

PARTNERS

BY KHYLARA



A MUNCH/FIN '7' STORY COLLECTION

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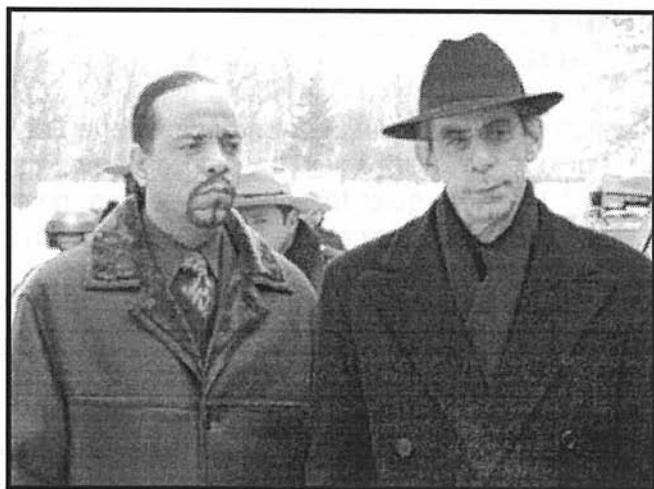
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THE SURPRISE

John Munch paused in front of the shop window, staring at the neon sign as he pondered what he was about to do. "I can't believe I'm actually considering something like this," he muttered to himself as he gathered his courage. It was an insane idea, quite possibly one of the craziest things he had ever considered doing. God only knew why he was.

But then he remembered why, and a fond smile appeared on his face. *He really liked the idea*, he thought, a wave of desire washing over him. *The look on his face when I said I'd think about it...right before he jumped me...he lit up like the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree.* To see that look on his partner's face again, Munch would do just about anything.

Including this, he decided with a nod, making a final decision. Before he could change his mind, he pushed open the door and went inside.

The brightly lit tattoo parlor was simply laid out with the multi-colored artwork on the white walls being the main focus. In one corner was a black leather couch and coffee table overflowing with various magazines. In the other corner, a computer and a cash register shared space on top of a long glass case filled with unusual bits of jewelry. Both flanked a rainbow-beaded curtain leading to a back room.

"Be out in a second!" Munch heard from the vicinity of the back room. "Take a look around!"

Taking off his hat, Munch laid it on the glass and peered inside. Rings and barbells of all shapes, sizes and colors glittered merrily in the bright light. He stepped away, momentarily overwhelmed. *Maybe Barry can recommend something.*

Jus then a tall bald man dressed in a tank top and jeans came through the beaded curtain. "Sorry for the...John!" He wrapped his tattoo-covered arms around the detective, enveloping him in a bear hug that took Munch's breath away. "How in the hell have you been, man? Haven't seen you around her in a fucking dog's age."

"Been good. Been busy," Munch said, backing away a little to catch his breath. He looked around again. "You look like you're doing well."

"Making money hand over fist. Everybody wants a little color or something shiny these days," Barry said cheerfully, gesturing around the store. "Just finished expanding last month. Hired a new piercer girl, two new artists. Had to so I could keep up."

Munch looked around again. The place was empty except for the two of them. "Pretty quiet now."

"Middle of the week during the day? Of course it's quiet. Try coming back on a Saturday night in the summer. You can't get in the door." Folding his arms, he leaned against the glass counter top. "So...

what brings you here, John? Case?"

Munch forced himself to shake his head. "No. actually, it's a... well... it's a little more personal than that." Taking a deep breath, he blurted it out. "I'm looking for a piercing."

Barry's eyes widened. "For you?" Munch nodded. "Gotta tell ya, John... you're one of the last people I'd peg for a little steel."

Munch felt his ears begin to burn with embarrassment. "Yeah... well... what can I say? Things change."

"Not that much," Barry countered with a knowing little smile. "Not unless there's a reason." There was a pause. "Let me guess... new girl has a little bling that presses your buttons and when she saw your reaction she mentioned that seeing you with a piercing would get her hotter than New York in August." His smile became wider, turning into a grin. "Am I right?"

"Close," Munch admitted. He threw caution to the winds; Barry was an old friend who knew when to keep his mouth shut. He would keep this quiet if asked. "New guy."

A surprised look appeared on the tattoo artist's face. "Well, I'll be damned," he said softly. "I figured you were a closet case, but I never thought you'd actually do anything about it because of everything." He leaned closer. "So does this mean I get to ask you

nosy questions?"

Munch rolled his eyes and frowned. "No." He gestured to the glass case. "So you gonna help me here or what? All this is a little confusing."

Barry considered the other man for a long moment before letting out a sigh. "Okay... sure. Since I'm not going to get anything else out of you right now." He gestured to the case. "First things first. What were you thinking of putting a hole in?"

John ducked his head, his cheek flaming. "Nipple," he muttered.

Barry suddenly grinned, making a show of cupping a hand around his ear. "What was that, John? I can't hear you."

Munch glared at him. "My nipple," he repeated a little louder, grateful that at least there wasn't anyone in the store to witness his embarrassment.

Barry couldn't help snickering at the detective's obvious discomfort. "You know, you're really cute when your ears get all red."

"I'm so glad this is amusing you," Munch replied dryly.

"Sorry, John, couldn't resist." Barry turned his attention to the case, gesturing with a beringed finger. "This row here is for nipples. Were you looking for something in particular?"

Munch shrugged. "Not really sure. Something that's not obvious under my clothes, for one thing." He tapped on the glass, indicating a shiny gold hoop. "My guy...he has one like this."

"If you want matching ones he'd have to come in so I can see it," Barry said. "That's one gold. I don't have a lot of call for gold."

Munch thought for a moment before shaking his head. "No. He can pull that off. I can't." He paused, considering. "Just...something not obvious. Simple. He likes simple."

The smile on Barry's face returned. *Smitten*, he thought. He had never seen his friend love struck before. "Simple, huh? Well, let's see...stainless steel is pretty simple. Clean, easy to care for. And barbells are simple, too. Can't tell you're wearing them under clothes, either. Not if you wear them loose like you do." Barry straightened, spreading his arms. "Can you tell I have them in?"

Munch forced himself to take a closer look. "Barely."

"And that's only because this is white and pretty tight," Barry said. "There's also less chance of it snagging on anything because it's close to the body." He paused. "Popular for a first time piercing if that makes any difference to you."

"Not really." Munch closed his eyes for a moment as he tried to picture his lover's reaction. *He really did*

like the idea, he thought. *Kept telling me what he'd do if I got one. Kept showing me, too.* The memory made him smile.

A tap on the glass counter dragged him out of his thoughts. "John? If you're going to be daydreaming about loverboy I can come back later."

Munch resisted the urge to smack the smirk off of his friend's face. "I'm just... I was... never mind." He turned his attention back to the body jewelry under the glass. "As an expert in this area, what would you recommend?"

Barry immediately took out several barbells and put the cases on top of the glass. "Any one of these would be good. Have to get your shirt off to see for size." He paused. "Well? Do you want to come back and do this now? Or do you need to think about it?"

Munch didn't hesitate. "No. Let's do this now." *While I still have the nerve*, he thought as he picked up his hat and followed Barry into the back room.

Barry indicated the barber's chair in the middle of the small room. "Strip down to your waist and have a seat," he said as he put the small jewelry cases down and turned to the sink. "You can hang everything up on the hooks by the door."

Munch did as he was told, taking the time to look around the room as he did so. "Did you draw all these?" he asked, indicating the brightly colored flash on the walls.

"Most of them. All the artists have their own workspace. This is mine." After washing his hands, Barry turned toward Munch. His eyes widened. "Damn, but you're pale. What are you – part vampire?"

Munch frowned as he sat down. "Can we just do this without the editorial comments?"

Barry shrugged as he sat down on a stool and wheeled himself over. "All I'm saying is you might want to get out in the sun a little more often. Your man might appreciate you having some color."

"My man likes me fine the way I am," Munch retorted as he watched Barry hold up the tiny cases to his chest. "What are you doing?"

"Trying to see which one will fit the best. Don't want it too loose." He put the smallest one up to Munch's chest and nodded. "This one should work. Okay with you?" He held it up so the detective could see.

John took one look at the stainless steel barbell and nodded. "Yeah. That's good."

"Okay." He put it down and picked up a bottle of antiseptic and a gauze pad. "Next question... which nipple? Or should I just surprise you?"

Munch thought for a moment. "Left. I wear my holster on the right." He nearly jumped out of his chair when Barry passed the cold, wet pad over his nipple. "Damn!"

"Sorry, John. Just sterilizing the area." Barry snapped on a pair of latex gloves and picked up a long needle. "Okay... now for this part you might want to close your eyes if you're squeamish. There's a numbing agent in the disinfectant, so it shouldn't hurt too bad." He paused expectantly. "Last chance to back out."

Munch closed his eyes and conjured up a mental image of his lover. "Do it," he muttered through gritted teeth, clutching the chair's armrests for good measure.

A moment later he felt a sharp prick on the left side of his chest. "Okay, John. Needle's in." Barry's voice was quiet and calm. "Barbell's coming in a minute. How're you doing?"

"Not that bad, actually," John managed to get out, taking a deep breath. "Thought it would be worse."

"Everybody says that." Barry's voice came closer. "Okay. Here it goes." A brief stab of pain followed by a dull ache hit Munch seconds later. "There you go. Open your eyes and take a look."

Munch did so, studying his reflection in the mirror. "Looks good, Barry. Thanks." He began to get dressed.

Barry watched for a moment before stripping off his gloves. "Wait a second. Come here." He taped another piece of gauze over the piercing. "Wash it gen-

tly with soap and water and don't be surprised if there's a little blood. It' gonna take six to eight weeks for it to heal fully, but your guy should be able to have a little fun with it before then. Give it a week or so and tell him to be careful." Barry grinned. "And if it gets red or infected, go to the doctor and come back."

Munch nodded. "Figured that. Anything else?"

"Leave the damn thing in until it heals. You take it out, the hole will close up and I'll have to redo it." He paused. "Got all that?"

"Yeah." Slipping his suit jacket back on, he tightened the knot in his red tie. "Thanks, Barry."

Barry ushered him out of the back room, giving him a smirk and a wink as he did so. "Not a problem. Hope your guy enjoys it."

Munch flushed. "I'm sure he will." Pausing in front of the cash register, he pulled out his wallet. "So how much do I owe you?"

To the detective's surprise, Barry shook his head. "Put it away. After what you and your partner did for me when you found the bastard who bashed my guy, I owe you one."

"I was doing my job," Munch protested. "You don't owe me anything."

The tattoo artist shook his head again. "I said put it

away. Seeing you blush like a teenager copping a feel was payment enough." There was a pause. "And maybe if you at least tell me the name of your new guy?"

Munch considered the request for a long moment as he slowly put his wallet away. "You've met him already," he finally said. "He was with me the last time I was here."

Barry's eyes widened in surprise. "Your partner? The smoldering black guy?" He let out a whistle. "I thought I saw something when you two were around, but he kept shutting it down whenever you looked at him. Figured he had the hots for you and you were oblivious." He gave Munch a clap on the shoulder that nearly bowled the detective over. "Glad to see that ain't the case. Congrats." He paused. "So the piercing..."

"Is a surprise," Munch finished.

"Well... if the way he was looking at you is any indication, he'll nail you to the mattress the minute he sees it." Barry made a show of looking Munch up and down. "I know I would if I wasn't already head over heels."

"Well, then... it's a good thing we're both spoken for, isn't it?" Munch replied, keeping his tone light as he put his hat back on. He shook Barry's hand. "Thanks again."

"My pleasure, John. Come by one night with your

guy one night and we'll go have a beer." A mischievous look suddenly appeared on his face. "And you can tell me how much your partner liked it."

"Don't count on it. I don't kiss and tell." Just then two young men wearing jean jackets and blue spiked hair came in to look at flash on the wall and Munch took the opportunity to duck out before Barry could grill him any more.

He headed down the street to the subway, the dull ache in his chest reminding him with every step what he had done – and who he had done it for. *Can't wait to see his face when he sees it*, John thought as a smile crossed his face, his mind already full of the delicious, erotic implications of his actions.



It was a week after when Munch felt a breath of hot air against his right ear. "Missed you, baby," Odafin Tutuola whispered, taking the opportunity to brush a kiss against John's silvering temple.

Munch turned to meet his lover's dark eyes. "I've been right here every day," he reminded playfully. "Maybe you need to borrow my glasses."

"You know what I mean," Fin countered, his own tone light. "Missed being with you... waking up next to you...feeling those fine hands all over me, driving me wild." His voice dropped even lower so that Munch was the only one who could hear him. "And I definitely miss waking you up in the morning my fa-

vorite way."

A shiver went through Munch's spine as he remembered what his partner's favorite way was. "You have to do this in the squad room, don't you?" he countered. "What if someone sees you pressing my buttons?" They were only out as a couple to their captain and the other two detectives, Olivia and Elliot. Everyone else considered them partners on the job and nothing more.

"Nobody's around. And you can always pull away," Fin reminded him.

Munch made no move to do so, however. Instead, he reached around and put his hand over Fin's. "Missed you, too," he said, leaning into his lover's touch. "Damn this case."

"And every other one keepin' you from me," Fin continued, planting another kiss in another kiss in his lover's hair. "Been too damn long a week without you."

A warm feeling filled John's heart at the softly spoken words. Fin talked to him on a regular basis and the warm affection never failed to get to him. "Yeah. I definitely know the feeling." He looked up, a smile crossing his face when he met his lover's warm brown eyes. "What's say we get out of here and grab a beer?"

Fin shook his head. "Much rather get outta here and grab you. Like that idea a hell of a lot better." His

voice dropped to a silky smooth purr as he blew another kiss into Munch' ear. "Don't you, baby?"

God, what he does to me, Munch thought as he pushed his arousal away through sheer force of will. *I wish I could get to him the same way.* Fin, however, was notoriously difficult to rattle that way. He had tried to more than once.

Just then he remembered the piercing and the fact that due to their crazy schedules his lover hadn't seen it yet. "Hell, yeah," he said, pulling away enough to stand up. "Besides, I have a surprise for you."

"Yeah?" Fin's face lit up as he grabbed his own coat. "What is it?"

"If I told you before I showed you then it wouldn't be a surprise now, would it?" Munch teased as he put on his hat and shrugged on his overcoat. "You'll just have to wait and see." Considering his partner for a moment, he decided to tease him just a little. "I'll say this much, though... I think you'll like it."

"Yeah?" At John's nod fin began making his way to the elevator. "Better not make me wait too long then," he warned playfully, looking back at the older man as he followed.

"Not long," Munch promised, the anticipation already singing through him. "Just until we get back to your place."



"Figures that today of all days we'd get caught in the traffic jam from Hell," Fin grumbled as he unlocked his apartment door and the two men stepped inside. "Two hours to get fourteen blocks is stupid."

"I'll agree with you there," Munch said as his overcoat and hat went on the brass coat rack by the door. "I can't remember the last time I saw it that bad."

Fin hung up his coat as well. "And you sittin' next to me didn't help."

Munch paused in the middle of taking off his suit jacket. "I don't remember doing anything."

"You didn't." Just then Fin reached over and pulled his partner into his arms. "Except look damn fine."

A smile crossed John's face as he slid his arm around Fin's waist and looked him over. "You look pretty damn fine, too. I like the gangsta street look." He paused. "And it's a hell of a lot easier to get you out of them than those damn three piece suits."

Reaching up, Fin undid his lover's tie and tossed it over his shoulder. "So show me how much easier and I might wear this stuff from now on." He undid the top two buttons of his lover's shirt.

Munch put his hands over Fin's, stopping him before he could go any further. "In the bedroom," he said,

his voice firm. "Remember the last time we jumped each other in the living room? Because my knees haven't forgotten."

Taking Munch's hand in his, Fin began leading him down the short hallway. "You keep sayin' you're old and you're gonna get a spanking?"

"Is that a promise?"

Once in the bedroom, Fin slammed the door behind them both and pulled John back into his arms. "You know something? You a damn tease."

Munch couldn't help smiling at that. "Am I? I can't think where I learned it from." He drew Fin closer, pulling into a slow, tongue-tangling kiss.

Groaning, Fin grabbed his partner's shoulders and pushed him against the closed door, turning the kiss hard and passionate. He slid his hands down Munch's chest, about to undo more shirt buttons when he felt something hard against his palm. He stopped, suddenly confused. "That ain't your nipple."

Munch grinned at the look on his partner's face. "You know, you look cute all confused. I'll have to try doing it more often."

Fin backed away a little as he tried to guess what was hiding under Munch's black shirt without actually looking. Finally he gave up. "What in the hell have you got under there?"

"Your surprise." Munch held out his arms in open invitation. "Go ahead. Take a look."

Fin quickly unbuttoned his lover's shirt and pushed it off his shoulders. It fell to the floor unnoticed when the younger man saw the barbell glint in the dim light. "John?" he finally said when he found his voice, his dark eyes wide with a mix of shock and lust. "Is that... did you...."

"Yeah." Munch's voice was soft. "What you said before when I saw yours... I couldn't stop thinking about it. About... what you said you'd do." He ducked his head, hoping for the thousandth time that he hadn't made a mistake and read the signals wrong. "So I thought... I was hoping...."

He didn't get a chance to finish. A hand on his chin tilted Munch's head back up and he was gifted with the biggest grin he had ever seen before Fin captured his lips again in another hard kiss.

Before he knew what had hit him, Munch found himself flat on his back on the bed with his partner hovering over him as his breath was kissed away. "So I guess that means you like it, huh?" he asked when Fin drew away enough to let him take in some air.

"Better than like," Fin corrected as he took off his lover's glasses and set them on the bedside table. "That has got to be the hottest thing I've ever seen with you. When did you get it done?"

"Last week, when I was off." Munch slid his hands

down his lover's back, finally grasping the hem of his shirt. "Move so I can take this off you. I want to see you with yours."

Taking Munch's wrists in his hands, Fin firmly pinned them to the bed, making a show of looking his lover over as he licked his lips. "I ain't done with you yet. Gotta do all those things I said I'd do if you got that done." He dropped his head down to nuzzle Munch's ear. "Gonna drive you wild like you do to me every time I look at you."

Munch sighed as he tilted his head back to give his lover easier access. "God... you already do," he gasped as a hot, wet tongue traced around the edge of his ear. "Odafin...."

"John... baby..." Fin murmured as he moved lower, kissing his way down his lover's long neck and over one shoulder. His tongue darted out to swipe at the unadorned nipple, drawing out a low moan in response. "My baby."

John shivered, the possessiveness of his lover's tone going right through him. "Yours," he agreed, squirming under Fin's touch. "Only yours." His fingers dug into the comforter for support as Fin moved over his chest, leaving little nips and kisses in his wake. "God, Fin... please...."

"I'm gettin' there," Fin promised in between kisses. "You just lie there and look fine like you always do." He paused, hovering over Munch's pierced nipple. "Can I touch it? Does it still hurt?"

Munch shook his head. "No. Barry said be gentle though." He gasped as his lover's tongue slowly, teasingly caressed the little pink nub. "God... yes...."

Fin drew away a little, a smirk crossing his face. "Like that, don't you, baby? Can see you do. I know what presses your buttons." One hand slowly slid down Munch's torso, pausing at his belt buckle. "Want more?"

"Yes," Munch said immediately, eyes wide. He arched into Fin's touch in an effort to get his lover's hands where he wanted them most. "Everything. Want everything from you."

Grinning, Fin sat up enough to strip off his shirt, the small gold ring that had sparked all this glowing softly in the dim light. "This the everything you mean?"

Grabbing Fin's arm, Munch pulled him back down into his arms. "Fucking tease," he muttered as he fumbled with his partner's belt buckle. "Have I told you lately how hot you are when you look like this?"

"Yeah, but you can say it again." Dark eyes looked over John possessively. "You look pretty smokin', too. Especially with this." He brushed a finger against the piercing, drawing out another long, low moan from the older man. "Yeah, definitely."

Finally undoing Fin's belt and zipper, Munch reached into his lover's black jeans, his fingers brushing

against the hardness contained within. "That's what I'm looking for," he breathed, watching the passion ignite in his lover's face. "Love that look on your face."

"Love your hands on me," Fin murmured as he moved his hips, turning the touch into a firmer caress. "Those long fingers of yours, they get at me every damn time."

Munch smirked. "I can think of one thing I'd like to get at me," he said, petting Fin's cock for emphasis.

"Oh, you being impatient now, ain't you?" Forcing himself to pull away fully, Fin quickly stripped off the rest of his clothes. "Well we'll just see how impatient I can make you." His hands went back to the waistband of his lover's black pants.

Moments later, John was pushed back against the pillows, his clothe on the floor and an equally naked Odafin pressed against him. "Now this is much better," he said as he let his hands wander.

"Oh, no. Don't you go thinkin' stuff like that," Fin warned as he took Munch's hands and once again pinned them to the bed. "Your hands stay there where I can see them. Least until I'm done with you." He trailed his lips down his lover's torso. "Think I stopped about... here."

Munch squirmed impatiently as Fin's goatee tickled his belly. "Fin..." he breathed, his fingers once again digging into the cover in an attempt to obey.

"Patience, baby. I got you," Fin crooned as his hands slid over his partner's slender hips. "Gonna take care of you, I promise." Ducking his head down, he licked away a drop of moisture from the tip of John's erection. "Sweet."

"You're sweet, too if I remember correctly," Munch managed to get out. He reached over, brushing his fingers over his lover's face. "Let me have a taste of you."

"Maybe later, when I'm through makin' you yell your head off." He saw Munch's eyebrows go up. "What? Think I can't do it?"

"I have no doubt that you can," John answered. "Just wondering when you're going to get around to it, that's all."

Fin stared at him for a long moment. "You did not just say that."

A small little smile appeared on the older man's face. "Yes, I did. What are you going to do about it?"

Fin didn't answer. Instead, he gave his lover a cheeky grin and another kiss before ducking his head back down. He slid his mouth over Munch's erection, not stopping until it was halfway down his throat.

Munch let out a long, low groan as his head fell back against his pillows. "Oh, God... I should know bet-

ter... than to try challenging you to something."

Fin drew away for a moment. "Yeah, you should." He went back to licking his lover's leaking cock like it was an ice cream cone. "John Munch... my favorite flavor."

Munch couldn't help the whimper that escaped him as he sat up enough to watch his cock slide in and out of his partner's mouth. "You would talk like that," he breathed. "You do it just to get to me, don't you?"

"Damn right," Fin said as he let Munch's erection go. Moving back into the older man's arms, he gave John another firm kiss. "Tell me what you want, baby. You want me to finish sucking you off? Or you wanna come another way?"

Munch wiggled impatiently under him, his cock aching, his entire body practically shaking with need. "Damn it, Fin... you **are** a goddamned tease!"

"And you love every minute of it." Fin gave Munch's pierced nipple a feather light caress, drawing out a longer, louder moan from his partner. "Bet I could make you come just by playin' with this some more."

Munch quickly shook his head. "No... not that way," he said, his eyes wide with lust and need. "Want... need you to... fuck, Fin. Just do me already."

"Thought I was doin' you," Fin teased, his dark eyes sparkling mischievously in the dim light. "Or at least

doin' something."

"Not...not what I meant." Munch clutched at his lover's broad shoulders as a pleading look appeared on his face. "In me. Want you in me." He wrapped his long legs around Fin for emphasis.

Smiling, Fin leaned down to give John another lingering kiss. "Anything my baby wants," he said softly as he reached for the bottle of lube sitting on the bedside table. Pouring some over his fingers, he reached in between Munch's legs. "Just let me get you ready. Don't want to hurt you."

"You could never hurt me." Munch's eyes closed as he felt two fingers ease their way in. "Oh... God... yes...."

"Like that, don't you, John?" Reaching up, Fin brushed a stray lock of graying hair out of the older man's eyes. "Can see you do. The look on your face... love it when you look like that." He slipped another greased finger in and was rewarded with a soft cry. "That's it, baby. You ready for me?"

Munch pushed against the finger probing him, forcing them in deeper. "Yes... God, Fin... please..."

"Shh. I gotcha." Removing his fingers, he pressed another kiss against John's parted lips. "Love you, baby. Love you so damn much." He paused, swallowing hard. "You don't know...."

Munch's eyes flickered open as he wound his arms

around Fin's neck. "Yes, I do," he whispered. "I love you, too." He pulled Fin into another kiss as the younger man slowly entered him.

Fin broke away once he was all the way inside, pausing to rest his forehead against John's. "So good, baby," he breathed. "So fucking hot... you with me, John? Baby?"

Munch began squirming under him again. "Just... please... shut up and move, damnit," he gasped, groaning when Fin began doing what he asked. "Yes... God... Odafin...."

Fin couldn't help a little moan of his own escaping him at the sound of his full name; his lover used it so rarely that it always managed to enflame him. "This what you want?" he asked as he picked up the pace, his own arousal growing by leaps and bounds as John moved his hips to meet his thrusts with some of his own. "Fuck... John...."

"Harder," Munch managed to get out through gritted teeth as he tried to hold back his building orgasm through sheer force of will. He needed to come so badly that he ached, but he wanted Fin with him. "Harder... want to come with you." A shudder ran through him; so close, he was so close... "Fin...."

"John!" Fin's yell echoed though the room as he managed one last deep thrust before his climax overtook him. Feeling his lover come deep inside of him triggered Munch's own orgasm; a loud cry escaped him as his fingers dug into broad shoulders,

holding onto the solid weight of his lover while his world spiraled out of control.

He came back to himself as Fin was scattering kisses all over his face. "John? Baby, you with me?"

"Yeah." Opening his eyes, Munch gave his lover a dazed smile. "Wow."

Fin couldn't help smirking a little. "Fireworks?"

"More like the Fourth of July and New Year's Day all rolled up into one." Munch let out a happy little sigh as he stretched. "God, what you do to me."

"More like what you did for me," Fin corrected, still grinning as he gave his lover's pierced nipple the briefest caress for emphasis. "Definitely inspiring."

A shudder ran through John's entire body as his arousal returned full force. "Jesus, Fin... what in the hell are you doing?"

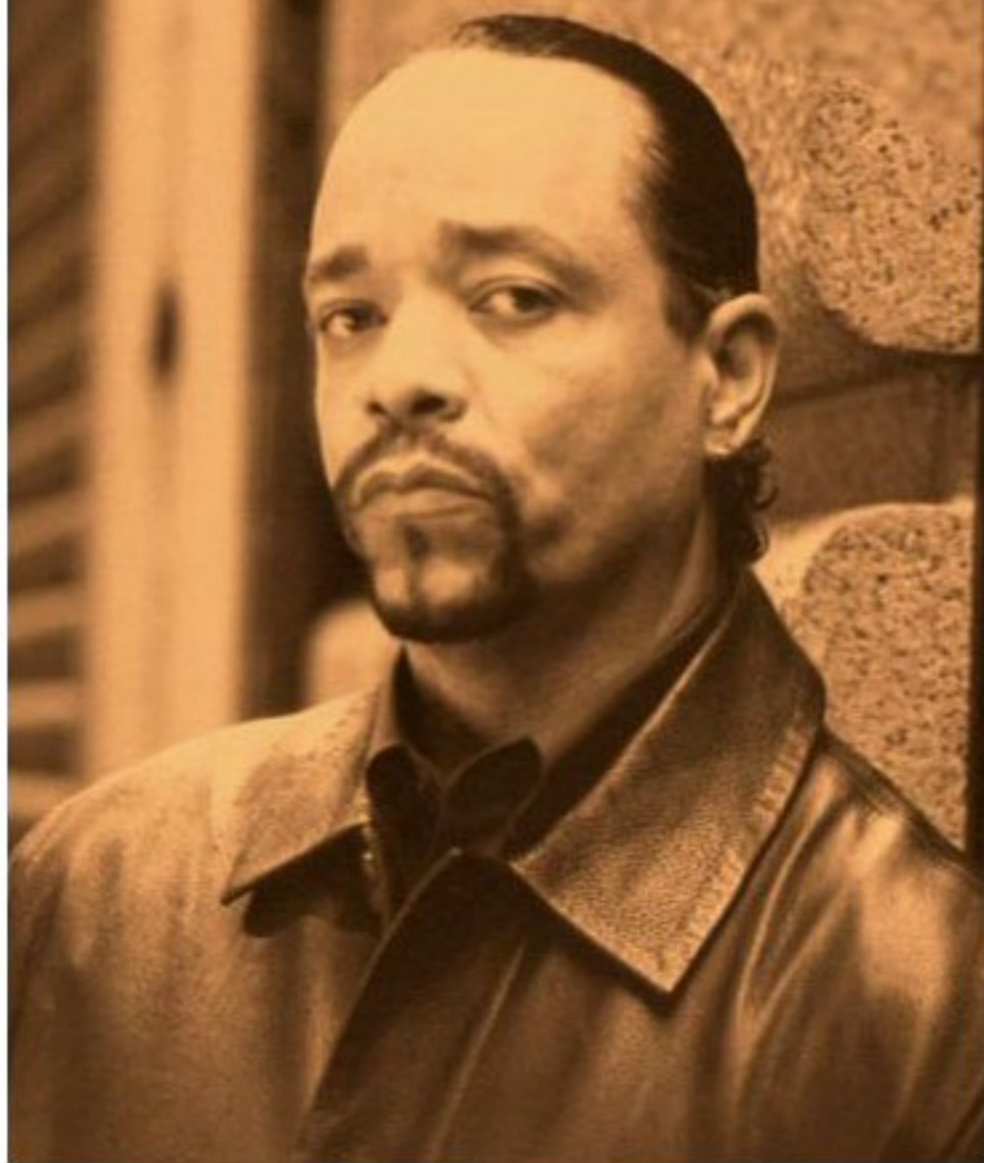
"Gonna drive you crazy some more," Fin said as his hands began wandering over the older man's body once again. "You gave me such a fine surprise that I think I wanna show you some of the stuff I've been plannin' on for awhile."

John's eyes went wide. "What kind of stuff?"

Leaning down, Fin gave John a long, tongue-tangling kiss. "Lie back and let me show you."

FIN

TUTUOLA



BEDSIDE

Odafin Tutuola paused at the doorway to his partner's hospital room, his heart lurching with every labored breath coming from the prone figure lying on the bed. For five days he had come in like clockwork, spending every spare moment he had at John Munch's bedside, waiting. Waiting for the older man's breath to change cadence and become steadier. Waiting for the fingers he held so carefully to tighten around his. Waiting for his partner, his love, his life, to open his eyes and smile.

Doc says he should've come out of it by now, he thought as he once again sat down in one of the hard plastic chairs and reached for his partner's hand. Sure he lost a lot of blood thanks to being shot by that punk ass kid. And the slam to the head he got going down didn't help none. But the doc says he's getting better. No reason for him not to open his eyes.

"Hey, John," he said, pitching his voice just loud enough for Munch to hear. "I'm here, baby. Gonna sit here for a while, try again to get you wake up and talk to me. Been too quiet, not hearing you spout off one of your weird ass conspiracy theories." The black man let out a long, low sigh. "Hard to believe, but I'd welcome that right about now.

"The kid that shot you... he had his day in court this morning." Fin caressed the long fingers in his keep-

ing. "Gave a real sob story to the judge. Tears and everything. Said he didn't mean to do it, that he didn't know you was a cop. Forget the fact that every witness up there said you identified yourself. Apologized even." Fin snorted. "Judge didn't buy it. I know Casey didn't. They're holding him over, making him an adult. Minute he heard that, boy just went cold." The detective closed his eyes. "He knew what he done. Wasn't sorry for it, neither. Not really.

"Things have been quiet, otherwise. Catching up on reports... going out with either Elliot or Olivia. George wants me to talk to him. Captain, too. Said I'd do anything they wanted after you woke up for me." Fin paused. "Captain's understanding about that. Everybody has been. I think it's just 'cause they're all waiting for that other shoe to drop... seeing if you make it okay or not." Reaching over with his free hand, Fin brushed his fingers over Munch's too pale face. "Don't know you like I do. You're gonna be fine. All you gotta do is open your eyes." His voice dropped to the barest of whispers. "Come on, baby. Open those eyes."

He waited for a long moment, looking for any sign that he had been heard. Finally, he let out a heavy sigh and leaned over to kiss his partner's forehead. "It's okay, John. I can wait. Long as it takes, baby. I'll be here." He settled back in his chair, his fingers still entwined with Munch's.

He was dozing off when he felt the slightest pressure around his fingers. He moved closer, a grin crossing his face when he saw his partner's eyes flicker open.

"There's my baby," he said, his voice full of relief. "Bout time, too. Nearly scared me white, you did."

Munch's eyes went wide as he tightened his fingers around Fin's. "Fin?" His voice was so soft that his partner barely heard him. "Where... hurts...."

Fin leaned over him, brushing his hand through John's salt and pepper hair. "Shh. It's okay," he murmured, his heart aching at the fear he saw in his lover's eyes. "It's okay, John. I'm right here. You're at the hospital. You remember anything?"

Munch closed his eyes, his brow furrowing in concentration. "Little," he finally said. "That kid... the one who... he raped that other boy... he shot me."

Fin beamed in approval. "Got it in one, baby. We cornered him and neither one of us saw the gun until it was too late." He turned somber, ducking his head. "I'm sorry, John. I should've thought... never occurred to me he'd have a piece."

One of Munch's shaking hands reached up, brushing over Fin's face. "Don't," he breathed. "Not your fault. Nobody's fault." A lone tear slid down the older man's lined cheek. "Glad... glad it wasn't you... this time."

A warm feeling spread through Fin as he leaned down to kiss Munch's cheek, brushing the tear away. *He would think of that*, he thought, remembering when their roles had been reversed not too long ago. "Wish it hadn't been you," he said softly.

"Scared the hell out of me, thinkin' I could lose you."
He kissed his lover on the cheek again. "Just... don't do that again. Okay, John?"

A wan smile appeared on Munch's pale face.
"Promise," he whispered before winding a hand around Fin's neck and pulling him down for another kiss.

This one lingered and deepened, turning into the lengthy, tongue tangling sharing they both enjoyed. It took a muffled gasp from Munch to make Fin draw away, his brow furrowed in concern. "John? Baby?"

"Hurts," Munch gasped, grimacing. "Bad... Fin?"

He's feelin' it now that he's awake, Fin realized. "I'll get the doc. She said to when you woke up so she could check you over." He untangled his fingers from Munch's. " e right back." He strode out into the hall.

He came back moments later with a redheaded woman dressed in scrubs following him. "Woke up a little bit ago," he said as he came back to his partner's bedside. "And he's hurtin' pretty bad. John?"

Munch didn't say anything. His eyes were screwed shut and his breath came in labored gasps as he clutched at the hospital sheets. The pain he was in was obvious.

The doctor took one look and practically pushed Fin out of the room. "Wait outside," she ordered, her tone of voice stopping any argument in its tracks.

She gestured for one of the nurses to join her before firmly closing the door behind her.

After what seemed like an eternity to Fin, the doctor came back out. "You can go back in, Detective."

"How is he?" Fin asked, letting his worry show.

"We changed the dressing on the wound; it seems to be healing nicely. No sign of infection. And we gave him something for the pain, so don't be surprised if he seems a little disorientated," she explained. "I don't see why he can't go home in a few days, provided someone stays with him."

Fin nodded. "That won't be a problem, Doc. Thank you." He went back inside as she headed off down the hall.

Going back over to his lover's bedside, Fin took one of his hands. "Hey," he said softly, his voice gentle. "Feeling better?"

Munch opened his eyes halfway and gave the younger man a wan smile. "Yeah. The doc... she gave me some of the good stuff."

Fin couldn't help smiling at that. "Flying high, ain't you, baby?" he commented as he sat back down. "Just don't get too used to it. She said you'd be able to go home in a couple days and I'm gonna make sure you don't get nothin' stronger than aspirin."

"Yeah... I know. Feels good right now, though." John

suddenly blinked, his partner's words slowly sinking in. "Going home... with you?"

"Yeah, with me. Doc doesn't want you going home alone." Fin paused. "You got a problem with that?"

Munch shook his head. "No... no problem. Want to go home with you." He suddenly yawned, his eyelids drooping even further. "I think... I think I'm going to take a nap, now."

Reaching over, Fin brushed his fingers over his lover's face. "Yeah, you're tired, aren't you, baby?" he murmured. "Go on... go to sleep, John."

Munch's long fingered tightened around Fin's. "Stay?" he whispered hopefully. "Please?"

"You don't gotta ask. I ain't moving my ass from this chair," Fin quickly reassured him. "Close you eyes and sleep, John. I'll be here."

Satisfied, Munch did as he was told. "Good," he breathed. "Love you, Fin." He dropped off to sleep a moment later.

Fin waited until his lover was sound asleep before he leaned over and brushed a kiss across his pale cheek. "Love you, too, John," he whispered, letting relief steal over him at last now that he knew for sure that his lover was going to be okay. "Love you, too."

FORGET

Tiny hands.

It was the image of tiny hands, bloody and forever still, that jolted John Munch out of an already fitful sleep. He sat up, automatically looking over his shoulder to see if he had woken up the man sleeping next to him. He let out a sigh of relief when he saw that he hadn't. *Let him sleep*, he thought, discarding almost immediately the urge to wake him up. Leaning over, he brushed the lightest of kisses across his partner's brow. *He doesn't need to deal with all my shit on top of everything else that's been thrown at us lately. Let him sleep.*

Grabbing his glasses from the bedside table, he carefully got out of bed and made his way to the living room, pulling on his robe as he went. Curling up on the window seat, John leaned his aching head against the cool glass, staring blankly out at the rain as it fell onto the city below.

I should have done more, he thought, the words repeating over and over in his head as he berated himself. *Something... anything... even just a little bit sooner... it would have been enough if we had been even a little bit sooner... could have saved her if we had realized... not fallen for that bitch and her tricks.* He gazed down at his own empty hands. *No one should die like that... alone... and terrified... with no one to care. Especially such a little life... such a tiny*

little life. A lone tear slid unchecked down his cheek. God help me... I tried... but I should have done more.

"John?"

Munch looked up to see his partner, his lover standing at the entryway, looking befuddled with sleep and definitely confused. "I'm sorry," he murmured, his voice full of regret. "I didn't mean to wake you."

Odafin Tutuola came closer, sliding his hands over his lover's slumped shoulders. "You didn't. I just reached over and you weren't there." There was a pause. "Third time this week I've done that."

Munch turned back to stare at the falling rain. "Maybe I should just go back to my place and let you sleep." He tried to pull away.

Fin, however, tightened his hold by wrapping his arms around his lover's slender frame. "And maybe you should just stay where you are and talk to me. Might help." He planted a kiss in his lover's graying hair, his tone softening. "Tell me what's upsetting you, baby. And don't give me that bullshit about how you ain't, 'cause you are. I can always tell with you."

Munch was silent for a long moment before he slowly put his hands over the strong arms holding him close. "The case... I can't get it out of my head," he finally said, his voice so soft that Fin had to strain to hear. "Every time I close my eyes... I see her lying in that hellhole of an apartment... looking so still and

broken....”

“I know. I see her, too.” Fin pressed another kiss against the other man’s temple, remembering the horror they had found in that dank, cramped apartment and the look on John’s face when he had found what the woman living there had been trying to hide. “You gotta let it go, John. You’re gonna drive yourself crazy if you don’t.”

“I know. And I don’t know what it is about this one that got to me so bad. God knows we’ve seen just as terrible or worse. But I can’t just push it away.” John closed his eyes against the tears rising up in them, and when he spoke again, his voice was shaking. “Her hands... I keep seeing her tiny little hands reaching out to me.” He shook his head in an attempt to banish the image. “I should have done more.”

“Baby, you did everything possible and more,” Fin answered, his voice pitched to comfort, to soothe. “You gave that little girl probably the only warmth and kindness he ever had. You stayed with her, made sure she wasn’t ever alone or afraid. And when everything came down, you gave her justice.” He paused. “That angel baby’s at peace now, all because of you. You gotta believe that.”

“How can I when all I can think is if we had gotten there a little bit sooner she might be alive right now?” Munch shook his head again. “A day... even an hour or two....”

"You don't know that," Fin countered softly. "You were there when the ME gave us her report, same as me. You knew how bad she was. Lucky she survived as long as she did with what that bitch did to her." Fin tightened his hold on his lover. "You did all you could, John."

Munch's body sagged in Fin's arms. "But it wasn't enough, Fin," he breathed, choking on the words. "It wasn't enough."

Fin couldn't say anything after that, not when he knew how true his partner's words were. So he simply tightened his embrace even more, offering what comfort he could in the form of his touch, his love. He only hoped that it would be enough.

Finally, John pulled away a little, sniffing as he gathered himself together bit by bit. "I'm okay," he muttered, running a hand over his tear stained cheeks. "It's all right. I'm okay."

Fin snorted. "You are the worst damn liar I ever saw." He stepped around to give his lover a hard, searching look. "The last thing you are is okay right now."

John smiled wanly. "Would you settle for pulling myself together?"

"Maybe." Fin brushed his fingers through the older man's graying hair. "If you tell me what I can do to help." His voice dropped to a whisper. "Tell me what you need from me, baby."

John looked up, his eyes still shining with unshed tears. "I need to forget... even if it's just for tonight," he finally said, clinging to the younger man as if to a lifeline. "Can you help me do that?"

"Yeah, I think I can," Fin said softly, knowing what John was asking for and willing to give it. "You sure?" When the older man nodded, Fin leaned over and gave him a soft kiss. "Then come back to bed, baby. I'll take care of you."

"You always do," John murmured as he let himself be led down the short hallway. "Even when I'm being a complete ass, you're always there for me. No one else ever has been."

Doesn't say a whole hell of a lot about the four ex Mrs. Munchs. Or your family, Fin couldn't help thinking as he ushered his lover into the bedroom and shut the door behind them. "Always, John," he murmured, pulling Munch back into his arms. "Always. I love you."

"I love you, too." They came together in another kiss.

The kiss lengthened and intensified as they pulled at each other's robes. Munch managed to open his lover's first, exposing Fin's bare chest and black silk boxers to his hungry gaze. "God, I love it when you look like this," he murmured as he ran his hands over dark skin. "So fucking hot." He sank to his knees.

"John... baby...." Fin breathed, a shiver running through him as his lover's hands slid up his legs. "You don't have to."

"I know I don't," John said as he laid his cheek against the silk covering the younger man's groin, feeling the heat, the hardness contained underneath. He planted a kiss on his lover's belly before slowly pulling the shorts down to pool around Fin's bare ankles. "I want to." With that, he slid his mouth over Fin's hard cock.

Fin tilted his head back, letting out a groan as his partner's lips and tongue gently caressed him. "Damn, but you do that fucking good," he murmured as he ran his fingers through John's salt and pepper hair. Another moan escaped him as John ran his tongue over the flared head to get at the moisture leaking out. "So good, baby."

John let out a muffled moan of his own as he sucked, trying to get as much of Fin's cock that he could down his throat without choking. He loved doing this, the taste and feel of his lover's hardness turning him on like nothing else. He slid his hands around to squeeze Fin's ass, delighting in the shudder that he felt going through his partner's body. It felt so good, so perfect to be able to love his man like this....

A gentle tug on his hair caused him to pull away reluctantly. "Something I'm doing wrong?" he asked as he sat back on his heels and looked up, unable to

keep the smirk off his face.

"Hell, no," Fin said, his voice firm as he drew John to his feet, giving him a hard kiss for emphasis. "I just thought you wanted me to do you. Can't do that if you drink me down."

"No, you can't," John agreed. "I could do you, though." His hands returned to Fin's ass.

A powerful wave of arousal went through Fin as he pictured the two of them in bed, with him on his back taking everything John had to give and the older man deep inside him, doing what no one else could. It was tempting to take Munch up on it and spend the rest of the night yelling his head off while getting wonderfully, perfectly fucked. Very tempting.

Fin, however, knew better. "That ain't what you need, though. Is it, baby?" he asked softly. He smiled when John ducked his head and didn't answer. "Is it?"

After a moment, John shook his head. "No," he whispered, his cheeks bright red. "Need you."

Cupping Munch's face in his hands, Fin lifted his head up enough so that their eyes met. "Then you got me," he breathed, taking off the older man's glasses and putting them aside. "I'm right here." He pulled Munch into another hungry kiss.

Laying John back against the mound of pillows, Fin

quickly got rid of the rest of their clothes. "Love you, baby. Love you so much," he said as he pulled the bottle of lube out of the bedside table drawer and coated his fingers. Sliding his hand in between John's legs, he worked two fingers inside, grinning when John groaned and arched into his touch. "Gonna make you feel so fucking good... you like that, John?"

"Just... damnit, Fin... please...." He couldn't get the words out, managing only a frustrated whimper when Fin took his fingers away. He pulled his partner on top of him, wrapping his long legs around Fin's waist. "Please...."

Fin kissed him yet again. "Damn, but it gets to me when you beg," he said as he reached between them to coat his erection with lube. When he was slick enough, he moved into position, pausing long enough to give John yet another lingering kiss. "Love you, John. So damn much... I love you."

John wound his arms around his partner's neck. "I love you, too." He closed his eyes, letting out a soft little moan as Fin slowly, carefully entered him.

When he was all the way in Fin paused for a moment, willing himself back under control. "Fuck, but you feel good," he whispered, planting a kiss on the older man's brow before moving back to his lips. "John... you with me, baby?"

"Yes... move, damnit," Munch managed to get out as he began to squirm underneath the younger man.

"Please... I need...." His words were cut off when Fin moved his hips in one hard thrust. "God!"

"That what you had in mind?" Fin asked, grinning at the look of stunned pleasure on his lover's face.

"Want more?"

"Yes... fucking hell, Fin...." He cried out as Fin began a slow, gentle thrust that had him clawing at the sheets. "Yes...."

"Yes," Fin breathed, watching as John lost himself in his pleasure, in the very gift of his love, his touch. Knowing he could do this, that in spite of his lover's past he was the only one who could put that look on John Munch's face... it made his heart soar.

It also sent lust scorching through his veins like an out of control brushfire.

He reached between them to grasp John's erection, moving his hand up and down in a gentle caress. "I gotcha, John," he said before smothering his lover's moan with another kiss. "I'm here, baby. I'll catch you... just let it go."

John's eyes flickered open and met Fin's. "With me," he gasped even as a shudder went through him.

"Please... want you with me...."

Those words were enough to make Fin let out a groan of his own as he moved faster. "Love you, John. Love you so much, baby... gonna make you forget. You're gonna forget everything and everyone

except me." He leaned closer, his mouth against John's ear. "Cause I love you."

That was all John needed. Screaming his lover's name, he came hard, his world spinning out of control as he spilled himself all over Fin's fingers. Managing one last, hard thrust into the unresisting body under him, Fin climaxed as well, his lover's name a breathless whisper on his lips.

Fin let himself go limp after with John's arms still securely around him, holding him close. It took everything he had to lift up his head and press a gentle kiss against his lover's lips. "John? Still with me?"

"Yeah... I think... God." When John's eyes flickered open, they were wet with unshed tears. "Love you, Fin."

"Shh. I know." He quieted his partner's words with yet another kiss. "I know, John. And I love you, too." He drew away enough to clean them both up as best he could with a discarded t-shirt. Tossing it aside, Fin drew his lover back into his arms, his long fingers running through the older man's hair. "Close your eyes and get some rest, baby. I gotcha... and I ain't letting you go."

Snuggling close, Munch laid his head against Fin's chest, letting his lover's heartbeat lull him into closing his eyes. He drifted off to sleep moments later, and for the first time in three days, he didn't dream.

THE RING

"Hey. Leave that and come here."

Odafin Tutuola paused for a moment, a stack of dirty dishes in his hands. "Dishes ain't gonna wash themselves," he commented as he surveyed the man who had just sat down in the overstuffed recliner in the living room.

John Munch held out his hand. "I'll help you with them later. Just come here for a minute. I want to talk to you about something."

Fin's dark eyes widened in surprise as he set the plates in the sink and wiped his hands on a towel. "Must be important if you're volunteering to help me with the dishes instead of just watching me do them," he said as he walked over to the chair.

A smirk crossed John's face. "What can I say? I like watching you do the dishes. It's sexy."

Fin stared at him. "Me doing dishes is sexy?" he asked, wanting to make sure he heard his lover correctly. When Munch nodded, the black man shook his head in disbelief. "Always knew you were weird. How in the hell is watching me do dishes sexy?"

Munch shrugged. "I don't know. I think it's a combination of the great view of your ass and you being elbow deep in soap bubbles."

"Have to remember that one." Fin paused. "What did you want to talk about?"

Instead of answering him immediately, Munch made a beckoning motion with his fingers. "Sit with me."

Fin raised an eyebrow. "I'll end up squashing your bony ass."

Munch rolled his eyes. "There's plenty of room for both of us. And you can squash my bony ass if you're so inclined. I'm not made of glass." He paused, his gaze softening behind his glasses. "And I want to hold you for a while."

Fin smiled. "Why didn't you just say you wanted to get all romantic?" Kicking off his shoes, he sprawled on top of his lover, finally settling his head on John's black-shirted shoulder. "How's that?"

Smiling as well, Munch laid his head against Fin's black hair and closed his eyes. "Good. Better than good, actually. Wonderful."

Fin slid his arms around his lover's slender frame. "Yeah. Feels pretty good from this end, too."

The two men sat like that for some time, simply enjoying the peace and quiet after the long day they had just gone through. Finally, though, Fin asked quietly, "So... you wanted to talk?"

"Yeah." Munch was silent for a long moment before

he planted a kiss on the top of his lover's head. "I love you."

"Love you, too, John."

John shook his head, angling Fin's face up so that their eyes met. Then, to his lover's surprise, he took off his glasses and put them aside. "No. I mean **I love you**," he repeated, putting emphasis on the last three words. "What I feel for you... it's never been like this. Four ex-wives over the years... I thought I knew what being in love was like." Reaching up, he brushed his fingers over his lover's face. "It wasn't until I met you that I realized I didn't... that I didn't have the first clue about love... about anything." There was a pause. "You know?"

Fin caught Munch's hand in his and held it against his bearded cheek. "Yeah, I do," he said, his own voice soft. "Cause that's how I feel. Exactly." He leaned a little closer. "John... baby... you gotta know that."

Munch shivered. "See? Like that. You calling me baby. No one ever has... and it goes right through me when you do."

"Yeah, I can see," Fin smirked, eyeing his lover's confined erection. "And that's what you are, John. You're my baby... my man." He leaned closer to brush his lips against John's. "Been that way from day one."

"From the first moment we met," Munch corrected,

nodding.

"Even though you fought it like hell."

"You did, too, if I recall correctly."

"Pretended to," Fin corrected. At Munch's puzzled frown, he clarified. "Had to make sure about you. With all the ex Mrs. Munches in the picture... and since we were new together and all... I didn't know if you'd bail on me."

"They all left me, one way or the other, I'll have you know," Munch said, a defensive tone creeping into his voice. "I would have stayed with any of them if they had given me the chance."

One of Fin's eyebrows went up. "You would've?"

Munch nodded. "But it wasn't up to me. And I'm glad." He suddenly smiled. "Left me free to fall head over heels for you."

The younger man chuckled. "Nice save."

"I'm jut saying... I'm here now. And I'm not going anywhere." Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a black velvet box and put it into his partner's hand. "Maybe this will tell you how serious I am."

Fin stared at the closed box for a long moment before he opened it with shaking fingers. What was nestled inside made him gasp. "John?"

"I know it's a little flashy," John said, his voice soft as his partner stared at the gold and onyx ring. "But considering your past with Narco and your own personal style, I thought it might be okay." There was a pause. "Do you like it?"

"It's beautiful. Never seen nothin' like it." The warm yellow band glowed in the soft light, offset by the rich blackness of the rectangular cut stone. Fin gazed at it for a long moment before he looked up. "Does it mean what I think it means?"

"If you want it to." John's voice was soft as he put a hand on his lover's arm. "I love you. I would like nothing more than to spend the rest of my days growing old and gray and decrepit with you." There was a pause. "I just hope you want the same thing."

"You gotta ask? Damn straight I do." Fin's voice was firm. "I just thought... I mean... with all your times at bat... I never would've blamed you for bein' a little gun-shy."

The older man shook his head. "Not with you. Never with you." He brushed his free hand back over Fin's face, caressing it lightly. "You should've said something."

"Didn't want to push. I know how you get." Fin's gaze returned to the ring. "You really serious about this? You want me to be your one and only?"

Munch nodded. "The two of us, together forever. I don't play it any other way." Taking the ring out of

the box, he took Fin's right hand in his. "Will you, Odafin?"

A shiver went through Fin; his lover said his full first name all too rarely, and it never failed to get to him when he did. "Yes, John." he whispered, his dark eyes shining with love and tears. "Yes."

Without breaking eye contact, John slid the ring onto his partner's fourth finger. He looked down at it and smiled. "I was right. It does suit you."

"It's perfect."

To Fin's surprise, John shook his head as a sad little smile appeared on his face. "No. Perfect would be the two of us standing in front of a rabbi and a priest in our dress blues and that being a wedding ring." He let out a heavy sigh. "That would be perfect."

My John's a romantic under all that cynicism, Fin thought, his heart melting at the look on his lover's face. "Yeah, it would be," he agreed, cupping Munch's cheek. "But I say this is perfect, too. And so are you." With that, he pulled John into a long, lingering kiss.

Munch slid his arms around Fin's waist, pulling him even closer as he deepened the kiss. So right, he thought as he lost himself in the completeness, the perfection of that one single kiss. I could stay here forever like this with you... my Odafin. He tightened his hold on the younger man. Now and forever... all mine.

They drew away slowly, trading smiles. Then Fin got to his feet and took Munch's hand, pulling him up as well. "Come on. If we can't have a wedding, at least we can have the honeymoon."

"I like the way you're thinking." Munch let himself be led down the short hallway toward the bedroom. He stopped and glanced in the general direction of the kitchen. "What about the dishes?"

"Screw the dishes. You can get off on soap bubbles and my ass later." Fin suddenly grinned. "I got other things in mind to do."

That widened Munch's eyes. "Yeah? Like what?"

Pulling John into the bedroom, Fin slammed the door shut and pushed his partner against it. "Like this." Pinning John to the door, he gave the older man a hard, demanding kiss.

Groaning, Munch pushed back, maneuvering both of them toward the bed. "Off," he muttered in between kisses, his hands fumbling with the other man's soft black sweater. "Take this off. Want to see you." His eyes were wide with passion and lust. "Want to touch you."

Fin soothed him with a kiss before drawing away enough to strip off his sweater and toss it aside. "This what you want, baby?"

Munch's breath caught in his throat as he stared at

Fin's bare chest and the slender gold hoop piercing one nipple. "When in the hell did you get that?" he finally asked, licking suddenly dry lips.

"While ago. While I was still with Narco." Fin sat down on the bed. "You like?"

"Fuck, yeah," Munch breathed, his heart pounding as he sat down next to him. "How come I never saw it before now?"

"Don't wear it all that much anymore. It's distracting." Reaching over, Fin tugged off the older man's tie and tossed it aside. He then set to work on his shirt buttons. "Knew you hadn't seen it yet, so I put it back in. Thought you might like it." Exposing John's chest, Fin ran his hand over it, brushing his nipples erect. "Like that, too. Don't you, baby?"

Closing his eyes, Munch tilted his head back. "You know I do, damn it." He gritted his teeth. "Fin... please..."

"Damn, but I love it when you beg," Fin murmured as he continued to play with one pink nipple. "Know what would look really hot? If you got one."

That opened John's eyes. "Me? With a nipple ring? Are you serious?" At Fin's eager nod, he continued. "You sure you didn't put anything in those pork chops you made for dinner?"

"Nothin' funny if that's what you're getting at," Fin answered, still smiling. "What? You don't like the

idea?"

"I didn't say that," John quickly said, dropping his gaze to the softly glowing ring. "I'm saying... I don't know what to say. I mean... an old man like me... with a nipple ring?"

"You ain't old." Fin's voice was firm, almost daring Munch to argue with him.

"Older than you."

"So? Since when's that matter?" Reaching up with the hand John's ring was on, Fin brushed his fingers through the older man's graying hair. "I think you look damn fine. Sexy, too."

Munch grimaced. "Sure you don't need my glasses? I can go get them." He made to get up.

Grabbing his shoulders, Fin kept John where he was. "My eyes are good. And I know what I'm seeing's good, too." Before Munch could contradict him again, Fin pulled him into another kiss.

When Fin finally let him come up for air, Munch was more than a little dazed and so aroused that he could barely think. "Damn. You should be registered as a lethal weapon with that kiss."

Fin grinned as he lay down on the bed, pulling John with him. "More where that came from," he promised as his hands wandered down to the waistband of Munch's designer pants. "I'll show you just how

much, once I get these damn pants off you."

"You, too," Munch said even as he sat up enough to get rid of his own shirt. "I'm not going to be the only one naked here, Odafin." Munch caught the glazed look that passed over his lover's face and smirked. "Something I said?"

A moment later John found himself flat on his back with Fin hovering over him. "Keep it up, John," he said, his dark eyes sparkling with lust. "You'll get yours soon enough."

Munch slid his hands over his partner's denim clad ass. "God, I hope so."

Fin leaned down to nuzzle the older man's neck as his hands slid back over his chest. "You never did answer me about the nipple ring," he said, giving one of the little pink buds a light pinch for emphasis.

"Didn't I?" Munch breathed, squirming under his lover's caress. "No. I guess I didn't. How about... I'll think about it and we'll see? How does that grab you?"

"Just fine for now," Fin whispered, blowing hot air into John's ear to make him squirm even more. "But you just think about how hot it would be to have something here. Especially when I do things like this." With that, Fin took one of John's nipples into his mouth and began playing with it with his tongue.

The results were electrifying. Munch's back arched

off the bed as he let out a long, loud groan. "God... Fin," he gasped as one of his hands went to tangle in his partner's hair. "Don't... please..."

"Don't what, baby?" Fin asked in between licks and nibbling little kisses. "Don't do this?" He moved to the other nipple, bathing it in warm wetness. "Or maybe you don't want me doin' something like this?" He boldly caressed his partner's still trapped erection.

Munch's next groan was even louder. "Don't tease," he begged. "Please... just do it."

"And what would you be havin' me do?" Fin asked as he slowly undid Munch's slacks. "Gotta be clear on this, baby. Don't want to be doin' nothin' wrong now."

"Damn you," Munch cursed, his eyes wide. "You know."

"Say it, then," the younger man challenged. He made to draw his hand away. "I want to hear it. Else I stop right now."

"No! Damn it!" Munch grabbed his partner's wrist, trying to keep his hand where it was. "Don't you fucking dare!"

Fin drew even closer, his voice dropping to a husky, lust-filled whisper. "Say it, John. Love hearin' you say it like you do. Gets me goin' like nothin' else." He slid his hand inside his lover's boxers, almost but not

quite touching his cock. "Come on, baby... say it for me."

"Fuck me." The two words came out in a choked off little whisper. "Just strip me down... and screw me until I can't see straight. Fuck me."

Fin couldn't help chuckling at that as he quickly got rid of the rest of his lover's clothes. "Can't see straight now without your glasses," he said as he stripped as well, tossing jeans and briefs across the room. He planted a kiss on John's parted lips. "And how straight can you see anyways if I'm the one screwin' you?"

"Fin... I swear to God... if you don't do **something**..." The rest of John's threat was forgotten when the younger man wrapped his hand around his aching cock. "Oh, God... that's it..."

"Yeah, baby," Fin agreed as he reached for the bottle of lube sitting on the bedside table. "You look so damn hot like this... all stripped down and wanting me. Gonna be even hotter when I'm finally in you." He poured the gel over his fingers, then eased two inside. "Okay?"

Munch gasped as Fin's long fingers brushed against the hard nub deep inside him. "Yes... please, Fin," he begged, not caring how it sounded. He'd howl from the rooftops if it got Fin's cock up his ass. "Love you..."

Those two words were enough. Removing his fin-

gers, Fin moved in between his partner's long legs. "Love you, too, John," he whispered, planting another kiss on the older man's parted lips before he entered him.

When he was all the way in, Fin paused for a moment, savoring the heat of John's body around him. "Damn, but you feel good," he breathed. "John? Okay, baby?"

"If you don't move or something damn soon, neither one of us is going to be," Munch said through gritted teeth as he firmly planted both hands on his partner's ass. He let out another little moan as Fin took the blatant hint and began to thrust. "Yes... God, Fin... just like that." He began moving his own hips, driving his partner's cock in deeper. "Fin..."

"I got you, baby," Fin murmured as he reached between them, once again grasping Munch's cock. This time, though, he used the hand his lover's ring was on. "You feel that? My hand on you... with your ring on my finger? Gonna send you flying, John. Gonna send us both up high." A shudder ran through him. With all of the teasing he had indulged in, he was getting close to release, but he wanted to make sure John was with him before he let go. "Come on, John. Fly for me, baby. I'm right with you. You just gotta let go." He brushed his free hand through Munch's hair. "My baby... my John... let go."

A moment later, Munch's head tilted back against the pillows and he let out a loud cry as he came all over Fin's hand. Seeing the look on his lover's face

and feeling his body tighten around his cock was all Fin needed to follow him.

They collapsed against each other, both dazed and sated by the intensity of their orgasm. John couldn't help the whimper that escaped him when Fin's cock slipped out of him. "No..."

"Shh. Right here, John," Fin murmured, automatically soothing him with a kiss to his brow. "Right here, baby. You okay?"

"Yeah," was the breathless reply. "Better than okay." He opened his eyes in time to see his lover licking his come slick fingers clean. "Fucking hell, Fin... what are you trying to do to me?"

"Just tastin' my favorite flavor," Fin answered, laughing at the blush coloring his partner's cheeks. "And you look so damn cute when you go red. Your ears color up and everything."

John found the strength to shake his head, a fond smile appearing on his face. "You're incorrigible," he murmured. "I love you."

Grinning, Fin gave John another sound kiss, the ring his lover, his husband, his life, had given him glowing in the dim light. "I love you, too."

BLACK TIE

John Munch stood in front of the full-length mirror in his bedroom, letting out a curse as he tried tying his bow tie for the third time. "I can never get these things," he said, the frustration evident on his face as he threw up his hands.

"C'mere. I'll get it," Odafin Tutuola said, gesturing for him to come closer. He expertly twirled the slippery ends of the silk around his fingers until he made a perfectly knotted bow. Brushing a piece of lint off his lover's broad shoulders, he met John's dark eyes and grinned. "There. Perfect."

Smiling as well, John took the liberty of sliding his arms around the younger man's waist, being careful not to wrinkle Fin's own tuxedo. "You look pretty good yourself," he said, making a show of looking his lover over. He licked his lips. "Makes me want to jump you right here and now."

Fin laughed. "Yeah. I can feel." Reaching between them, he ran his hand over John's crotch, feeling the hardness contained within. "And who says you'll be doing the jumping?"

"You're more than welcome to bend me over something any time you want to." John arched into the light touch. "But we can't right now. The damn retirement dinner for the police commissione... Liv and Elliot will be here any minute."

Fin gave his lover a skeptical look. "You think so? Five bucks says those two are parked somewhere necking in the back seat of Elliot's car." He checked his watch. "We still have half an hour before they're supposed to show up."

"That much time, huh? Half an hour?" John asked, wanting to be sure. When Fin nodded, the older man cupped his lover's face in his hands. "Plenty of time." He drew Fin into a tongue-tangling kiss.

Fin found himself pushed against the bedroom wall as his breath was taken away. Groaning, he grasped Munch's shoulders and pushed until John was pressed against the other wall. "Ever tell you how hot you look dressed in that damn penguin suit?" he asked when he finally drew away enough to catch his breath.

"You're pretty hot, too," Munch murmured, a soft groan escaping him as Fin's hand once again began playing with his zipper. "Fin..."

Fin let out a chuckle as he nuzzled the older man's ear. "You said we got enough time," he whispered. "What did you have in mind, baby?"

A shiver went through Munch's body at the sound of the softly whispered endearment. Fin only used it when they were alone and it never failed to send his blood boiling. "Can you... could you... fuck." He took a deep breath as he tried to gather his scattered thoughts. "Just... just do me. Okay?"

Fin's dark eyes lit up. "You want what you said, John? You bent over something while I pound that skinny ass of yours?" His hands slid around to squeeze it for emphasis. "You want me to fuck you right now?"

John nodded vigorously. "Yes." His own eyes were bright with barely contained lust. "Fuck me. Right now."

Fin nipped at John's earlobe. "Love it when you talk like that," he said as he backed away. Going to the bedside table, he pulled open the drawer and pulled out a strip of condoms and a bottle of lube. "Turn around, John. Face the wall and assume the position."

John obeyed immediately, putting his hands on the wall where Fin could see them. "Should I put my hands on my head while you get out the handcuffs?"

"Don't think we got time to get that crazy," Fin said as he came back over. "Don't want Elliot and Olivia walkin' in on something they shouldn't be knowing about. The last thing we need to be doing is giving those two any ideas."

"You've got a point." John let out another soft moan as Fin's hands went back to his zipper and eased it down. "Damn it, don't tease."

"I won't. I promise," Fin said as he reached inside. "Besides, I ain't got time to tease you the way I

want to. That part's gonna have to wait 'til later."

"I was hoping you'd say that. Definitely something to look forward to." John's breath quickened when his partner's long fingers brushed against his erection. "Oh, God... Fin..."

"I gotcha, John," Fin murmured as he pushed John's pants and boxers off his slender hips, letting them fall to his ankles. Coating his fingers with lube, he slipped two inside, grinning when his lover let out a soft cry. "Okay?"

"Yes." He nearly pulled away when Fin slipped a condom over his erection. "You don't need those."

"They're not for that," Fin murmured as he put one on as well. He moved even closer, his cock nudging his lover's bare ass. "Don't want to mess up that fine tux of yours."

Munch let out a breathless little laugh. "Didn't think of that. See what you do to me? Got me so scatter-brained I can't think straight."

Fin laughed as well as he kissed the back of his lover's long neck. "Like you thinkin' like that. Sometimes you're just too damn serious." He paused, his voice dropping to a husky whisper that only John could hear. "Gonna do you hard, baby. Gonna fuck you so hard that you feel it all through the rubber chicken dinner and every single boring ass speech... So you know every minute of it who you belong to."

"Like I have any doubts." John put his hand over the one on his waist holding him steady. "Love you, Fin."

"Love you, too, John." Squeezing his fingers, Fin entered his lover in one smooth thrust.

John leaned forward enough to rest his forehead against the wall as Fin began to thrust. "God, you feel good," he muttered through gritted teeth.

"So do you, baby. Hot... and so damn tight. Made for me." He wrapped his hand around his lover's erection, pumping it in time with his thrusting hips. "You feel close... Are you, John? You gonna come for me?"

"Yes... hell, yes," John moaned as he moved his own hips, meeting every one of his partner's thrusts with one of his own. "Please, Fin... harder." His hand joined Fin's on his cock, stroking it. "Damn it, harder!"

"That's it, John," Fin crooned as he did as he was asked, his own climax building with every move, every thrust. "Wanna see you let it go and come for me." A shudder went through him as he put his lips right next to John's ear and whispered the words he knew would send the older man over the edge. "Love you, John."

Letting out a shaky cry, Munch came hard, shuddering in his lover's arms. Fin followed a moment later, coming deep inside John as his own orgasm overwhelmed him.

They stood against the bedroom wall for a long moment, catching their breath as they clung to one another. John let out a whimper of protest as Fin slipped out of him. "No... don't go."

Fin kissed a graying temple. "I'm right here, baby," he murmured. He checked his watch. "Gotta clean up. Liv and Elliot will be here soon. You stay put and I'll be right back. Okay?" He waited for John's nod before kissing him again. "Give me a minute." Drawing away fully, he headed for the bathroom.

Bringing back a warm, wet cloth, Fin dealt with both condoms before getting rid of any leftover stickiness. Pulling his own suit together first, he began to work on John's. "Everything good in there?" he asked as he tucked in the white shirt and redid buttons.

Munch opened his eyes and gave his lover a sated little smile. "Better than good. Wonderful." He brushed a kiss across Fin's lips. "Thank you."

Fin grinned as he smoothed the last wrinkle back into place. "Anytime, John. In fact, I was thinking... if things get really boring tonight, maybe you and me can sneak off to the men's room and you can return the favor?" His dark eyes sparkled mischievously. "How's that sound to you?"

Munch swallowed a groan as he felt his cock twitch in response. "Pretty damn good," he managed to get out. "You're incorrigible."

Fin gave his lover a hard kiss, his grin growing even wider. "And you love every damn crazy minute of it."

They were about to go further when they were interrupted by a knock on the door. "Figures they'd be on time for once," Fin grumbled as they drew away fully. Going to the door, he opened it. "Hey, guys. Come on in for a minute."

Elliot Stabler and his partner, Olivia Benson, stepped in, both of them turned out perfectly in their own evening wear. "Almost ready?" Elliot asked.

"Just gotta grab our coats. We got time." Fin openly admired Olivia's evening clad form with an appreciative whistle. "You clean up pretty smoking, Liv."

A blush colored the detective's cheeks. "Thanks. So do you two." She gazed at them both before throwing a glance at her partner. "There's just something about a man in a tux."

Fin nodded. "I hear you there." Taking a closer look at Elliot's cheek, he suddenly laughed. "Hey, John. I was right. You owe me five bucks."

A confused look crossed Elliot's face as Munch took out his wallet. "Did I miss something?"

"Just a little," John answered as he also dug out a handkerchief and handed it over. "Lipstick. Right under your left ear." He gestured to the area with his hand "Definitely not your color. More Liv's, I'd say."

Meanwhile, Fin pocketed the bill his partner had handed him. "I bet John five bucks that you two were necking in the back seat before coming over here."

"Which I don't remember agreeing to, by the way," Munch said as he tucked his wallet away. "But seeing as I'll get it back the next time we play poker, I'm not going to dwell on it." He paused, eyeing the couple in front of him. "Unless he's wrong?"

To their credit, neither one of them tried to deny it. Elliot simply turned bright red while Olivia smiled. "No, he's not wrong," she said as she took the cloth and wiped the lip print away.

"Sorry, Liv," Elliot apologized. "That dress... couldn't help getting carried away a little."

She shook her head, her long rhinestone earrings glittering in the dim light. "I couldn't, either. And you can make it up to me when you take me out to lunch."

"Lunch?" Munch echoed, a confused look on his face as he shrugged on his overcoat.

Olivia nodded, a triumphant gleam in her eyes as she looked the older man over. "I bet Elliot lunch at the Russian Tea Room that you two would've gotten it on before we showed up."

Both John and Fin stared at her. "How can you tell?" Munch finally demanded.

"A woman can tell stuff like that," she said mysteriously. A moment later, she grinned. "Plus, I'm a trained detective. I added together the satisfied looks on both of your faces and John's crooked tie."

"My..." John glanced at his reflection in a nearby window and bit back a curse. The once perfect bow was lopsided and threatening to come undone. "Damn it."

"The one thing I forgot to check you for," Fin said as he went up to his lover and proceeded to redo the bow. "There you go. Back to perfect."

John smiled at his lover. "Thank you. And so are you." He drew Fin into a kiss.

The kiss went on for so long that Elliot cleared his throat and made a show of looking at his watch. "Guys, if you're planning on being any longer Liv and I will go back and wait in the car."

"Not a chance," Fin said as he forced himself to draw away. He grabbed his own coat. "You do that and we'll never get to the damn thing."

"And that would be a bad thing how?" Munch asked

"Cragen would never let us hear the end of it, for one thing," Elliot said as he ushered everyone to the door. "So let's just go and get it over with."

Olivia nodded. "The sooner we do..."

"The sooner you two can find some place more comfortable than a back seat to neck in," Munch finished as he locked the door behind him.

"And the two of you will have time for more than a quickie," Olivia retorted good-naturedly as she followed her partner.

"Sounds like a plan to me," Fin agreed before turning to look at his partner. "What do you say, John?"

Catching the smoldering heat in his partner's eyes, Munch felt his arousal return with all the force of a runaway train. "I agree," he answered, letting the hand he had resting on his partner's shoulder slide down his back and under his jacket to briefly rest on his tuxedo clad ass. "A definite plan."



WATCHING

"Come on in a minute," John Munch said as he ushered in his partner. His gray striped tie was looped around his neck and his graying hair was still damp from his shower. "I'm almost ready."

Odafin Tutuola checked his watch. "I'm early. Wanted to beat traffic." He settled in the overstuffed recliner. "We got plenty of time."

"There's coffee. I just made it," John said, waving his hand in the general direction of the tiny kitchen. "You know where everything is. Help yourself."

Fin wrinkled his nose. "If it's anything like you make at the station, I'll pass." A small smile crossed his face as he watched Munch pause in front of the mirror hanging on his bedroom door to knot his tie. This was the real reason he came a little bit early every day; it gave him the chance to watch his partner without the intrusion of prying eyes and nosy questions.

Black again, Fin thought as John slipped on his suit jacket. *Does he own suits of any other color?* Not that he minded; dressed in black from head to toe, with his tie being the only spot of dubious color, John Munch was a good looking man.

Better than good. Damn fine, Fin mused, resisting the urge to lick his lips as he wondered what Munch

was hiding under the layers of black. *I'll find out one of these days.* If he came early enough, there was always the chance he'd catch his partner fresh out of the shower wearing just a towel.

Skinny, but then I don't mind skinny, he thought as he continued to watch. *He's in shape, I know that much. He didn't have no trouble passing his self-defense evals.* He debated asking John to train with him; in the gym there was always the off chance that he'd get to see a little more of the older man than he did normally. It was something to think about.

Gotta go slow, though, he thought as he continued to watch. *Move too fast and I could scare him away. Especially since I don't know which way he goes.* He knew of the four failed marriages and former girlfriends; every once in a while John would come up with a suitably outrageous story appropriate to the situation of the moment, something so wild and inconceivable that Fin had no doubts to its truth.

Man has bad taste in women, he mused. *Least he used to.* In the time the two men had been partnered, Munch hadn't mentioned another person's name at all. No dates, no one night stands, nothing. No women... and definitely no men.

Which don't mean a thing, Fin thought as he gazed at his partner. *We work every hour known to man and then some. Don't do well for relationships or findin' anybody. His four divorces prove that. And as for men... maybe it's something he never thought of.*

Although he couldn't imagine John not being hit on by another man at least once in his life.

"You know, you don't have to pick me up every morning," John said as he strapped on his badge and gun. "Not that I mind... but I can get to work on time. I'm a big boy."

Fin laughed to cover up the wave of arousal that had shot through him because of John's words. *Wonder if you really are*, he couldn't help thinking as his eyes swept over his partner's frame, lingering on his crotch. *Wish there was some way I could find out*. But he couldn't think of any way that didn't involve blurting out his secret, and Fin wasn't ready to do that just yet.

"You're on my way in anyway. And I don't mind stopping," he finally said. Forcing his desire aside, he met his partner's eyes and gave him a blinding smile in order to alleviate any suspicion. "Don't mind at all."



The ride into work, with John sitting so close and yet so far away, turned out to be another test of his patience. By the time they pulled into the parking garage, Fin was clutching the steering wheel in a desperate attempt to keep his hands to himself. *Of all days, why'd he have to pick today to ditch the Aqua Velva and go with something else?* he thought, taking another whiff of Munch's aftershave. He wasn't sure what it was, but it smelled wonderful.

"You're driving's getting better," John commented as they go into the elevator. "Have you actually been taking lessons?"

"Nope. Just slowed down a little. Got tired of how green your face got every time you got into the damn car with me," Fin retorted good-naturedly. "For a bit there I thought my partner was Kermit the Frog."

"I'm the one with the glasses," the older man reminded him as they went to their respective desks. A look of concern crossed John's face as he sat down. "Seriously, though... you okay?"

Fin froze in his tracks. "Yeah, I'm fine," he forced out, his heart pounding hard in his chest. "Why?"

Munch shrugged. "I don't know. It's just a feeling, that's all." There was a pause. "Call it a cop's intuition."

"Well... I think yours got broken along the way, 'cause I'm good," Fin said as he sat down as well. *He don't know. He can't know. I haven't said anything... and I've been careful... so he don't know,* he thought, remaining as calm as he could under the circumstances. *He's just fishing, is all. He don't have a clue.* He swallowed hard against the lump in his throat. *God, though... I wish you did have some kinda clue. If you did...*

John gave him a long, searching look before finally

turning his attention to his case files. "Okay. Just thought I'd ask." A moment later, he had his nose buried in paperwork.

Fin sighed with relief before he did the same.



He's watching me again, Munch noted as he went through one file after another, catching his partner staring at him out of the corner of his eye. Granted, Fin was being careful about it, but every time John looked up from his pile of papers, he caught the swift movement of Fin's head ducking down. It would have been funny if it weren't so serious.

We need to talk, John mused as he signed his name to yet another report and put it aside. *And we need to do it soon. This can't go on for much longer.* Not without ruining the easy partnership they had, and that was the last thing he wanted to happen.

Because we're good together, he thought, smiling a little. *We balance each other out. Haven't had a partner like that in I don't know how long.* He didn't want to lose that; a good partner was a precious thing.

So we need to talk about this, John thought as he watched his partner watching him. *Get it out in the open and find out why he can't stop staring. Because something has to be wrong. It can't be because he wants me.*

He suddenly blinked. Where had that thought come from?

My own warped imagination, John realized as he glanced at Fin over the top of his glasses. I'm seeing what I want to be there, not what really is. We're friends, partners, co-workers... No way in hell would Fin want to be more.

Would he?



It was the end of a fairly quiet, moderately productive day in Munch's eyes, fairly quiet meaning no new cases and moderately productive alluding to the fact that his piles of paperwork were getting noticeably smaller. It wasn't a lot, but it was enough to give the older man the courage he needed. "Any plans for tonight?" he asked his partner as he and Fin headed for the elevator.

Fin shrugged. "Was planning on watching the Knicks with some beer and pizza, but the game got called. Team's trapped in Minnesota of all places 'cause of snow." He pressed the down button. "Why?"

"Just wondering." The door opened and the two men stepped inside. "Have dinner with me."

Fin stared at his partner. "What you say?"

"Have dinner with me," Munch repeated. "I don't know about you, but I'm too keyed up to go home

just yet. Maybe it was because of the quiet day. I don't know." He shrugged. "There's a little hole in the wall place not too far from here. Food's pretty good and it's quiet. By some miracle, the tourists haven't found it yet." He paused for a moment to let the idea sink in, and when he spoke again, his voice had the slightest pleading tone to it. "Come on. I guarantee it'll be better than beer and pizza. And I hate eating alone."

Fin raised an eyebrow. "That ain't all of it, is it?" he asked suspiciously. "There's more. I know there is."

Munch let out a sigh. "I think we need to talk and I'd rather do it someplace quiet," he finally said. There was a pause. "And I'd rather not do it on an empty stomach, either."

Fin thought for a long moment. *He's gotta be onto something, but he would've said before this. Least I think he would.* He wasn't sure; there were times when Munch kept things to himself, especially if it dealt with something personal.

I should just call it a night and go home, Fin debated. Be a hell of a lot safer than bein' around him. Might do somethin' stupid. But then he remembered the pleading note he had just heard in the other man's voice. *But it sounds like he don't wanna be by himself right now. And I don't, either.*

"Okay, sure," Fin finally said, gesturing to Munch. "Lead the way."



Once the two men were settled in a back booth and had given their orders to the waiter, Fin took an appreciative sip of his beer. "This is a nice place," he said, looking around. "Small, but it's cozy. And quiet."

Munch smiled as he did the same. "Yeah. Found it while I was wandering a while back. I'm here at least once a week; easy enough to stop on the way home and I've never been a great cook." There was a pause. "Figured you'd like it. I was just waiting for a chance to bring you here."

Fin stared at his partner's dimly lit face. "Wait... you actually thought about bringing me here?" Munch nodded. "Why?"

"Like I said, I think we need to talk." Munch leaned closer, leaning on his folded arms. "See... I've noticed you watching me lately."

Fin let out a heavy sigh as he ran a hand over his face. "You have, huh?"

"Yeah, I have." There was a pause. "And I'd like to know why." Munch was quiet for a moment. "Have I done something?"

Fin quickly shook his head. "No. Hell, no. It ain't you, John. I swear to God... it ain't nothin' you did."

"Then what?" Silence. "Fin, come on. Whatever it is,

you can tell me."

A skeptical look crossed the younger man's face. "Sure of that, huh?" he asked, his tone turning harsh. "I wouldn't ask if I was you. You might not like what you hear."

"Let me be the judge of that." Suddenly Munch reached over and put his hand over Fin's. "Look... we're partners. And I like to think we're friends. So that means you can cut through the bullshit." He squeezed Fin's fingers. "Whatever it is... it might not be as bad as you think."

After a long silence, Fin met John's eyes with his own. Then, he slowly turned his hand palm up and clasped his partner's fingers. "This answer your question?"

John stared at their entwined fingers for a long moment. "Is that how it is?" he finally asked, his voice a soft whisper.

"Yeah, that's how it is." Ducking his head, Fin stood up and tried to pull his hand away. "I'd better go. And if you go to Cragen tomorrow and say you want a new partner... I won't stop you."

To Fin's surprise, the fingers around his tightened even more, keeping him where he was. "Now why would I want to do that?" John asked, a small smile appearing on his face.

Fin's own face hardened as a sudden swift flash of

anger went through him. "Ain't funny, John," he said harshly. "Let me go."

"I'm not laughing." He gently tugged on his partner's fingers. "Come on. Sit down and talk to me." He glanced up to see their waiter coming out of the kitchen area with a loaded tray. "Besides, our food's coming."

Fin stared. "Our food? Is that all you can think about with all this? Food?!"

"When I'm hungry, yeah. And you're hungry, too. I heard your stomach growling on the way over." He gave the other man's fingers another gentle tug. "Sit, Fin. You don't want to leave it like this."

Still scowling, Fin finally did as he was asked, slumping back into his booth just as the waiter came to their table. "And if I don't wanna talk?" he asked, his dark eyes flashing.

John let his fingers go. "Then you don't have to," he said as he spread his napkin across his lap. "We can play 'this never happened' if you really want, but I'd rather not. It would just make things worse."

"You got a point," Fin grudgingly admitted as their waiter set their plates in front of them. "Doin' things like that would screw things up between us."

Munch picked up his fork. "I think so."

The two men ate in silence for several minutes. Fi-

nally, John asked quietly, "How long?"

"A while," Fin confessed. "Just kinda hit me one day out of the blue." He gave Munch a stern look. "Your fault, you know. Lookin' so tall and fine... Never expected to go and fall for you like I did."

Munch considered him for a moment. "Yeah... well... if it helps any, I never expected to fall for you, either." He smiled at the stunned look crossing Fin's face as the other man dropped his fork with a clatter. "You didn't know?"

"Fuck, no." Fin picked up his fork again. "You hid it damn well."

"Years of practice. And you were so busy watching me that you never noticed me watching you." He paused to take a sip of his beer. "Ironic, if you think about it."

"Yeah." They continued to eat in relative quiet before Fin asked the one question that was hanging between them. "So... what happens now?"

John shrugged. "Depends." There was a pause as the older man looked up and their eyes met. "I know one thing. I'm getting damn tired of watching."

Fin swallowed hard, seeing the intensity in his partner's eyes. "Yeah, me too," he said finally. "Waste of time, just watchin' when we both know. Especially when we could be doin' stuff instead."

"My thoughts exactly." Putting his fork down, Munch signaled for the waiter. "Check, please." He paused. "Unless you want dessert?"

Fin shook his head. "Only dessert I'm wanting I can't have here." He deliberately looked John over.

Catching the look, and knowing exactly what it was going to lead to, Munch dug out his wallet. "Then let's go somewhere where you can."



The moment both men stepped into Munch's basement apartment and the door closed behind them, John found himself pushed against the wall and kissed breathless. Groaning, Munch wrapped his arms around his partner and returned the kiss with everything he had. "God... Fin..."

"John... baby," Fin murmured as he trailed kisses down the older man's long neck, one hand pulling at the knot in John's tie while the other tangled in his graying hair. He pressed his entire body against Munch's, his own desire running rampant when he felt the hardness confined in his partner's pants. "My baby." He captured John's lips again.

A shiver went through Munch's entire body as his own hands slid down to cup the younger man's ass. It had been so long since he had felt anything even close to this white hot need coursing through his body, so long since he had let anyone near his heart, much less in. *So damn good... Fin...*

It was too much too soon. Before he knew what hit him, his entire body was shuddering in Fin's strong arms as he came. He vaguely heard Fin shouting out his name a moment later, dimly realizing that the other man was climaxing as well, and all because of a simple kiss.

They clung to each other, both of them breathing heavily. John felt the lightest brush of a kiss against his parted lips. "John? Still with me?"

"Yeah." The older man let out a weak little chuckle. "God. I haven't come in my pants since I was a teenager."

Fin laughed as well. "Neither have I. Been at least that long since I had it this bad." He gave John another kiss, this one lingering a beat longer than the last. "Want you, John."

"Want you, too," John murmured, his fingers squeezing his partner's ass before letting go. He took Fin's hands in his and began leading him through the apartment. "So why don't we move this some place a little more comfortable? Isn't that the line they use in all those cheesy romance movies?"

"And how would you know?" Fin countered, still smiling. "Cause I can't see you sitting through stuff like that."

"I did, but under duress. Wife number two used to watch them by the box load and she'd make me sit

there with her." Munch rolled his eyes. "*Sleepless In Seattle... You've Got Mail...* to this day they're still burnt in my brain."

Stepping into the bedroom, Fin shut the door behind them and took Munch back into his arms. "Always knew you was a romantic deep down," he teased before taking the older man's face in his hands and kissing him again.

Munch let out a whimpering little moan as their tongues tangled, his fingers digging into the silky material of Fin's bright blue shirt. "Off," he managed to get out as he fumbled with the buttons. "Want this off you. Now."

"You, too, baby," Fin said as he finally unknotted his partner's tie and tossed it aside. "I ain't gonna be the only one naked here."

"You won't be if this keeps up," John said as they both sat down on the bed. In the middle of kicking off his shoes and socks, John stopped a moment, the other man's words finally registering. "Baby?"

"Yeah. You my baby," Fin said, grinning. "My baby. Nobody else's." He paused in taking off his own shoes. "You mind? 'Cause if you do, I can think of something else to call you."

"Because heaven forbid you actually use my first name," John deadpanned with a tolerant smile. "No, I don't mind. I actually kinda like it." He finished taking off his shoes and socks. "Have to think of some-

thing suitably embarrassing to call you."

Fin rolled his eyes. "You can call me anything you want," he said as he wound his arms back around Munch's neck, a mischievous little smile appearing on his face. "Can't wait to see what you come up with. Knowing you like I do... it's gonna be good."

"I'll have to give it some serious thought," Munch said as he smiled as well. "Let's see... sexy fits you pretty good. Or maybe snookums."

Fin's eyes widened in disbelief. "Snookums?" he repeated.

"How about snugglebunny?"

The younger man burst out laughing. "I don't know, John. That's a pretty hard name to live up to, snugglebunny. Might not be all up to it, you know?"

"I think you are," Munch said quietly, his dark eyes suddenly serious behind his glasses. "Definitely." He gave Fin a firm nod. "Yeah... it fits. Snugglebunny, it is."

Fin threw up his hands in defeat. "There goes my street cred. Detective Odafin "Snugglebunny" Tu-tuola." He shook his head fondly as he went to work on John's shirt buttons.

John went back to his own attack, finally managing to undo them all and push the silky material off Fin's shoulders. "On second thought... sexy fits you **really**

well," he said, his eyes glued to his partner's toned chest.

"Fits you, too, John," Fin murmured as he did the same, his dark fingers reaching out to tease a pink nipple erect. He grinned when John let out a low groan. "Like that?"

"God, yes," John said, arcing into the touch. "Damn it... Fin..."

Fin leaned forward enough to give the older man yet another teasing little kiss. "I gotcha, John. It's okay." His hand moved to John's belt buckle as he noted the tremor going through his partner's body. "Been a while, hasn't it?"

"You could say that." John's voice was quiet. "Since Baltimore."

The younger man froze. "But that's..." He shook his head. "There ain't been nobody since then?"

A shrug answered him. "Not since my annulment, no. Not a woman, anyway. Another man's been longer... couple years before that. Between marriages three and four." A wan smile crossed his face. "One of my more spectacular mistakes. At least what I can remember of it; I was pretty high at the time."

Fin smirked. "Now why doesn't that surprise me about your hippie ass?" There was another pause as the look on Fin's face softened. "The fact that you've been alone all this time does, though."

"It shouldn't," John countered. "I mean, think about it. With all the crazy hours we work, when do I have time to go out? And to be honest, a lot of the time I don't want to. After dealing with all the crap we put up with, I'm happy going home for some peace and quiet." He paused. "Besides... the minute a person hears sex crimes..." He didn't finish.

After a moment of consideration, Fin nodded. "Yeah. I hear you there. Only people who understand are other cops. And even then they don't get why we do what we do." He brushed his fingers over John's face. "Only people who do is us."

John leaned into the caress. "Exactly. And that's another reason." At Fin's puzzled frown, he explained. "It took me a while to realize how I felt about you... what it meant. But when I did... I didn't want anyone else." He copied the other man's gesture, his fingers brushing against Fin's goatee. "If I couldn't have you, then I didn't want anybody."

Fin's gazed softened. "You... that's just... damn." He shook his head. "I think I'm speechless." He cupped the back of John's head, pulling him closer. "C'mere, baby." Their lips met in another smoldering kiss.

They fell onto the bed, still kissing hungrily as they pulled at the rest of each other's clothes. Fin let out a low, throaty groan as long fingers brushed against his erection. "Fucking hell, John."

There was a soft chuckle. "I think I found what

you've been hiding from me," John said as he caressed his partner's cock with a firmer touch, noting Fin's response. "Been a while for you, too, I take it?"

"Yeah," Fin replied breathlessly. "Not as long as you. Don't know how you managed such a long dry spell." He groaned. "Although... what you're doin' with your hand... I gotta pretty good guess."

"And your guess would be correct," John answered, his breath fanning the other man's ear. "Lot of practice... especially the past few months." He nipped at his partner's earlobe, making Fin squirm even more. "And you know who I'd think about while I was lying here? Care to take a guess?" Another moan was his response. "You. Sometimes we'd be doing this. Sometimes I'm on my knees sucking your dick. Sometimes you're fucking me into the mattress. There's even one where I'm screwing you up against a tree in the middle of Central Park in broad daylight." John moved his hand faster as he leaned his forehead against Fin's, his eyes never leaving the other man's face. "But in every one of my fantasies... it's always you."

"Fuck... John!" Fin suddenly shouted. He buried his face in Munch's bare shoulder as he came a moment later, covering the other man's fingers with milky white fluid.

When Fin was still, John drew away enough to give him a hard kiss. "Fucking incredible... The look on your face," he breathed as he drew his hand away. Then, making sure Fin was watching, he licked his

fingers clean. "And you taste pretty good, too."

A moment later, John found himself flat on his back with Fin hovering over him. "You're a damn tease," Fin said, his dark eyes gleaming with lust.

John smiled. "Couldn't resist."

"Yeah. I bet you couldn't." Fin eyed the bulge still trapped in John's black pants. "Surprised you didn't... you know... while you was doin' me."

"You forget I'm older than you are," Munch reminded as he wrapped his arms around his partner's waist. "It takes me a little bit longer to get going again." He let out a low groan as Fin leaned down to nuzzle his ear. "Doing that will do it, though."

"Thought so." Fin gave his lover a grin before he began trailing kisses back down his neck. "How about if I do stuff like this?" His tongue flicked out to caress a pink nipple.

Groaning, Munch clutched at the bed sheets. "God... definitely." He lifted his head up enough to watch Fin's dark head move lower, a shiver escaping him when he realized where the younger man was heading. "Fin... you don't have to."

"Want to," Fin growled as he placed a kiss just over his partner's belly button. "You don't know how long I've wanted to get you just like this." Undoing John's pants, he slid them off his slender hips, taking his briefs along with them. "So... Central Park, huh?"

Munch's cheeks turned bright red. "Yeah. That one's my favorite. Not sure why... Maybe the way your skin looks in the light." He closed his eyes as Fin's hands slid up his long legs. "Damn, that feels good."

"Gonna feel even better once I'm done with you," Fin promised. "And I got a few fantasies of my own we can try out later on if you want."

"Yeah?" Munch was suddenly curious. "Like what?"

"Like the one where we're getting' it on in the crib and you're tryin' so damn hard to be quiet so one hears and catches us. Or the one where we're down by the docks where the rent boys hang, parked in the back seat of my car and rubbing up against each other." He heard John's breath quicken in response. "Like the sound of that, baby?"

"Hell, yeah," John breathed. "More. That can't be all."

Fin's hands slid underneath John's ass, squeezing it. "Well... I do got one more. Goes something like this." Ducking his head down, Fin slid his mouth over his partner's cock.

Groaning, John's head fell back against the pillows as his hands moved to the other man's shoulders and held on. "Oh, God... Fin... Good. So fucking good." He shuddered as Fin's tongue caressed him, leaving no spot untouched. "Yes..."

Yes, Fin thought as he greedily licked away the fluid leaking out of the older man's cock, delighting in the salty sweet taste. *Damn good, tasting you like this all over.* His hands began to wander, one pressing against John's hip to hold him as still as possible while the other moved in between his ass cheeks to tease the puckered opening hidden there.

That was all John needed to send him over the edge. "Christ... fuck... Fin!" he cried as his entire body bucked hard and he spilled everything he had down his lover's throat. "Fin!"

Fin held onto him while he swallowed, making sure he didn't miss a drop. When he was done, he moved back up to wrap his arms around John. "You pretty sweet, too, baby," he said as he reached up to slip off his partner's glasses, grinning all the while.

John's eyes flickered open and he gazed at Fin with something very close to awe. "God, that was... I mean you... I just..." He finally gave up trying to speak and kissed him instead.

The kiss continued until John broke away abruptly to smother a yawn with the back of his hand. "Christ, Fin... I'm sorry. It's not you."

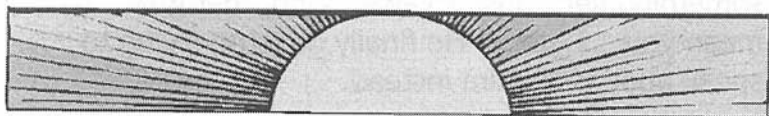
Fin immediately shook his head. "No worries, John. I'm pretty wiped, too. Long ass day." He reached down to grab the comforter, pulling it over them both. "You mind me stayin'?"

"I'd mind if you didn't. In fact, I insist. I don't want

you even thinking about moving out of this bed before the sun comes up." John wrapped his arms around the younger man, holding him close. "In fact, you might want to get used to me being close enough to keep an eye on you from now on."

Fin chuckled as he closed his eyes. "I figured. And that's something you'd better be getting used to as well, baby," he warned, his tone not entirely playful. "Yeah... gonna be watchin' over you from now on."

John closed his eyes too. "Good to know."



INTERROGATION ROOM THREE

John Munch looked up from the report he was finishing for the fourth time in as many minutes, wondering once again where his partner had gone off to. *He said he'd help me with these*, he thought as he took off his glasses to rub his tired eyes. *But the minute we get more than five seconds to actually do them he disappears. Where in the hell did he go?*

"John? You okay?"

He looked up to see fellow detective Olivia Benson standing over his desk, her coat over her arm and a concerned look on her face. "Yeah. Fine." Putting his glasses back on, he leaned back in his chair. "These reports are making my eyes cross, that's all."

She nodded in sympathy. "I know the feeling. I just finished mine." She suddenly smiled. "Why don't you take a break and stretch your legs? Maybe take a walk by interrogation room three?"

Munch's eyebrows went up. Interrogation room three was at the end of a very long hallway, far away from the main squad room and therefore not used as often. "And what, may I ask, is waiting for me in interrogation room three?"

Olivia's smile became even wider as she nodded toward the empty desk. "Someone you've been looking for. He asked me to tell you that he wanted to talk."

Privately.”

Munch let out a heavy sigh. “What is this, high school? Why didn’t he just pass me a note when the teacher wasn’t looking?” He ran a hand through his graying hair, more than a little frustrated with what was happening. “Did he say why, at least?”

Olivia shook her head. “Just that it was private. Even told me to mind my own business.” She gave the older man a knowing little smirk before heading for the elevator. “See you tomorrow, John. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t.”

“That doesn’t leave much,” Munch muttered under his breath as he watched her go. Between her recent antics with her partner and her former ones with the ADA, Olivia had managed to work her way through every room in the precinct. He considered his options for a moment. *I could just let him sit there and wait while I finished all this. Would serve him right after leaving me with all the paperwork.* He glanced down at the file folders littering his desk. *Or I could go hear what he has to say and then drag his ass back here.* One more look at the sea of manila decided him; getting up, he headed down the far corridor.

He paused for a moment in front of the closed door, taking a quick look around to make sure no one saw him. Satisfied, he was about to open it when the door swung open and a hand shot out to grab his arm. He was pulled in forcefully, the door slamming shut behind him.

Munch found himself being pushed against the wall with his partner's body pressed against his. "About time you showed up," Odafin Tutuola observed, his dark eyes bright with mischief.

"I was working on our reports," John commented in an attempt to be stern. "You know... those pieces of paper the Captain likes us to fill out and file every once in awhile? You said you'd help me with them."

Fin gave his lover a wide grin. "Did I? Much rather help you with something else." One hand wandered down to caress the front of the older man's black pants.

Munch swallowed a groan. "Fin... don't," he warned. "Cragen's going to be looking for us."

"Cragen left an hour ago, along with most everybody else," Fin countered as he continued to rub the growing bulge. "It's just you and me, with no chance of anyone walking in to interrupt." He gave Munch a teasing little kiss. "You really wanna say no?"

"Jesus," Munch murmured, feeling the heat in his body going off like a blast furnace. "What's gotten into you? You haven't kept your hands to yourself all day." And he hadn't, starting with the hand on his knee while they had drove in to the impromptu shoulder rub during lunch to goosing him in the elevator on the way to the morgue. And now this.

"Maybe I can't resist you looking so damn fine," Fin

murmured as he made a show of looking John over from head to toe. "You a beautiful man, baby."

Munch's cheeks turned bright red. "I'm not," he murmured, ducking his head. "You keep saying that, but I'm not."

Cupping the older man's face in his hands, Fin gave him another kiss, this one lingering just a little longer than the last. "I think you are," he said softly. "My baby... you are so fine. Can I show you?" He didn't wait for his lover's answer before falling to his knees.

Munch reached down to brush his fingers over his lover's face. "Fin... love, you don't have to." Usually he was the one on his knees, not the other way around. "I know you don't like to do that."

Pulling his lover's hips closer, Fin nuzzled the bulge in his pants. "Never said that," he corrected, looking up. "You always jump me so fast I never get a chance." His hands slid up to cup Munch's ass, squeezing his cheeks before sliding back around to play with his zipper. "So now I'm gonna be jumping you for a change. Unless you're gonna object?"

"I'd have to be out of my mind to object to something like this," Munch breathed as he braced himself against the wall. "But there are still people around. We could get caught..."

"Door's locked. And like I said, most everybody's gone home." There was a pause. "Any more ex-

cuses?" He waited for the minute shake of his lover's head before undoing his black pants and reaching inside.

Munch tilted his head back as long fingers lightly caressed his cock. "Oh... God," he muttered, the touch sending a bolt of pleasure straight up his spine. "Fin... please...."

Fin grinned. "Love hearing you. Gets to me like nothing else does." Pushing cloth aside, he drew out his lover's erection and pressed a soft kiss against the very tip. "Love seeing you like this, too."

"You're gonna torture me, aren't you?" Munch asked as his heart began to beat a little faster. "That's what you're planning on doing... you're going to tease the living hell out of me."

Fin pretended to consider his lover's words for a few moments. "Don't think so," he finally said. "'Cause if I teased you all night then I couldn't do stuff like this." With that, he slid his mouth over Munch's cock and took it deep down his throat.

Munch let out a choked little groan as he was expertly, insistently, caressed by warm lips and soft tongue. "God... I can't believe you're doing this... and here of all places." He reached down to pet his lover's dark hair. "Good... so good, Fin...."

Fin responded by sucking harder, taking his lover's cock deep one minute and drawing back to lick it like an ice cream cone the next. He loved doing this,

loved drawing John out of his tightly closed off shell. It was the one thing in the world he couldn't get enough of, loving his man like this. A part of him wished he could do still more. It was a long cherished fantasy of his to take his lover into his arms, strip him out of his black suit and take him right in the precinct where anyone could see. But he knew his partner. He knew John would never agree to something so personal made so public; the fact that he had managed to coax Munch into this surprised Fin to no end.

Another groan, this one louder and longer than the first, escaped Munch as his fingers tightened in his lover's dark hair. "Fin... love, please... I'm gonna... I can't...."

Don't baby, Fin thought as his tongue danced around the flared head, licking up at the fluid leaking out. *Don't hold back on me. I gotcha*. He tightened his grip on John's long legs, holding him steady. *I'll catch ya, John. Just let go*.

Minutes later, Fin got his wish. With one last groan, Munch came, his entire body shuddering as he came down his lover's eager throat. Letting out a muffled groan of his own, Fin greedily swallowed it all, even licking him clean before tucking him back into his pants. He looked up and made a show of swiping his tongue over his grinning lips. "Sweet baby."

Munch stared at him, eyes wide, chest heaving as he tried to get himself back under control. "You... you..." Finally, he gave up, clutching at Fin's broad

shoulders instead. "Come here."

Fin stood up and was immediately pulled into a demanding kiss. The younger man reached up to card his fingers through his lover's gray hair, pressing him back against the wall as he rubbed his own erection against one hard thigh. He wanted, needed, loved this man so much....

It was only a lack of air that made the two men break the kiss. John cupped Fin's face in his hands, giving him a long look before brushing the lightest of kisses against his lips. "God, I love you," he murmured, putting everything he had, everything he was feeling into those words.

"Love you, too, John. So much, baby." Fin's voice was just as soft as he stole another lingering kiss before drawing away fully. "What's say we take this someplace a little more private? Like home?" His dark eyes sparkled mischievously. "Cause there are a whole mess of things I wanna do to you, and with you, that would be uncomfortable doin' here."

Munch felt his arousal return full force as he took his lover's hand and let himself be led out of the room. "So do I," he agreed wholeheartedly. "And we will. Just as soon as we finish up those reports."

"John!"

Munch couldn't help laughing as he steered his partner back to their shared desks. Turning the tables on his lover had never been so much fun.

COMFORT POST "UNCLE"

John Munch watched as his uncle slowly, deliberately, walked away from him without once looking back. He let the hand that he had used to reach out with fall limply to his side. "Uncle Andrew," he breathed, the name coming out in a soft, sad little sigh.

He looks so lost, Elliot Stabler thought, for once not sure what to do. He had never seen the older detective like this, looking like a heartbroken little boy, in spite of his lined face and gray hair.

Just then Munch's partner stepped up, putting a careful hand on the taller man's arm. "John?" Odafin Tutuola said, his voice full of concern. "You still with us?"

John blinked, the sound of his partner's voice shaking him out of his daze. "Yeah." He grasped Fin's arm. "Come on. You have to help me talk to him." The tone of his voice took a pleading edge to it as he looked at the younger man with wide eyes. "He likes you. Maybe he'll listen to you."

Fin shook his head. "He won't. You know he won't. If he's anything like you, he's too stubborn to listen to anyone right now, no matter what you try to say." He paused, his voice softening. "You gotta let him go, John."

"No!" The word came out in an anguished cry. "I can't leave him like this! He doesn't understand... He's not thinking right..."

"Yes, he is," Fin interrupted gently. "He's owning up to what he did, pushin' that guy under the train. He's taking responsibility for it the only way he knows how." He paused. "That's a brave thing... doin' what he is."

John shook his head. "I can't let him do this, Fin." A lone tear slid down the older man's cheek. "I can't..."

Reaching over, Fin brushed the tear away with his thumb. "You gotta, baby," he whispered, his tone turning tender. "He made his choice. You really wanna try taking that away from him?"

John didn't say anything. Instead, his shoulders slumped as he visibly crumbled under the weight of everything that had happened. "There's nothing I can do, is there?" he asked. "If Uncle Andrew refuses his medication... and as long as he stays here... there's nothing I can do."

Fin shook his head again. "No." He put an arm around his partner's slender waist, holding him steady. "Come on, John. Let's get out of here." There was a pause. "Let me take you home."

"Your home," John murmured, his voice as firm as he could make it. He didn't want to go back to his empty basement apartment and listen to the echoes.

Not so soon.

Fin immediately understood. "Course my home. No way in hell I'm lettin' you be by yourself right now." He looked at Elliot. "Will you tell Cragen?"

Elliot nodded. "Go on." He watched Fin lead John out the double doors before following them.

His own partner was still waiting outside the ward, her face an unreadable mix of emotions as she watched Munch and Fin head for the elevator. Elliot swallowed down his disapproval of her choice to remain outside. *Olivia would've gone in with me, he couldn't help thinking. She would've gone in and done what she could. But then Munch is just as much a friend as he is a fellow detective.*

Seeing Dani about to say something, Elliot put a hand on her arm to stop her. "Not now," he said, shaking his head. "Maybe later. After Fin puts him back together."

Dani gave him a confused look. "Puts him..." She stopped, her eyes widening as understanding dawned. "You mean they're..." She didn't finish.

Elliot nodded. "Five... no, six years now. Old married couple."

She frowned a little. "Usually they don't let partners stay together if they become involved. Too much of a chance of personal feelings interfering with work."

"Cragen lets it slide because they work together so well." Elliot suddenly smiled. "And because no one else will put up with them. Besides, they keep private stuff private." Seeing the look on Dani's face, Elliot's smile disappeared. "Is it going to be a problem?"

"No, of course not," she said – a little too quickly, he thought, but he let it go. "It's just they're so... different."

Elliot considered that for a moment. "Maybe that's why it works so well," he finally said. "Munch keeps Fin on an even keel and Fin keeps Munch from slipping too far into the darkness. It's almost scary the way they are sometimes." He paused. "They complete each other. That's the only way I can describe it. Their relationship is more solid than some of the marriages I know."

Dani didn't say anything. Instead, she nodded toward the closed double doors. "Is Andrew still refusing to take his medication?"

"Yeah. And it's already starting to affect him. Another few weeks and he'll be back to the state we found him in." Elliot let out a sigh. "The state's going to keep him here, though. So Munch can keep an eye on things."

"And Munch? Is he okay?"

She's just asking out of politeness, Elliot thought, his opinion of her going down another notch. *She does-*

n't really care. And she doesn't like the fact that Munch and Fin are a couple, either. He made a mental note to tell the pair his suspicions the next time he got the chance. They should know to keep an eye on her. Just in case.

"He'll be good. Fin will take care of him," he answered before changing the subject. "Come on. Casey should know what happened and we should check in with Cragen." He followed her to the elevator, wishing for the millionth time that it were Olivia next to him instead of Dani Beck.



Fin unlocked the door to his apartment and ushered his lover inside. "Get out of that suit and into something more comfortable," he ordered, taking in the older man's shell-shocked expression and shaking hands. He took them in his for a moment, his eyes widening when he felt how cold they were. "You're freezing, baby. I'll make you something to warm you up."

John shook his head. "Not hungry."

Fin frowned. "You don't eat, your skinny ass is gonna disappear one of these days."

Closing his eyes, John shook his head. "I can't. Not now." A pause. "Maybe later."

"Gonna hold you to that," Fin warned. He put a hand on John's cheek. "Tea, then. You need something

hot. Okay?" He waited for his partner's nod before giving him a light kiss. "You need some help getting undressed?"

"No. I've got it." A ghost of a smile appeared on John's face. "Thanks."

Fin smiled as well. "No need for that." He gave Munch a gentle push toward the bedroom. "Go. Put something warm on before you turn into a Munchicle."

Munch rolled his eyes heavenward. "Yes, Mom," he said as he made his way down the short hallway.

That's better, Fin thought, smiling as he hung up their coats. Too damn quiet on the way back here. Don't think he said more than three words. Going into the kitchen, he rolled up his sleeves and began making tea. Poor baby's hurtin' bad 'cause of all this. Maybe if I get him to talk, it'll help a little. He shrugged to himself. Worth a try.

John came out several minutes later, dressed in pajamas and wrapping his robe around him. "Better?" he asked as he sat down on the sofa.

"You tell me," Fin said as he handed the steaming cup to his partner. He sat down next to him and kicked off his shoes. "How you feeling?"

Munch took a long sip of his tea. "Warmer, anyway." There was a long pause. "I just wish there was something I could do."

Fin put a hand on his lover's robed knee. "I know, baby. I wish, too."

John was silent for a long moment before continuing. "After my dad... did what he did... I used to spend a lot of time with Uncle Andrew. He was the only one I could talk to about everything... what I was feeling... how much I hated my father for what he did... how guilty I felt." He took a deep breath, his voice shaking a little. "And he never judged. No matter what I told him... he never said I was wrong or bad."

"Sounds like he's a good man," Fin said quietly as he moved closer. "I only met him that one night, but I could see how much he cared about you."

John nodded, a wan smile crossing his face. "He liked you, you know," he said, looking at his partner. "That night... he said he was glad I had found someone to make me happy..."



"Do you have someone in your life, John? Someone special?"

To say the question had been unexpected was an understatement of magnificent proportions. John stopped dead in his tracks, his fingers frozen around the silk ends of his tie. "What?" he asked, blinking.

"In your life... is there someone?" Andrew pressed,

suddenly looking worried. "You're not alone, are you, John?"

A small smile crossed John's face as he finished knotting his tie. "No, Uncle Andrew. I promise you, I'm not alone."

Andrew looked pleased. "Is it that pretty detective? What was her name... Dani?"

John shook his head. "No, not Dani. She's new. We're all still getting to know her."

Going over to the pictures on the tallest bookcase, Andrew picked up a group photo of the entire squad. "This pretty lady, then? The one wearing the sparkling Santa hat?" he asked, indicating Olivia. He peered at the photo closely. "Did I meet her?"

John shook his head. "That's Olivia. And no, you didn't. She's away right now, working a case for the FBI." He paused long enough to slip on his suit jacket. "Besides, Olivia and Elliot have something going. Not sure what it is, but it's something."

Andrew looked at the picture again, finally seeing what it had captured. "Is it the man standing next to you, then? He has his arm around you. And you're both smiling."

John froze, not knowing what to say. He finally settled for as little as possible. "That's my partner, Fin."

Andrew continued to peer at the photo. "I haven't

met him, have I? I would remember meeting him."

The younger Munch shook his head. "Fin's been at court all week. One of his old cases came up... He used to work Narcotics before we became partners." He paused. "But he's coming by later tonight. I thought we could go someplace for dinner."

"He looks like a nice man," Andrew said. A confused look crossed his face. "Fin?"

"It's short for Odafin. That's his name – Odafin Tu-tuola." He smiled at the look on his uncle's face.

"Yeah, I know. It's a mouthful. That's why everyone calls him Fin."

"You love him very much, don't you?" Andrew asked as he carefully put the photo back on the bookshelf. "I can hear it in your voice when you mention him." He turned back around to face John. "And it's all over your face. You look happy."

John couldn't help the blush he felt creeping across his cheeks. "With all my heart," he replied, ducking his head. "As for being happy... Fin has a lot to do with it."

"And he loves you?" Andrew pressed. "He's good to you?"

"Pretty sure he loves me. He says so all the time," John said, still smiling. "And he's very good to me. Definitely better than any of my wives ever were." He paused, the look on his face turning serious.

"Uncle Andrew... I need to know... are you okay with all this? I mean, with me being in love with another man?"

Going over to his nephew, Andrew reached up and gently patted his lined cheek. "John, my boy, I'm glad you're not alone. Out of all you kids... I used to worry about you the most." He smiled. "If he loves you... and you love him... and he makes you happy... then of course I'm okay with it." He tilted his head. "You look surprised."

"I am a little," John replied honestly. "Don't get me wrong... I'm really glad you're okay with it, but why?"

Andrew cupped the younger Munch's face in his hands. "Because love is a precious thing in whatever form it takes, and no one should be without it. Not ever." He paused, his soft voice taking a serious edge to it. "Hold onto him, John. Hold on to him with everything you have. And don't let him go."

"I won't," John promised. He wrapped his arms around the older man. "Thank you."

They were interrupted by a knock on the door. "That'll be Fin," John said, reluctantly drawing away. Giving his suit jacket a final tug, he opened the front door and grinned. "Well, you sort of look familiar, but the name escapes me."

"Very funny," Fin grumbled as he came in. "Can't blame you, though. And it's gonna get worse." He

rolled his eyes toward the ceiling. "Defense lawyer must've called everyone who ever knew the guy to testify as character witnesses. We're talkin' babysitters, kindergarten teachers, the works. Surprised he didn't go for the nurses in the delivery room." He shook his head, the frustration evident on his face. "Casey's ready to strangle him."

John sighed as well. "Can't say I blame her. You're going to be tied up for weeks while he milks this." He put a hand on his partner's shoulder. "What do you always tell me? Don't let it get to you?"

"Yeah... tell me when that starts working for you and I'll give it a try," Fin snapped back. A moment later, he closed his eyes and put his hand over his partner's. "Sorry."

"No need for sorry." John's voice was soft. "Come on. Before we go to dinner, I want you to meet someone." He led Fin into the living room. "Odafin Tutuola, meet my uncle, Andrew Munch. Uncle Andrew, this is Fin." John couldn't help the smile that crossed his face. "My partner."

Fin flashed his white teeth in a wide smile as he held out his hand. "Good to meet you, sir." He shot a glance at his lover. "Bit of a surprise, though."

"I can imagine," Andrew said, smiling as he shook Fin's hand. "But it's not his fault. I literally fell into his lap a few days ago."

"And this is the first chance we've gotten to talk for

more than five seconds since all this happened," John said, his tone apologetic.

"No worries, John. Things have been a bitch for both of us all damn week." Fin turned his attention back to Andrew. "Has he bent your ear about his latest conspiracy theory yet? Wanna make sure I haven't missed nothing."

John frowned. "I'm not that bad."

Fin shot the other man a look as Andrew let out a laugh. "We haven't gotten that far." There was a pause. "Can I ask you something, Detective?"

Fin nodded. "Anything you like so long as it's Fin. When you call me Detective, I start looking for my C. O."

"Fin, then," Andrew agreed. The look on his face became serious. "Do you love my nephew, Fin?"

A stunned look appeared on the younger man's face as he turned to look at his partner for an explanation. "I did warn you," John reminded him. "If someone asked about us I wasn't going to lie."

"I wouldn't ask you to," Fin countered before turning back to John's uncle. "Mr. Munch... Sir..."

"Andrew, please," Andrew interrupted, smiling.

"Andrew." Fin took both of the older man's hands in his and when he spoke again, his tone was soft and

gentle. "I love your nephew with everything I got. Every breath in my body. Every beat of my heart. And I promise you, as long as I'm here on this Earth, he ain't ever gonna be alone again." He gave the older man's fingers a gentle squeeze. "You got my word."

Andrew let out a sigh of relief. "Thank you," he said, the tone of his voice full of relief as well. "I was worried about that, about John being alone. I'm glad I don't have to be anymore."

Fin turned to look at his lover. "You hear that, John? We got your uncle's blessing. Looks like you're officially stuck with me."

John swallowed hard against the lump in his throat; every time he thought that Fin couldn't love him any more than he did, the man went and surprised him. It humbled him, knowing that. "I wouldn't want to be stuck with anyone else," he said, finally finding his voice. "And I love you, too."

"I know." Just then Fin's stomach growled so loud that all three men heard it. "What were you saying about dinner, John?"

John laughed as he shrugged on his overcoat and handed Andrew his. "Let's go before you decide to take a bite out of one of us."

"Maybe later," Fin promised, his dark eyes twinkling mischievously. "I'll settle for food for now."



"So that's how he knew," Fin said quietly, watching as his lover sipped his tea. "I wondered how he got around to askin' since he hadn't seen us around each other."

"Uncle Andrew was always like that, picking up the little things." Finishing his tea, John put the mug aside. "You know... I could end up like him."

Reaching over, Fin took John's hands and began to gently rub them. "What you talking about?"

"When Elliot and Dani found him, he was practically catatonic. Didn't remember me, didn't even remember his own name. Huang said it was because of his depression." John was quiet for a moment before he continued. "You know me... my mood swings... my family history. That could be me ten years from now."

"No, it can't," Fin said, his voice firm.

"It could. Everything points to it," John insisted. He ducked his head. "You don't know."

Hearing how shaky his lover's voice was, Fin's cupped John's cheek and lifted his head back up. His heart ached when he saw the real fear the older man was trying to hide. "I do know," he said, his voice quiet but still firm. "Cause I love you, baby. And there ain't no way in hell I'm gonna let that happen to you." With that, he gave John a long, linger-

ing kiss.

When they finally drew away, Munch let out a heavy sigh and put his head on his partner's shoulder. "I love you, too. So much." He closed his eyes, suddenly exhausted. "You don't know how much."

"I think I do," Fin murmured, planting a kiss in his partner's gray hair before drawing away enough to slip off John's glasses. Putting them next to the empty cup, he coaxed his lover to lie down. "Come on, baby. You've had a bitch of a day, and I know you ain't been sleeping well. Can tell just by lookin' at you."

Laying his head in his lover's lap, Munch snuggled close. "Too much on my mind. And I've gotten too used to being with you to like sleeping alone anymore." He closed his eyes as Fin began carding his fingers through his short hair. "Mmm... that's nice... what you're doing. Like it when you do that." He drifted off.

Fin let out a soft chuckle as he continued to play with his lover's hair. *Fastest way to get him to relax,* he thought as he reached over to turn down the light. *Should get him to go to bed. Needs a good night's sleep in a regular bed, but let him stay like this for a little bit.* A tender look crossed his face; he had missed little moments like this, too.

The ring of his cell phone broke through the quiet and Fin let out a muttered curse as he dug it out of his pants pocket. "Yeah, you got me. Hey, Elliot." A

pause. "No, he's here at my place. Gonna make sure he stays put here for a while so I can keep my eye on him." He listened for a moment. "No... he's okay. Dealin' with it his own way, like he usually does." Another pause. "He's asleep, but I'll tell him when he wakes up. Thanks, man. See you tomorrow." Clicking off the phone, he put it on the side table next to his lover's glasses.

John stirred a little. "What did he want?" he mumbled.

"Just checking on you," Fin said as he went back to playing with John's hair. "Said if you needed anything to give a holler."

John responded by snuggling closer. "Got all I need right here." His breathing evened out as he slipped back into a deep sleep.

Fin watched him sleep, a small smile crossing his shadowed features. "Yeah, me, too."



WISHFUL THINKING

"You didn't have to do this, you know," John Munch said as he gathered up empty beer bottles.

Clicking off the widescreen TV, Odafin Tutuola put the remote of the coffee table and began gathering up empty pizza and wing boxes. "I got the set up. Might as well get some use out of it, especially since we all was planning on watching the game anyways." He shot his partner a stubborn look. "And I still think I should give you something for all this."

Munch rolled his eyes. "For the last time, no. You provided the venue, we provided the refreshments. That was the deal. And at least here we could actually sit and watch the game; we never would've been able to at the bar."

Fin considered that for a moment. "Yeah, you got a point. Especially with the way the Mets was playing." He headed for the front door. "Gonna dump these. Be right back. Recycle cans under the sink." He disappeared.

After dumping the bottles into the bright blue bucket, Munch took the opportunity to grab another beer and take a closer look around. Fin's apartment was small but warmly decorated in various shades of brown and crimson, with everything centered around the big screen TV that took up the entire one wall. Munch, however, was more interested in the con-

tents of Fin's three floor to ceiling stuffed to overflowing bookcases.

He was pleasantly surprised. Next to the Black history and Martin Luther King books he had expected, there were books on Ancient Egypt and Rome, dozens of cookbooks featuring cuisine he had never even considered trying, and thrillers of the Tom Clancy and John Grisham variety. It was a widely eclectic collection, to say the least.

Munch heard the door open and shut behind him, followed by a wry chuckle. "I was wondering how long it'd take."

"And you're surprised why?" Munch retorted good-naturedly. "I would've done it sooner, but it would've been rude with everyone else here." He brushed a finger against one of the cookbooks. "I didn't know you could cook."

"Don't get much of a chance to with all the overtime we get, but my Gran taught me when I was knee high." Going over to the shelf where dozens of picture frames sat, he picked up a large wooden one and handed it to John. "She always said that a man needs to know how to make one thing really good so he can make dinner on special occasions."

John couldn't help but smile at that. "My Aunt Mary said the same thing. Tried teaching me and my brother, but it didn't get through my thick skull. I still burn water." He gazed at the photo for a moment before handing it back. "Formidable woman."

"You can say that again. One thing me and my brothers learned early was don't mess with Gran while she's cooking, otherwise you'd get a wooden spoon slapped upside your butt." He winced at the memory. "And that shit hurts."

"Aunt Mary used to throw things. Can't tell you how many plates and glasses we went through growing up. Bernie and I got pretty good at ducking." John indicated the large beveled glass frame close to Fin's hand. "That your mom?"

"Yeah." Fin picked up the frame and handed it over. "She wants to meet you."

John's eyes widened. "She does?"

Fin nodded, a smile crossing his face. "Yeah. Told her so many stories about you that she wants to see for herself." He thought for a moment. "How's next Sunday grab you? I always go over and help her out with dinner after she's done with church. She cooks up a storm for anybody she can drag in."

John nodded. "Sounds good. I can't tell you the last time I had a home cooked meal. And I promise to behave myself." He looked at the picture for a long moment before handing it back. "Very pretty lady. And obviously with a lot of patience if she had to put up with you growing up."

"Buckets of it," Fin replied cheerfully as he put the frame back in its place. "Had to, puttin' up with my

bad ass. Add in my brothers and it's a wonder her hair ain't all white." He gazed at the photo fondly. "Did the best she knew how, though, considering everything. And I turned out better than a lot of the kids I grew up with."

"I'm looking forward to meeting her," John said. He suddenly smiled. "Maybe I can get some embarrassing Odafin-as-a-kid stories out of her."

Fin let out a laugh as he headed back into the kitchen. "You can give it a shot, but you probably won't get nowhere."

John smirked. "We'll see. She won't be able to resist my charm, I can practically guarantee it." He turned back to peruse Fin's many pictures. "I think you're the only person I know who actually keeps pictures of his ex around."

"I still get along with her," Fin said as he pulled a bottle of beer out of the refrigerator and popped the cap. "Have to for my boy's sake. Seein' us fight used to tear him up somethin' awful." He took a sip. "'Course it helps that she lives in Jersey."

John nodded in understanding. "Yeah, I know the feeling. It's why I get along with all of mine so well. They're at least three states away." He looked at the other photos, most of them of Fin with his son at various ages. "Good looking boy. Does he take after his mother?"

Fin leaned against the doorframe. "You're full of

funny ones tonight, ain't you? Ought to book you on Letterman."

Munch pretended to consider Fin's comment for a moment. "I'm going to need something to fall back on when I finally decide to retire. A career in stand up is as good an idea as any." He was about to offer up another quip when he came to the last photo on the shelf and stopped cold.

Fin saw him freeze. "John? You okay, man?" he asked, a concerned look in his voice. "You just turned into the whitest white boy I ever seen."

John didn't say anything right away. Instead, he picked up the heavy silver frame and gazed at it for a long moment before turning it around to show his partner. "Is there something you wanted to tell me?"

Fin let out a muttered curse. The photo was of the two of them standing close together with Fin's hand on Munch's shoulder as he grinned for the camera. John, however, looked more than a little confused. "Fuck, John... I'm sorry." Putting his beer bottle down on a nearby counter, he went over to his partner and held out his hand. "Forgot that was still out. I meant to put it away before you got here."

John's eyes narrowed in confusion. "Why?"

"Cause you weren't meant to see it, that's why," Fin answered as he put a hand on the frame. He tugged at it. "Give it here."

Munch pulled it out of the younger man's grasp. "No. Not until you tell me why."

Fin let out a heavy sigh. "I didn't want you feelin' all uncomfortable for no reason," he finally said. "It's just a picture, John."

John shook his head. "No, I think it's more than that. A hell of a lot more, especially since I don't see pictures of anyone else in the squad here." He turned the frame back around to look at the photo again. "You know... I remember the day this was taken. We were doing the crime scene at that hotel we caught that family of grifters trying to fleece a couple years ago."

Fin nodded. "Not long after I joined the squad. We were still feeling each other out back then."

"Yeah," John said with a nod of his own. "I remember thinking you were a loose cannon, all over the place with how you did stuff. It got the job done, but I wasn't sure I liked the way it got done."

Fin shrugged. "Yeah... well... I thought you was one of those stiff, by the book home boys like I had in Narco. Make me do all the dangerous stuff while you take all the credit." There was a pause. "Good to know I was wrong."

Looking up, John offered his partner a small smile. "Yeah, me too." He turned his attention back to the photo. "Anyway... Nate... I think that's what the CSU kid's name was... You gave him the camera you

were using to shoot the scene with. The next thing I know you had your hand on my shoulder and I had a flash go off in my face. Didn't think anything of it at the time." He paused, thinking back. "Well... aside from the fact that I thought you were just screwing around."

"Impulse kinda thing," Fin commented. "Didn't plan it or nothin'"

"Kinda thought so." A thoughtful look appeared on the older man's face. "I remember later on when we were looking through the photos in the squad room, this one wasn't in the batch." Looking up, he met his partner's dark eyes with his own. "I thought it hadn't come out."

"No... it did," Fin answered, the look on his face unreadable. "I just took it out, is all. Didn't have nothin' to do with the evidence, so I asked Nate for it. Gave it right up." He suddenly grinned. "Said he understood where I was coming from since he'd been crushin' on you since you came up from Baltimore."

Munch's cheeks turned bright red. "That explains a lot," he commented. He was silent for a moment. "That still doesn't tell me why."

Fin ran a hand over his face. "You ain't gonna let this go until you get an answer, are you?"

John gave him a look. "What do you think?" His tone softened when he saw the uncertain look on his partner's face. "Come on, Fin. We've been through

too much together to start with the bullshit.”

After a long moment, Fin let out another heavy sigh. “Call it wishful thinking,” he finally said, taking the photo out of John’s hands. He put it back on the shelf. “And we’ll just leave it at that.”

John put a hand on Fin’s arm. “I can’t. You know I can’t.” His tone softened. “Fin... come on. Whatever it is, you can tell me.”

Fin jerked his hand away, the emotions he had been hiding away for so long finally coming to a boiling point. “Fine. You wanna know why?” Taking John’s face in his hands, Fin pulled him into a hard, swift kiss before pushing him away just as quickly. “There. Now you know.” He turned away. “And since you know where the door is, you can go.”

The living room was silent as Munch stared at his partner, his mouth open, and a shocked look on his face. Finally, he said, “And what if I don’t want to go?”

Fin shook his head as he looked up toward the ceiling. “Don’t play with me, John,” he warned darkly. “I ain’t in the mood to be jerked around.”

“I’m not. I swear.” Moving closer, John put his hand back on Fin’s arm. “I wouldn’t do that to you.”

Fin turned around to face him, his eyes hard and his mouth set in a thin line. “Then what are you saying?”

Tentatively, John reached out and brushed his fingers along Fin's beard line. "I'm saying... well... I guess I'm saying I've been indulging in some wishful thinking, too."

Fin closed his eyes briefly, leaning into the touch before pulling away fully. "Just thinking?"

"And wondering. And hoping. And even praying, for God sakes." A rueful little smile appeared on Munch's face. "And I haven't done that in I don't know how long. I'm lucky lightning didn't come down and strike me."

Fin couldn't help smiling at that. "You should've said something."

"I didn't know I could've. You're pretty good at keeping things to yourself," Munch commented. "And... well... you're you."

Fin frowned. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means that I'm a middle-aged, four times divorced, white, Jewish, lone nut of a cop," Munch clarified. "And you're definitely not any of those things except for the cop bit." He ducked his head and shrugged. "I didn't think someone like you would actually want someone like me."

A warm feeling went through Fin as he moved even closer, brushing his fingers over John's face. "You're all I've ever wanted since I first saw you," he mur-

mured just before he drew his partner into another kiss.

Letting out a muffled groan, John slid his arms around his partner's waist and pulled him even closer, his body pressing against Fin's hard enough for the other man to feel his arousal. His groan became even louder when Fin drew away enough to nuzzle his ear. "Christ... Fin..."

"Pressing your buttons, ain't I, baby?" Fin breathed, giving John's ear lobe a nip for good measure. Taking one of Munch's hands in his, Fin pressed it against the bulge in his jeans. "I know you're pressing mine."

"I can feel." John rubbed the bulge, drawing a low moan out of the younger man. "Makes me want to feel more."

Fin grinned. "I was hopin' you'd say something like that." He began leading John down the short hallway. "Come on. I want to see what you've got hiding under those fine suits you always have on."

"A lot of very pale skin," John commented as he followed. "You might want to find a pair of sunglasses. I wouldn't want to blind you."

Stopping in the middle of the hallway, Fin gave him a hard kiss. "You just shut that shit up," he growled, the serious look once again returning to his face. "You talkin' like that... it ain't true. And I won't let you no more. Got it?"

Swallowing hard, John nodded. "Loud and clear." He let himself be led into the bedroom. "You know something? I think I like you like this. All growling and forceful, I mean. It's a pretty big turn on."

Shutting the door behind them, Fin pulled Munch back into his arms. "I can be sweet, too," he said as he began undoing John's shirt one button at a time. He pressed his lips against the hollow of John's throat. "You pretty sweet, too, baby."

Closing his eyes, Munch swallowed another moan. "God, Fin... you don't know what you're doing to me."

"Getting a pretty good idea." Fin chuckled as his hands went lower, pausing at John's belt buckle. "Can I see, baby? Can I get all this stuff off you?"

Munch forced himself to nod as his hands plucked at Fin's shirt. "You, too," he said. "I want to see you, too."

Fin's face lit up. "You want me naked? I can do that. 'Sides, kinda hard to do stuff with you with my threads on." He drew away enough to pull his black sweater over his head and toss it to the floor. "How's that for you?"

Munch stared. He couldn't help staring. Finally, he swallowed hard and managed to croak out, "You keep a lot hidden under all those three piece suits, don't you?"

Fin smirked, preening a little under his partner's gaze. "I'm guessing you like what you see?"

"Fuck, yeah." Moving closer, Munch put his hands on Fin's flat stomach and slowly caressed his way up. He flicked at the gold ring piercing one nipple. "How long have you had this?"

"Got it on a dare after I graduated from the police academy," Fin said, sighing as John continued to play with the ring. "Some of the guys I went through with... we was all celebrating pretty hard when we came up on this tattoo place out in the Village. All of us decided to get something, and something like this wasn't as extreme as some of the other stuff. You know?"

Munch nodded. "I get the idea." He paused as he tried to gather his scattered thoughts. "So... you wear it all the time? I mean, isn't it distracting?"

Fin let out a little laugh. "Damn straight it is, so I don't wear it all the time. Last thing I wanna do is to be getting' wood while we're on a case." He let out a sigh and closed his eyes. "John... baby... you keep doin' that and you're gonna get jumped."

Munch smirked. "I thought that was the general idea." He suddenly ducked his head. "I have to warn you, though. I don't have the faintest idea what I'm doing here."

Fin put his hands over John's. "Kinda figured. I can

feel your hands shakin' a little.' He leaned forward enough to give the other man a teasing little kiss. "It's okay, John. You're here and you ain't running for the hills. That's what matters. And if it helps any, I think I kinda know what I'm doin' here."

John's eyes went wide. "You've done this before?"

"Long time ago. High school," Fin clarified as his hands went back to undoing John's pants. "Wasn't nothin' more than two friends satisfying a little curiosity... and we never did nothin' more than jerk each other off... but it helped me figure out a few things."

John's hands slid around Fin's bare back, moving over his still clothed ass. "Like what?"

"Like how bein' with a woman is a good thing and I like it, but I knew even back then that a man would get my heart. Not just any man neither." Fin's gaze softened as he looked at his partner. "Had to be the right one."

"I know that feeling. I've been looking for the right one for years," John said. "I just never thought I'd find it here." He closed his eyes as Fin's long fingers brushed against his erection. "And I'm beginning to know this feeling, too. God... that's good."

"And it feels pretty right from where I am," Fin said as he nuzzled John's ear. "Can't wait to feel it where it counts."

John couldn't help the needy little whimper that es-

caped him. "You mean you want me to... Oh, God."

"Damn straight I do." Sitting up enough to get rid of the rest of his clothes, Fin quickly took the rest of John's off as well. "Just as soon as I find the lube and a condom." He reached over to rummage through the bedside table drawer.

John reached for his pants. "I might have one in my wallet."

"No... wait... I got it." Letting out a sigh of relief, Fin pulled out a strip of condoms and a bottle of lube. "Don't know what we'd have done if they hadn't been in there."

"I'm pretty good at improvising when I have to. We would've thought of something," Munch said as he watched Fin rip open the condom. He let out a sigh as Fin slipped it over his erection. "Glad... glad we didn't have to, though. Fin..."

Quickly coating Munch's cock liberally with gel, Fin pushed the older man onto his back and straddled him. "This is definitely gonna feel good," he purred, his eyes dark with lust as he poured more lube onto his own fingers. He reached in between his own legs. "Gonna feel so fucking good to have you in me, baby."

Munch watched with wide eyes as Fin prepared himself. "Fucking hell. What you're doing... you're just so – damn."

Fin chuckled. "First time I ever seen you at a loss for words." He leaned down to give John a hard, tongue-tangling kiss. "John... baby... I love you."

John's hands slid around the younger man's waist to hold him steady as Fin moved into position, his eyes never leaving his partner's face. "I love you, too." They both let out a moan as Fin slowly lowered himself onto John's cock.

Once Fin had John all the way inside of him, he stopped, letting himself get used to the feeling. "Damn, but you're a handful," he whispered, brushing his fingers over the older man's face. "Wish I could stay like this... so fucking hot." He let out a surprised gasp as Munch wrapped a hand around his bobbing erection. "John!"

"Had to do something to shut you up," John said through gritted teeth as he squirmed under his partner. He let out a cry of his own as Fin began rocking his hips. "Fuck, that's it. Fin..."

Fin bit his lip as he moved faster, his fingers digging into the sheets as he leaned forward enough to rest his forehead against John's. "So good, baby... can't wait for you to feel it from this end." He let out a little laugh when he felt John shiver under him. "Like that idea? Me doin' you 'til we both come?"

"Yes," Munch bit out as he moved his hips in time with Fin's, meeting every thrust with one of his own. He could almost feel it. Fin entering him gently at first, then with more force as he became used to the

younger man's length and size. Their bodies pressed together so closely that no spot was left untouched. Their combined moans and cries growing louder with every caress, every thrust until orgasm overwhelmed them both, completing the long journey of two souls being made into one...

Wrapping his free hand around Fin's neck, John pulled him into a kiss as he gave the leaking cock in his hand several firm strokes. He was rewarded with a muffled groan and semen spilling over his fingers as Fin's orgasm overtook him. It was enough to send him over the edge as well.

Fin's body collapsed against John's, his arms snaking around the older man's waist. He let out a low groan, burying his face in his partner's shoulder as John slipped out of him. "Damn, John. I think you killed me," he muttered, his chest heaving as he tried to catch his breath.

"Then we both must be dead, because I feel the same way." Picking up Fin's discarded t-shirt, Munch dealt with the condom and cleaned them both up as best he could before dropping it back onto the floor. "I don't want to move."

"And you ain't gonna try before tomorrow morning, otherwise I'll have to hurt you," Fin warned playfully as he grabbed the comforter off the floor and pulled it over them both. He smiled, snuggling closer. "Definitely could get used to all this."

"Yeah, me too," Munch murmured as he laid his

cheek against his lover's dark hair. His arms tightened around Fin as his eyes began to drift shut. "Fin?"

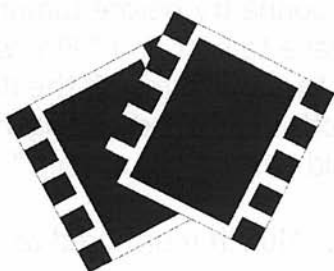
"Mmm?" Fin was quickly falling asleep as well.

"That picture... you think Nate still has the negatives somewhere?" John asked hopefully.

Fin drew away enough to look up. "Maybe. It's been a while." He paused for a moment. "We can always get him to take another one of us. Something that shows off how sexy you are now." He ran a dark finger down John's chest for emphasis.

"Only you get to see this much of me from now on," Munch warned, his tone only partially playful. "And the picture has to be this particular one. Because of this."

It finally sank into Fin's sleep and sex-befuddled brain what John meant. *The picture that started all this*, he thought as he leaned up to give John a final kiss before settling back into his arms. "I'll ask him tomorrow."



JOHN MUNCH



WHITE ROSES

"John?" Detective John Munch looked up from his paperwork to see his captain poking his head out of his office. "Reception just called. There's something downstairs for you."

"Something?" Munch echoed, peering at Cragen over the wire rims of his glasses. "What kind of something?"

"She didn't say. And apparently she's a rookie who doesn't know how to use the phone system yet, which is why she called my line instead of yours." Cragen looked annoyed. "Just go down before she calls again. It's too early in the morning to be dealing with someone that perky." Going back into his office, he slammed the door behind him.

Munch traded looks with his partner. "Well, that doesn't bode well for the day."

"Brass leaning on him?" Odafin Tutuola wondered as he glanced over his shoulder at the closed and shuttered office door.

"I haven't heard, but that doesn't mean anything. We're usually the last to know stuff like that." Munch got up from his chair. "Be right back." He disappeared out the squad room door.

He came back several minutes later carrying a large

cut glass vase. In the vase, nestled among the green ferns and baby's breath, were a dozen white roses. "And things get weirder and weirder as the day goes on," he said as he set the vase in the middle of his desk.

"They're beautiful," Olivia Benson said as she and her partner came up to Munch's desk. "Who are they for?"

"For me, apparently," Munch answered, looking as confused as he sounded.

"For you?" Elliot Stabler repeated, his eyes going wide with surprise. "You're kidding."

For an answer, Munch plucked the card off its ribbon and showed it to him. "Detective John Munch. Last time I checked, that was me."

Leaning back in his desk chair, Fin folded his arms across his chest. "Who in the hell would be sending you flowers?" he asked, looking highly amused.

The older man shrugged. "Off the top of my head, no one I can think of." Tearing open the little white envelope, he slipped the card out and read it. "And this doesn't help much."

Eager and curious all at once, Olivia leaned closer to see. "What does it say?"

"I saw these and thought of you. Hope they make you smile," Munch read. He turned the card over,

looking for more. "That's it. No name. Nothing."

"Recognize the handwriting?" Elliot asked as he went over to the coffee station and poured himself a cup.

Frowning, Munch shook his head. "No, I don't."

"Maybe it's some pretty young thing you helped out before?" Fin guessed, still smiling, a part of him looking as though he was enjoying his partner's confusion. "You know... wanting to say thank you?"

The older man thought a moment before shaking his head again. "Doubt it. We haven't been helping a lot of live bodies lately."

"Maybe not lately," Elliot continued, taking a sip from his cup. "But someone from your long and checkered past?"

"I doubt that, too. You don't make many friends working Homicide." Sitting down in his chair, Munch pulled the phone over. "But I know one way I can find out." He began dialing.

After two rings, the phone was answered. "Good morning. This is Detective John Munch with the NYPD. I received a flower delivery a few minutes ago." A pause. "Yes. They are very beautiful, but the card wasn't signed. Could you please look up who ordered them for me? I'd like to thank the sender if it's possible." He put his hand over the receiver as he looked up at Benson and Stabler. "She's checking her orders."

Fin smirked. "You think it's gonna be that easy?"

Munch regarded his partner from across their facing desktops. "What can I say? I live in hope." He turned his attention back to the phone when he heard a voice on the other line. "Yes, ma'am. I'm still here." He listened for several moments before asking, "And the clerk who took the order?" Another pause. "I see. And when will he be back?" A disappointed look crossed his face. "Okay. I'll try back then. Thank you." He hung up the phone. "I also live to see those hopes dashed every damn time."

"So no luck, I take it?" Olivia prompted.

Munch shook his head yet again. "Nope. Turns out that the order was paid for in cash, so no credit card receipt. And the clerk who took the order left this morning for his two week vacation, which pretty much guarantees that being a dead end."

"You never know," Fin commented.

"He left for Key West," Munch added. "After two weeks of margaritas and baking his brain in the Florida sun, he'll be lucky if he remembers his own name, much less the name of the person who sent those flowers."

Elliot looked amused as well. "So I guess that means you have a secret admirer."

Munch regarded the flowers dubiously. "Or a

stalker."

Olivia rolled her eyes heavenward. "You're such a romantic, John."

John turned his head to look at her. "After four marriages, I had that little piece of me taken out at the advice of my lawyer. It got me into too much trouble." He turned his eyes back to the roses, his expression softening a little. "They are beautiful, though. And no one's ever sent me flowers before. It's kinda nice."

"So enjoy them," Fin said from his side of the desk. "Whoever sent them, they'll let you know if they really want to."

Munch looked at his partner over his glasses. "And if they don't?"

"They will," the other man replied with a knowing little smile. "They just might be watching, you know? Seeing your reaction while getting up the courage to say something." He paused. "Some people... they're shy like that. Need to look over the edge a bit before jumping into the unknown, just to see what they're getting into."

John gave his partner a look. "You've been spending too much time around Huang," he commented. After a moment, however, he said, "But I guess you're right."

"So you're not going to do anything?" Elliot said, go-

ing back to surprised.

"What can I do? Aside from flying down to Key West to find the guy, and that seems too extreme to me," Munch said with a shrug. "Especially for flowers."

"So you're not even a little curious?" Elliot pressed.

"I didn't say that. I'm definitely more than a little curious. But there's no sense in me getting all crazy about it." Moving the vase over just enough so he had room on his desk, Munch began going through case files. "I've got enough going on to raise my blood pressure as it is. Besides, I'll find out eventually." He glanced back up at the flowers, then at the card lying nearby. He couldn't help the small smile that crossed face. "The person who sent them will want to see if what they wrote actually came true."



It did, Fin thought, allowing himself a smile of his own as he turned his attention back to his own reports. *And it's beautiful thing to see.*



"So any ideas who they might be from yet?" Fin asked as they headed for the elevator later that day.

"No, and I've been racking my brain all day," John said as he followed his partner, the roses held carefully in front of him. "Can't think of a damn thing."

"No special days celebrated by any of the past Mrs. Munches?"

"The only thing any of them would be celebrating would be the anniversary of my signing the divorce papers." Munch stepped into the open elevator after Fin. "And we're nowhere near any of them."

"So maybe it's a secret admirer like Elliot said," Fin teased as he pressed the button that would take them to the parking garage.

"More like someone's idea of a practical joke," John said, his tone turning dark and morose.

Fin couldn't help staring at him. "Why you go and say that for?"

Munch shot his partner a look. "Look at me. Do you honestly think any woman in her right mind would consider me dream date material?"

This man would. Definitely, Fin thought, biting back the words before he could say them. He wasn't ready to talk about this to his partner yet, not while it was still a relatively new idea for himself.

But his heart went out to the older man all the same. *Those damn exes of his... they did a number on the poor baby, putting all those doubts in his head.* He looked John over; in his mind, there was no reason for doubts like that. No reason at all.

Out loud, he covered himself by saying, "You'd be

surprised, John." He grinned at his partner. "You'd definitely be surprised."



Going into his dark apartment, Munch made his way to the small kitchen, setting the vase on the counter before turning on the light. *They are pretty*, he thought, another smile crossing his face as he admired them. *I wish I could figure out who sent them, though. I'd like to thank whoever it is.* Letting out a sigh, he went to take off his hat and overcoat. *I guess Fin's right about this. I'll find out when whoever did it gets their courage up.* He just hoped that he didn't have to wait too long.

Pulling a beer out of the refrigerator, John popped it open and took a long sip, his mind still on the flowers. *Has to be someone who knows me and my schedule, otherwise how would they know where to send them? So that narrows the field; the only people I see are the ones I work with.* Putting his bottle down for a moment, Munch pulled off his red striped tie and lay it on the counter next to the vase. *So... people I work with. Most of them are either married or seeing someone important. Casey Novak isn't... but I don't know her that well. And from what's going around, Olivia is more her type than I am.* Picking up his bottle, he took another swallow. *And by the way Olivia was reacting, she didn't. Not that she would, with how wrapped up she is in Elliot.*

He stood there by the sink for the better part of an hour, looking at the roses and drinking his beer as

he ran down the list of people he knew in his head. With every name came a reason as to why he was sure they couldn't be the sender, until he had narrowed the list down to one name. One person.

His partner.

The thought sent a shock wave through him so strong that he nearly dropped his beer bottle. *No. It can't be*, he told himself over and over, a part of him not wanting to believe it while another part of him wanted it to be true so badly that it made his heart ache. *He wouldn't... would he? He said... I remember him saying he sent flowers all the time. But he never said to whom.* John closed his eyes. *And he never even hinted that he might be interested in me.*

He knew Fin was bisexual. The younger man had told him point blank after their first case together as official partners, asking him baldly if it was going to be a problem. He remembered how surprised Fin had been when he had said no, even going so far as to confessing his own checkered pass with its four failed marriages. That sharing of secrets had cemented their bond, turning them into friends instead of coworkers. And it had stayed friendship – Fin hadn't mentioned his sexuality since. In fact, Munch frequently forgot he had a partner that swung both ways.

Until now.

He's the only one out of everyone I know who would do something like this. But why? John carefully set

his empty beer bottle in the sink, not trusting himself to hold it any longer. *He's not cruel. And he's never done anything he doesn't mean. So why would he go and do something like this now, after all this time? When he's never even looked at me like that before?*

Or had he?

Suddenly every moment that he had caught his partner looking at him came into clearer focus. The emotions Fin had been hiding... longing, maybe? A desire for something more between them? But if that was the case, why do something like send roses? Why not just come out and ask?

Because even though he knows me, he doesn't know what I'd do if he came onto me flat out, John realized. *There's more at stake than just our friendship, our partnership. It could mean his job, his whole career.* The older man let out a sigh. No wonder Fin hadn't wanted to take the risk.

But he still wanted me to know. He reached out to caress one of the white blooms with his fingertip. It was silky smooth to the touch and a part of him wondered if Fin's skin felt like that. *He wanted me to know that someone cared. That I wasn't alone.* The thought sent a warm feeling through him.

But that still doesn't answer the question why, he thought as he let his hand fall. He suddenly made a decision. *I have to know. And it can't wait until tomorrow. It can't wait another moment. I have to know now.*

Giving the roses one last long look, Munch went for his hat and coat, all the while praying that his partner would be home when he got there. He wasn't sure what he was going to do if he wasn't.



Nearly a half an hour later, Munch knocked on his partner's door. *Please let him be home*, he thought, waiting a grand total of thirty seconds before knocking again. *Please, God... I'll wait all night if I have to. I'll go out and search the streets if that's what it takes, but this can't wait.* He closed his eyes for a moment. *Please... just let him be home.*

He was just about to knock a third time when he heard the sound of locks being undone. A moment later, the door opened and a confused looking Odafin Tutuola stood in the entryway. "John? What in the hell are you doing here? Do you know what time it is?"

Munch checked his watch, wincing when he saw that it was close to midnight. "I'm sorry. Did I wake you?" He glanced at Fin's bare feet peeking out from under the long robe he was wrapped in. "It looks like I did."

"Another half an hour and you would've. I was in bed reading." Fin showed John the book he was carrying with a shrug. "What's going on? Did something happen?"

"Not exactly," John said, trying hard not to stare at the glimpse of bare chest he could see. His partner was a handsome man; why hadn't he noticed it before?

Swallowing hard, Munch met his partner's dark eyes with his own. "We need to talk."

"Now?" Fin asked, his eyes narrowing. "It can't wait until the sun comes up?"

Munch immediately shook his head. "No, it can't. We have to talk now."

After a moment, Fin let out a long suffering sigh and stepped aside. "Come on in. I'll make us coffee. We're gonna be here for a while by the sound of things." He closed the door behind John and ushered him into the living room. "Good thing we're not catching tomorrow."

"Yeah." Hanging up his hat and coat on the brass stand by the doorway, Munch followed him as he took a quick look around. He suddenly smiled. "Looks a lot bigger than a cracker box."

Fin shot him a smile that hit John square in the heart. "Not by much. And you're thinkin' of my place before this in Brooklyn. That place definitely was a cracker box." Putting his book on the counter, he started the coffee maker. "So what did you want to talk about?" he asked as he pulled two mugs out of the overhead cupboard.

Munch came right to the point. "The flowers," he said, coming closer. "You sent them."

Silence. Finally, just as John was beginning to doubt himself, Fin nodded. "Yeah." He met his partner's shocked gaze with his own unflinching one. "How'd you figure it out? I didn't give you a whole lot of help."

"No, you didn't," Munch agreed. "I went through everyone in the precinct in my head. Figured it had to be someone from work – no one else knows my schedule. And after I was done, you were the only person I thought of who might do something like that." He paused. "And then I remembered the comment you made a while back about how you sent flowers all the time."

Fin's lips quirked in a small smile. "Gotta watch what I say around you. You remember everything, dontcha?"

Munch shrugged. "Important stuff." There was a pause. "I want to know why."

"Why I sent you the roses?" Fin clarified and the older man nodded. "I was coming home the other night and I saw them in the window of the flower shop on the corner. Thought of you first thing." He paused. "Not sure why... but they fit you."

"That doesn't tell me why you sent them," John said, folding his arms across his chest. "If it was a joke, it's not funny."

Fin looked outraged. "I don't play that way. Not when it comes to you."

"Then why?" John asked again, his frustration growing with every moment that passed. "Because I don't understand."

"Don't you?" Fin asked, coming closer as well. His voice dropped to a low, husky whisper. "Can't you guess?"

John felt a shiver go down his spine at the sound of that soft, seductive little purr coming from his partner. "Maybe I need it spelled out for me," he said, forcing himself to remain calm. "You have to remember I've been married four times. It's pretty well established that I'm not good at stuff like this."

Fin's smile returned as he stopped, his face so close to John's that the other man could feel his breath fanning his cheek. "Maybe you be good at stuff like this," he breathed right before he closed the distance between them and met John's lips in a long, tender kiss.

Munch couldn't help the sigh that escaped him as the kiss lengthened and intensified, surrounding him with warmth and filling his heart with joy all at the same time. His arms slid around his partner's waist, a little whimper escaping him as Fin's hard body pressed against his. How long had he wanted this, dreamed of this and not realized that Fin wanted it, too?

Vaguely he felt Fin draw away and he opened his eyes to see the younger man grinning at him. "John Munch speechless. I think we got a miracle here."

The comment brought a smile to John's lips as well. "It's not often I get my breath taken away." He was quiet for a moment, trying to gather his scattered thoughts. "So. You... you want me?"

Fin shook his head fondly, still smiling. "More than that, John. A lot more." He reached up to brush his fingers over the older man's face. "I love you. Like you love me."

Munch's eyes widened in surprise. "How did you..." He stopped, realizing he had fallen for the oldest trick in the police officer's handbook. "Busted."

"Busted," Fin agreed cheerfully. "Been watchin' you watchin' me for a while now. Got tired of waitin' for you to do something."

Munch ducked his head. "I didn't think... You never seemed interested," he murmured. "Why didn't you?"

"Same reason. And I didn't want to take a chance and fuck up what we already have," Fin replied, his voice serious. "We're good together... we tight. You put up with my bullshit, I put up with yours. I ain't never had that, not with any of my other partners before." He paused. "But when I saw the roses, I got to thinking. We good together now, but we could be

even better." Another pause. "If you want us to be."

Munch's eyes widened. "If I... you have to ask? Especially after that kiss?"

"Yeah, I think I do," was the soft reply. "Like I said, I never got a hint from you except for those looks. And I didn't know whether that was you, or just my wishful thinking."

John swallowed hard, took a deep breath... and threw caution aside. "And if I said that it wasn't just wishful thinking?"

Fin didn't say anything, but Munch got the briefest glimpse of his partner's incandescent smile before he was pulled into another kiss as electric, as heart stopping as the first. It was enough to make his knees go weak, feeling the depth of caring, of love conveyed by that one perfect kiss.

"John?" He opened his eyes to see Fin smiling at him. "You okay in there?"

"Yeah. Better than okay." He shook his head a little to clear his daze. "You know something? You pack quite a punch."

"There's more," Fin said, his voice dropping back to the low, throaty purr that continued to send shivers down Munch's spine. "Lot more. If you want it."

John didn't hesitate. "Show me."

Taking his partner's hands in his, Fin led him down the short hallway to his bedroom. "Let's get you comfortable first. You're wearing way too many clothes."

"I kinda like what you have on," Munch said as they walked. "Be a little distracting if you wore it to work, though."

"Only you gonna see this much from now on," Fin promised as he took off John's suit jacket and pushed it aside. His fingers paused at the buttons of his shirt. "How much do I get to see of you?"

"As much as you want," Munch said, his own voice soft. "I have to warn you, though. You might want to dim the lights. I wouldn't want to blind you when they bounce off my pasty white skin."

To Munch's surprise, Fin gave him a hard kiss. "Don't you say stuff like that," he ordered, his voice gruff. He made a show of looking the older man over from head to toe. "I think you look damn fine."

Munch felt his cheeks grow hot. "And I think you may want to get your vision checked. I can recommend the name of a very good eye doctor. His card is in my wallet."

"I said stop puttin' yourself down like that," Fin repeated firmly. "Don't like it when you do, 'cause none of it's true." He gave John another kiss, this one lighter, intending to tease. "Love how you look, all tall and serious and fine." He blew hot air into

John's ear as he began undoing shirt buttons. "Can't wait to see more."

John sighed as Fin began trailing kisses down his neck. "Oh... God," he muttered, tilting his head to give his partner better access. "You know just what to do, don't you?"

"I got a few things in mind," Fin promised in between kisses. "You'll have to tell me if you like particular things. I'm willing to take requests."

Munch let out a shaky little sigh. Time for his own confession. "See... that's the thing," he said, trying to keep himself under control even as Fin's fingertips brushed over his chest. "I don't... I have no idea what to do."

Fin stopped and stared. Finally, he asked softly. "John... baby, you ever been with a guy before now?"

"That depends on your definition of being with a guy," John said, his voice still quiet, still soft. "But there was someone about a thousand years ago. When I was in high school."

Keeping his arms around his partner in a loose embrace, Fin sat them both down on the edge of the bed. "It didn't go well, did it? I can tell by the look on your face." He brushed his fingers through Munch's graying hair. "Did he hurt you?"

Munch immediately shook his head. "No. Nothing

like that." There was a pause, followed by a heavy sigh. "It just... it ended badly."

"Tell me."

Munch stared at him. "We're about to go to bed together and you want to hear about my sordid past?"

"Yeah. Tell me."

Seeing that Fin wasn't going to relent, Munch gave up. "We grew up together on the East Side. Friends forever. He was more my brother than my own was, but that wasn't too hard considering my family." He leaned into Fin's embrace, taking comfort in his friend's touch. "Anyway... we were at his house. It was after school and his mom hadn't come home yet, so we were taking advantage of being alone together by getting blasted out of our minds while we traded stories about sex and girls." A small smile crossed the older man's face. "In other words, we were lying our heads off."

Fin smiled as well. "Done my share of lying like that with my friends when I was a kid."

"I think every guy in the world has." Munch continued. "Anyway... we were both higher than the proverbial kite when he asks me out of the blue if I had ever thought about guys that way. The second after I said no, he leaned over and laid one on me."

"And you didn't push him away," Fin stated.

Munch shook his head. "I was too high to do much of anything. And to be honest, I didn't want to. It felt too fucking good." He paused. "Before I knew what was happening, we were both naked on his bed and Barry was blowing me. And that felt damn good, too. But we didn't get any further than that." At Fin's puzzled look, he elaborated. "With everything we were doing, we hadn't heard Barry's mom come home. She picked that moment to walk in."

Fin winced. "Great timing," he commented, his voice full of sympathy.

"Yeah, I thought so, too." There was another pause. "I still remember the look on her face. Horrified. I mean... there was no way we could explain what we were doing anyway. The whole room spelled like pot, both of us were stark naked on Barry's bed and Barry had my dick in his mouth." Munch ducked his head. "It was pretty obvious."

"What did she do?"

"That was the weird thing. She didn't really do anything. Just told me to get dressed and go home." John was quiet for a moment. "On the whole, though, it could've been a hell of a lot worse."

Fin frowned. "How?"

"It could've been her husband." He gave Fin a knowing look. "He was an ex-marine. Sharpshooter."

Fin nodded in understanding. "What happened with

your friend after that?"

"I never saw him again after that. His parents took him out of school the next day and transferred him to a military school somewhere in Pennsylvania, I think. At least, that's what I heard," Munch answered quietly. "I tried to find out what happened to him, but his mom just slammed the door in my face when I went over there. They moved out a year or so later."

Fin's face was full of sympathy. "I'm sorry, baby," he murmured, brushing his lips against John's. "They should've at least told you."

Munch shrugged. "I can understand them freaking out about it. When I came down from my haze, I did, too. Couldn't believe I had done something like that... but it felt like the rightest thing in the world at the time." He paused. "See? Like I said... long time ago."

"But it still gets to you," Fin said quietly. "That why you ain't never been with another guy before this?"

"Some." Munch looked up and their eyes met. "But the main reason... I never thought about being with a guy after that. Not until I met you." He shook his head. "I don't know what it is, but you do things to me I never thought possible." He suddenly smiled. "I kinda like it."

A mischievous grin appeared on the younger man's face. "Yeah? Well... I gotta few things in mind that I

hope you like just as much." With that, he pulled John into another kiss.

Munch let out a muffled sigh as his partner's hands once again began to wander. "Fin... Oh, God... please..." He jumped when Fin's fingertips brushed against one of his nipples. "Fuck!"

"I'm getting' to that," Fin teased in between kisses. "Maybe not tonight... but it'll happen eventually." He drew away for a moment. "Would you like that, John? Me doin' you like that? Hard... and fast... until you're yellin' my name when you come?"

Munch's cheeks turned bright red as he felt his body's reaction to Fin's words burn a path straight to his groin. "Yes," he breathed. "Fuck, yes. Everything." He gave Fin a hard kiss. "Want everything with you."

"And you're gonna get it," Fin promised. He went back to undoing Munch's shirt buttons. "Just as soon as I get some of this stuff off you."

"You, too." Munch's hands paused at the belt to Fin's robe. "Can I take this off you?"

"You don't gotta ask, John," Fin chided gently. "You can put your hands on me anywhere you want to."

"I'll keep that in mind." Munch slid the robe off his partner's broad shoulders, leaving him dressed in a white t-shirt and bright blue boxers. "Nice."

Meanwhile Fin had finally managed to undo the rest of John's buttons. "Yeah. Damn nice," he murmured as he stripped the shirt off his partner and tossed aside. "You look good, John."

Munch was about to contradict him again when his lips were once again captured in a hard kiss that left them both breathless and befuddled when Fin finally let him go. "You keep doing that and I won't be responsible for my actions," he warned, his own hands going to the hem of Fin's t-shirt.

"Hope not," Fin said as he held up his arms long enough for John to pull off his shirt. He then gave the other man a gentle push. "Lie down. Let me get rid of the rest of this." He gestured to the rest of his partner's clothes.

"Only if you come with me," Munch said, pulling Fin down with him. Realizing what he had just said, Munch's cheeks turned bright red with embarrassment. "I didn't... I mean... fuck."

Fin chuckled. "I know what you mean. You're kinda cute all blushin' and squirmin' though." He reached down and unfastened the older man's belt buckle. "Come on, baby. About time you was naked."

Tentative hands ran over Fin's bare back, pausing briefly at the waistband of his boxers before moving under them. "About time you were, too."

The rest of their clothes were soon scattered on the floor as they traded kisses back and forth, their de-

sire growing with every teasing caress. Munch couldn't help the frustrated little sigh that escaped him when Fin let him go. "What? Is something wrong?"

Fin shook his head. "Nothin'. Just forgot something." Smiling, he reached down and carefully took off John's glasses. "Always wanted to do that." He set them aside, reaching even further to dim the lamp. "Now... where was I?"

John cupped the back of his head, pulling him closer. "I think you were about... here," he murmured before he kissed Fin again.

Fin rolled them both onto their sides, his hand wandering over his partner's slender frame, noting which touches drew out a sigh and which caused John to moan. "Like that, baby?" he whispered as his hands moved over the curve of the older man's ass. "Like my hands there?"

"God, yes," John breathed, squirming under the younger man's touch. "You getting off on teasing me until I go crazy?"

"Just takin' thing slow, John," Fin answered, his own breath quickening as his partner's fingers found one of his nipples and teased it erect. "You ain't never done nothing like this before. Don't wanna do nothin' you don't like."

Munch shook his head. "You won't... you couldn't." He pressed his body against Fin's, making sure his partner could feel the heat of his erection. "Please..."

A shiver went down Fin's spine at the sound of that pleading little whisper. "Shh, baby. It's okay. I gotcha." He leaned closer, breathing hot air into his partner's ear. "Tell me what you need, baby. I'll do whatever you want. All you gotta do is say."

Munch's fingers dug into Fin's arms as he stared at the younger man with wild eyes. "Touch me," he finally managed to get out. "Want... **need**... your body against mine." He let out a long, low groan as Fin's hard cock rubbed against his own. "Oh... fuck, that's it. Just... just like that."

"Like that, baby?" Fin asked as he rocked his body against John's, making sure there wasn't a spot left untouched. He grinned when all he got was a moan in response. "Yeah... you like that, dontcha, John? I can feel you all hot and hard for me... can't get enough of you like this." He gave John a teasing little kiss as he moved faster, harder. All their teasing had brought him dangerously close, but he held back. He wanted John with him.

Reaching between their bodies, he grasped both of their erections together in one hand and began to pump. "Gonna make you come for me," he whispered, making sure that his partner heard every word he was saying and knew it for the promise that it was. "Just like this... with your dick in my hand... you're gonna come for me. But that ain't gonna be it for us. 'Cause when we got more time to plan this outright, I'm gonna be in you. And then... then you're gonna be in me."

That did it. Screwing his eyes shut, John threw his head back and came all over Fin's caressing fingers. The sight of his lover's climax, and knowing that he had been the one to cause it, was enough to trigger Fin's. Burying his face in John's shoulder, he came as well, covering both of their bellies with warm wetness.

They clung to each other after, taking comfort in their embrace, coming back to Earth after soaring so high. When Fin finally found the strength to move, he fished for his discarded t-shirt in order to clean them both up. "John? Baby, you okay?"

"Yeah." The word came out as a sigh. Opening his eyes, John offered Fin a lazy smile. "Just trying to unscramble my brain."

"No need to before morning," Fin reached down to the foot of the bed for the comforter that had been kicked there. He pulled it over them both before taking the older man back into his arms. "You're not going anywhere before then."

Munch let himself relax in his partner's embrace, for the first time in a long time content to remain where he was. "Did you mean it? What you said?" he asked after a moment.

"Which part?"

Munch's cheeks turned bright red. "You in me. And... me in you."

"Hell, yeah," Fin answered immediately, a grin crossing his face. "Maybe not tonight. I think we're both down for the count. But definitely soon." A pause. "You good with that?"

Munch nodded, smothering a yawn with the back of his hand. "Yeah, I'm good with it. You will be, too, eventually." He sighed as Fin began playing with his hair. "You know something? This is nice."

Fin let out a soft chuckle. "Yeah, it is. You better get used to it, 'cause now that I've got you, I ain't lettin' you go." A pause. "Better be okay with that, too."

"I am." And he actually was. For the first time in a long time, John Munch's heart was in another person's keeping, and he wasn't afraid. "I love you."

Fin brushed a kiss over his lover's brow, his own eyes drooping shut. "Love you, too, baby. Get some sleep now. You gonna need all your energy in the morning."

"Looking forward to it." Munch let out another yawn. "One more thing?"

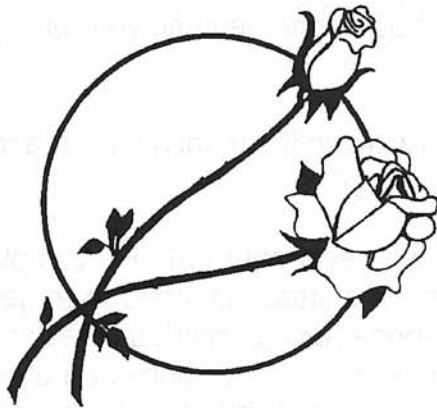
"God, don't you ever shut up?" Fin complained good-naturedly as he shifted just enough to get comfortable. "I'm gonna have to think up ways to keep you quiet for more than five seconds at a time." He pulled the comforter a little tighter around them both to protect them from the night's chill. "Go ahead. What's your one more thing?"

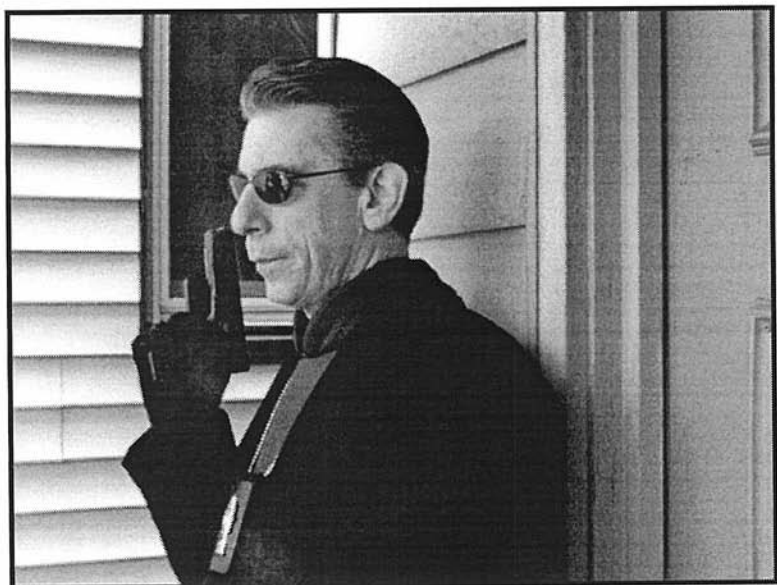
"I was just wondering... Why white roses?" Munch regarded the man holding him with a curious expression on his face. "I mean, usually, if you're trying to express true love, red roses are traditional."

Fin let out a short burst of laughter. "John, the last thing you are is traditional."

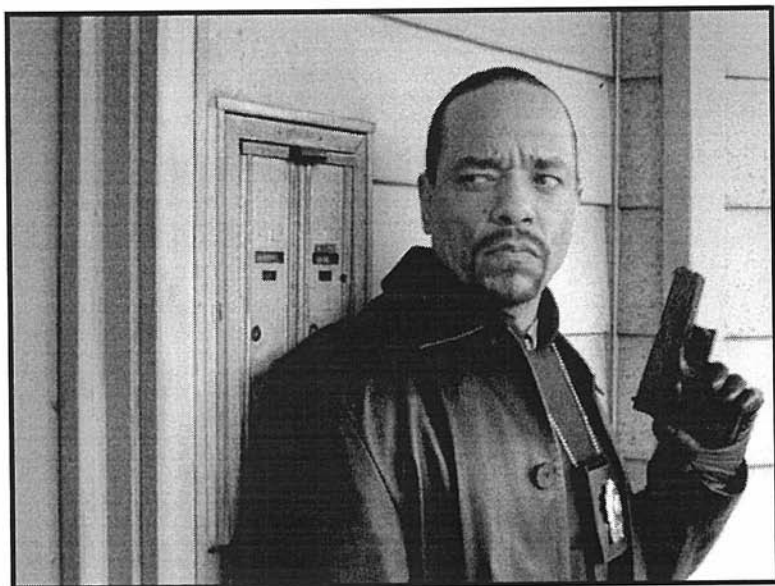
Not knowing what to say to that, John simply snuggled closer, his eyes closing. The last thing he heard was his partner's affectionate laughter before he drifted off to sleep. And for the first time in a long time, John Munch didn't dream of dead bodies and yellow crime scene tape littering grimy city streets.

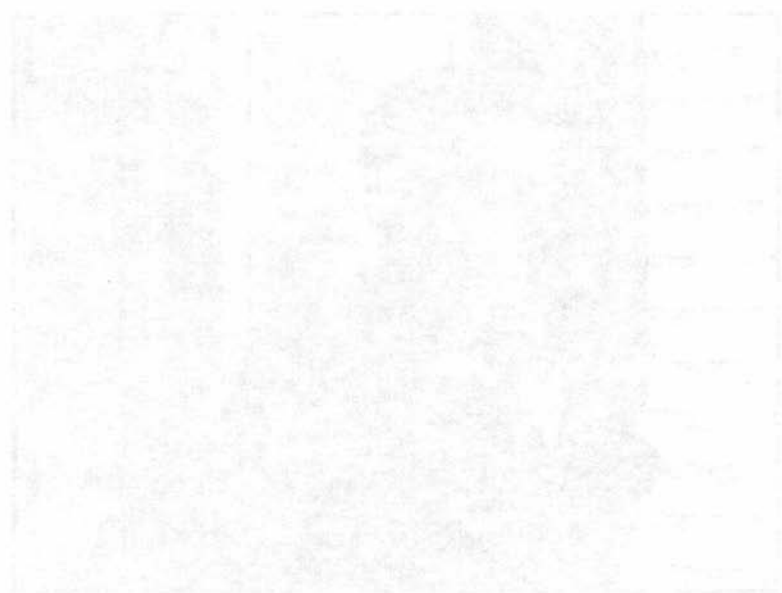
Instead, he dreamed of white roses and Fin.





PARTNERS





PHOTOGRAPH

