's space, his warm breath puffing against the big man's chin, his dark eyes very steady. "Can you think of a better date to choose for your Natal Day? That time in the valley, it was a kind of rebirth for you, the start of something new for both of us."

He sucked in a breath, the sound clearly audible in the hush. "You don't regret it, do you?"

Fort swallowed a curse. What the fuck was he supposed to say? Shit, why did he have to speak at all? Surely Griff knew? And if he knew, then why did he have to ask?

He fell back on the truth. "No," he said baldly.

His lips tingled in expectation of a kiss, his mouth actually watering. The way the little shit kissed, he could make Fort's toes curl in his boots, a fact he would rather die than have him know, though he had a feeling it wasn't much of a secret. Griff was so much better at all this emotional shit, at *understanding*.

He'd expected Griff's expression to lighten. So why was the man so tense, a crease between his brows? Fort could see the spray of freckles across his nose, a constellation he knew so well he could have drawn it in his sleep.

"What?" he said, his guts cramping with apprehension. "What's wrong?"

Griff gave a snort. "Nothing, you idiot. Here." He picked up Fort's hand and shoved a small velvet bag into it. "I got you something, that's all."

He looked away, his lashes fluttering down like absurd little fans. "You don't have to— I mean if you don't like it... Ah, fuck, never mind, just take a look at the fucking thing."

His mind racing, Fort fumbled with the drawstring and upended the pouch over his palm. A small golden circlet rolled out, gleaming softly in the lamplight. "It's a ring," he said stupidly. "A signet ring."

Griff rolled his eyes. "Well, yeah," he said, sounding more like himself.

Fort brought it closer, then held it farther away. Shit, he did need spectacles. "It's engraved," he said, screwing up his eyes. "With—"

He got such a shock, the ring slipped from his fingers. With a musical *chink!* it rolled and spun, coming to rest against Griff's boot.

The tumbler bent and scooped it up. "Too much, isn't it?" he said, huffing out an irritated breath. "I should have bloody known. Well never mind, old Barnaby might give me the value of the gold, because with the—"

With a roar, Fort picked him up and tossed him onto the bed. Before Griff finished bouncing, Fort came down over him in a rush and plucked the ring from his grasp. "Tomorrow," he growled. "We'll go see Barnaby together."

"What for?" Griff's lip curled. "You think you'll get a better price?"

Fort slammed a callused palm over his mouth. "*Will you shut the fuck up?*" He dropped the ring into the soft pit at the base of Griff's throat, then held up the other hand, fingers spread. "Put it on for me."

Griff stared, saying nothing, but gradually his body relaxed beneath Fort's, his thighs slipping open to cradle the other man's hips. "You like it then?" he said, his breath coming warm and quick against Fort's palm. "It's all right?"

Fort shifted his fingers to grip Griff's chin, rocking his head to and fro. "It's fine," he said softly. "Idiot. Now do what you're told."

Griff's eyes opened very wide, but he said nothing, only biting his lip as he fumbled for the ring and slid it onto the smallest finger of Fort's left hand where it fit snugly, lying flat, gleaming against the olive skin.

"I knew gold would suit you," Griff said with satisfaction. Then he frowned. "But why do you want to take it back?"

Fort snorted. "I don't." He bent his head to nibble at the long muscle in Griff's neck. Automatically, the other man tilted his head, murmuring his pleasure in soft curses.

Fort's heartbeat slammed in his ears, but this was right, he knew it to his very bones. *I give you joy*, Holy Lufra had told him long ago in a dream – and so She had. His joy was lying beneath him, smelling of greasepaint and breathing a little too fast.

He placed his lips next to Griff's ear. "I'm going to buy another one, exactly the same. For you." Beneath him, every muscle in Griff's body locked up. "Will you – will you wear it?"

Griff reached up to take two fistfuls of Fort's thick dark hair, yanking his head around until they were nose to nose. "You stupid fucker," he said with tremendous affection. "What do you think?"

Fort ground their hips together, sliding the rigid length of cock against cock. "I think your ass is mine."

"Now and forever." Griff pulled him down into a kiss that started as a carnal battle of tongues and teeth, before – strangely – gentling to tender nibbles and licks. "Love you," Griff whispered against Fort's lips. "Fuck me."

When Fort made a hungry noise in his throat, crushing him into the mattress, Griff's ass clenched with mingled lust and apprehension. Twister, the mood his lover was in, this was going to hurt so very, very good.

He cleared his throat. "Wait."

Fort frowned, a growl rumbling in his chest. Oh gods, that fellwolf thing. It got Griff every time.

"Strip," Griff said, almost too breathless to speak. "Want to see."

Fort grinned, which only made him look more wolfish than ever. Sitting up, he ripped his shirt off, exposing a deep chest lightly furred with dark curls. "You too."

Oh, right. Griff had been so lost in the other man, he'd forgotten he was still wearing his costume. Quickly, he kicked away his boots and peeled off the tights. Then he crossed his arms and hauled the clinging, sequined vest over his head. Dropping it over the side of the bed, he leaned back against the pillows, opening his arms and spreading his thighs, wanton and loving it, reveling in the heat in Fort's eyes, the flush on his cheeks.

"C'mon," he said. "You want it? Come and get it."

Fort grabbed the pot of ointment from the nightstand and came down over Griff in a rush, his chest a wall of unyielding muscle. "Hold this." Shoving the pot into Griff's hand, he slithered down the bed and without any kind of preliminary, inhaled the entire length of Griff's cock, all the way to the root.

"Twister!" Griff reared up, grabbing Fort's hair.

Fort mumbled something that sounded like a half-hearted complaint, the vibration sending sparks of erotic delight dancing along Griff's shaft. He shuddered. Fort started sucking hard and fast, his cheeks hollowed with effort.

Fuck! Gods, Fort. Ah, shit!" Griff's eyes rolled in his head, spinning faster than the wheel in the gamblers' tent.

As abruptly as he'd begun, Fort stopped, pulling back.

Bereft of all that delicious wet warmth, Griff's cock bounced against his belly, rosy-red and spit shiny. "Aargh!" He made a desperate grab for it, but Fort's strong fingers closed around the base, squeezing.

"It's my natal day, isn't it?" Fort said, ignoring Griff's futile attempts to loosen his grip. "So I get what I want, right?"

"Uh, yeah. Godsdammit, let go!"

Fort did so, standing to peel off of his trews with remarkable speed.

Griff growled, reaching for all that hard warm flesh, but Fort gripped his wrist and hauled him up to his knees, chest to chest. Their noses bumped. "I want – I want –"

Breaking off, he flopped down on his back, pulling Griff over him.

Grinning and breathless, Griff straddled Fort's hips and twisted the lid off the little pot. He liked it this way, his lover hard and wide and deep inside him—so gorgeously deep. In fact, if he were honest, he could say he loved it, because he could drive them both mad, rising and falling with an acrobat's supple strength, adding the occasional swivel and rock. When he got it just right—ah, the rewards! The fabulous excruciating pressure behind his balls each time Fort's broad crown slid back was insanely good, but the best part was when the big man broke, as he inevitably did. Fort would shudder, muscles rippling. Then he'd rear up, swearing, and fold Griff into his arms, welding them together into a single shaking orgasmic whole. Griff would wind his arms and legs around that broad solid body and cling while they bucked and jerked together and his world exploded around him.

Oh, yes.

"No." Fort grabbed his wrist again.

Griff gazed into eyes gone smoky dark with lust, pupils blown wide. "What?"

Fort just stared back, a slow flush crawling up over his neck and cheeks. He opened his mouth, then closed it again, cleared his throat.

Something hot and sinuous curled low in Griff's belly, a beautiful suspicion. "I have to be sure," he said softly. "Say the words."

"Little shit." Hooking a hand behind Griff's neck, Fort pulled him down. Turning his head, he buried his nose behind Griff's ear and rumbled, "Fuck me." By way of punctuation, he nipped the earlobe, a sharp sweet sting.

Griff grinned. "Bastard." No reason to make it easy. "How do you want it?"

An aching pause. "Like this. Face to face."

Griff pulled back, more than a little startled. "You sure? We've never done it that way, but if—"

"My Natal Day, my choice. Right?" Fort's glare softened, his voice dropping to a husky whisper. "*Griff...*"

"Hang on." Griff helped himself to a sweet tangling of tongues, then slithered down his lover's body, loving the resistance of hair-dusted muscle and hard bone beneath him. Shoving at Fort's legs, he murmured, "Open up." He nipped at the smooth vulnerable skin on the inside of a brawny thigh.

A momentary hesitation and Fort complied.

"Going to be so good," crooned Griff, making good use of the ointment pot. He teased with one finger, then two, circling and massaging. Wrapping his other fist around Fort's cock, he grinned and stroked, lingering over it.

"Better be," Fort grunted, but his eyelids fluttered as Griff pressed further in with a questing finger. "Get on with it."

"If you say so." Griff slathered himself with slippery stuff, then leaned in to angle his crown over the smooth skin behind the other man's scrotum. He rubbed. "Oh yeah." Slick hot tingles the length of his cock, his balls a sullen, demanding weight.

Biting his lip, he pushed in the first delicious clinging inch. Twister, he'd do this right or die trying. The breath rasped in his throat.

Fort's eyes opened, only a thin rim of gray visible around the pupils. "More," he growled. Tilting his hips, he wrapped a powerful leg around the other man's hips, pulling him in hard.

With a thrilling rush, Griff slid in, balls deep. "Ah, fuck!"

He clenched his jaw so hard it hurt. Gods, it was hot in there, a glove of living flexing muscle that squeezed and constricted, so perfect it made him light-headed with lust. Forcing himself to concentrate, he pulled back, then pressed back in, until he had a good rhythm going, deep and powerful.

Fort made no sound, only stared into Griff's eyes, breathing hard, powerful fingers digging into his hips. Griff would have bruises on the morrow, but that was a vague, peripheral concern, inconsequential. A little unnerved by the silence, he panted, "Good?"

Fort's whole face lit up as if he'd been illuminated from within. Griff hoped to the gods he'd be the only one to see that expression, ever. As it was, he knew he'd take the image with him to the grave.

"Fuck, yes," Fort rumbled. "C'mere."

The big man hooked a hand behind Griff's neck and tugged until they were nose to nose, their bellies sealed together with sweat and pre-come, Fort's cock compressed between them. "Kiss me," he breathed into Griff's mouth, thrusting up with his hips. "Fucking fuck me."

Griff didn't think it was possible to get harder, but he felt himself swell. Spots danced before his eyes. In desperation, he picked up the pace, changing the angle, probing.

"Aargh!" Fort writhed, groaning. "Lufra's tits! There, right there!"

Griff's laugh came out more like a sob. Swooping, he took the other man's mouth, while his hips hammered and his climax shimmered just out of reach, a white-hot burn flaring at the base of his spine, sparking in his balls, seething and boiling and driving him mad.

He had to ... had to ... He redoubled his efforts, pushing Fort ruthlessly, gripping his shoulders for extra leverage.

Fort's pelvis lifted clean off the bed and his legs clamped hard around Griff's hips. Groaning his pleasure into his lover's mouth, he shuddered and jerked, gripping so hard Griff's ribs creaked. In a series of spasms, sticky warmth spread between them.

If he'd had a single thought to spare, Griff would have been grateful, but his whole world had narrowed down to the ecstatic rush of seed that surged from his balls to his cock, spurting out of him in long rapturous pulses.

"Fort!" He wailed and thrashed as he spilled, stars exploding behind his eyelids. "Fuck! Ah, gods, gods!"

Every muscle in his body went limp. Twister, so good. He buried his nose in Fort's neck and simply concentrated on breathing, while the sweetest parade of aftershocks quivered down his spine and nestled like honey in his belly.

Fort turned his head so his lips brushed Griff's temple. His chest rose and fell as if he'd been running. "Yours," he said, his voice low, but perfectly clear. "Always."

"I know," Griff said, too wrung out to quibble. "Me too."

Relief and pleasure combined in a long sigh that felt like it started from the soles of his feet. His spine had turned to warm putty. It felt...nice. "Can't move yet. Sorry." And that was a lie if ever there was one. On top of Fort was such a fine place to be, there was nothing to be sorry about.

"I'll get up in a minute." Fort yawned. "Clean up..."

"Mmm." Griff nuzzled, inhaling sweat and spice and the man he loved. "Happy –" A huge yawn caught him unawares. " – Natal Day."

"Was good." Fort slid a big warm palm the length of Griff's spine and cupped a taut buttock. "Mmm." His breath deepened, becoming a soft snore. The guttering lamp flared once and then again, spotlighting his splayed hand, the gentle possessive grip. When the soft light slid over the ring on his little finger, the gold gleamed, the monogram engraved on it showing clearly – two letters, gracefully and inextricably intertwined, an F and a G.

With a soft hiss, the lamp gave up, plunging the van into darkness.

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