

A LITTLE TALL AND DARK

by

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They're all waiting for me to serve it up, he thought, looking around the room at suit after suit after suit, tired of all the black and white, tired of all the little leeches that wanted, whined, used, cajoled, slithered, all turning, all looking at him, wanting his attention, wanting his generosity, wanting him dead, wanting him in pieces, or wanting what was in his pockets. *All but him*. He swiveled and looked across the room straight at Vinnie's cool blue eyes.

And there that other guy was, meeting his gaze, moving forward if not with his body then with his whole spirit as if attached to him like fucking Peter Pan's shadow.

The party sucked. All of it sucked right now. He was bored. Everything seemed strangely one-dimensional. Except for Vinnie.

He wanted to take comfort in that, but something inside him got weirdly tangled and twisted and made him even more uncomfortable when he realized he really did not like anyone at all in this whole world. Except for Vinnie.

He reached for a drink off a passing tray, grabbing it so hard some of it sloshed out onto his wrist.

And what did that mean anyway, that he didn't like anyone? That people were like insects he couldn't wait to douse with Raid? All of them users and abusers. All of them petty little shitty little tyrants who didn't even realize they were already surrounded by buzzing flies, half-dead most of 'em, but not smart enough or polite enough to just get in the grave already and pull it in after them.

Damn, he was in a mood.

He drank the entire contents of the glass in one breath and looked around for another. He hated himself when he got morbid like this. It was time for more champagne.

"Here, Sonny."

He looked over at the voice. Vinnie stood right beside him now, holding out a fresh new glass of something, whatever it was he didn't care. He knew he was glowering. But Vinnie didn't seem to react like others might, groveling, or steering clear. Vinnie just stood there, almost shrugging, almost nodding, as if reading his mind like some fucking neon billboard, and knowing, and accepting. Whatever. This was the way he got sometimes.

He grabbed the drink and downed it, too. It was probably his seventh or eighth.

Vinnie said, "Shit."

Sonny said, "Yeah, tell me about it."

"You tell me."

It was weird, all right, suddenly having his very own angel-confessor for...how long had it been now? Months. Where the fuck did this guy come from? But he didn't care. He just knew he liked it very much, thank you, and fucked up or not, he was actually amazed that no one else in the room seemed brave enough to even care that he was less than happy right now about all of it. They always wanted so much, but they never gave anything. Not without being paid. Except Vinnie.

Dark, tall, mysterious Vinnie.

His head seemed to spin. Hotel ballroom. Glittering chandelier. Buzzing sounds like flies, or bees. Taste of sour. Scent of sweet.

Vinnie said, with that charming low Brooklyn accent, "You look as bored as me."

To which Sonny replied, "Sometimes I just hate people."

"Got it," Vinnie said quickly.

Sonny reached out, grabbing his elbow. "Not you." When he touched him, he felt a sudden devastation deep in the center of his stomach. It wasn't the first time. He didn't really like anyone all that much, never had really, not in any way that mattered beyond deals and contracts and negotiation. But Vinnie... He liked Vinnie a lot more than he ever thought he could like anyone. And there were no deals. Just this guy who showed up all furious one day, down and out, and decided to accept Sonny as his boss after Sonny had creamed him (or he had let Sonny cream him) in a childish but strangely satisfying casual boxing match at the warehouse.

It all turned out entirely differently than he thought it would. Vinnie was no ordinary street hood. When he ditched his cheap suit for a silk one Sonny offered, he transformed. He pretended, Sonny noticed, to be all subservient and gracious. But Sonny saw comprehension in those baby blue eyes, the rare gleam of intellect. Vinnie observed everything, and Sonny observed him observing.

It could be danger he felt. It should have made him nervous, but instead he was intrigued. His instincts told him Vinnie was a man with agendas even though Vinnie never asked for anything, but instead of worrying about the consequences of that he was drawn to him even more.

Dave had not liked Vinnie.

Sid had accused him of being a cop.

Sonny had been nearly convinced of it himself, but something had stopped him from killing the man outright. Something had twisted in his gut at the thought of this man disappearing. Something had made him look away, lose his breath, deny, deny, deny.

Vinnie had pulled a clever stunt to try to save himself – going through Sonny’s wallet, finding things in it to misread any man.

Sonny had never bought the act, not one hundred percent, but he had admired Vinnie’s quick thinking, his control. Most men would’ve broken down like babies, begged for mercy, negotiated. But not Vinnie. Vinnie stood tall.

So Sonny had let him go home, figuring there was far more to this guy than anyone else saw and damned if he wasn’t up for a little mystery, a little challenge, a little tall and dark. If Vinnie really was a cop, well, what if he could turn him?

And then Vinnie had turned out to be even more, reading his fucking mind for one, saving his life more than once, and just plain setting Sonny’s nerves tingling by being nearby.

If Vinnie was a cop, he was no ordinary one, and getting close to that after everything was a total turn on.

God, what was he thinking?

But dammit, cop or not, Vinnie glowed. Everyone else diminished around him. Sonny just loved seeing that, because it meant in this world of sleeping souls there was one other, awake like him, and maybe the whole world wasn’t such a disappointment after all.

But devastation threatened, haunted. The idea that Vinnie might not love him back made the world dim again, made him feel lost.

He started to reel.

“Hey, whoa,” Vinnie said softly, hand on his lower back. “What...?”

“Get me outta here,” Sonny said, trying not to notice the touch.

“I thought you’d never ask.”

Sonny frowned in confusion at those words. No way Vinnie could be reading his mind this time. Could he?

They got outside in the cooler air. The hotel parking lot was surrounded by tall trees, fresh grass that smelled wonderful. Crickets murmured all around.

They walked toward the black Caddy. Vinnie said softly, "Are you drunk?"

"I don't know, probably," Sonny replied.

"Good thing I'm driving."

"How much did you have?" Sonny asked, looking sideways at him.

"Oh," Vinnie murmured. Stuttered. "I...I don't know. I knew I was driving, ya know?"

"None? That's not like you."

Vinnie laughed softly, and everything sounded different in the silence and the dark. It sounded good. Soon it would be autumn. You could smell it coming in the air. And again the funny feeling came. The twisting inside. The sadness. This was worse than his typical morbidity.

He started to reel, to fall.

"Hey..." Vinnie caught him. They were at the back end of the Caddy and Sonny put his hand on the edge of the trunk as his knees started to buckle. "Sonny!"

"Fuck!"

"Come on." Vinnie helped him into the passenger seat and when he relaxed into the leather bucket he felt much better.

Vinnie got in on the driver's side and Sonny said, "Just sit here for a minute, ok?"

"Sure."

For awhile Sonny said nothing. He was thinking about Vinnie Vinnie Vinnie. Being so close. Being so calm. God everyone was so easily intimidated by Sonny. He never knew when people were being upfront or not. But was Vinnie being upfront?

He thought, *Ok, Sonny, do you really want to know the answer to that now?* And he thought he did. The voice in his head said, *How ya gonna find out?* But as that voice spoke, a plan was already forming.

To Vinnie he said, "Ok, let's go."

"Where to?"

Good question. Where could they be alone? Where could they be comfortable?

“I’ll give you directions,” Sonny said.

When they arrived, Vinnie said, “What is this place?”

“I have it for when I want to disappear for awhile. No one can find me here.” They made their way up the steps. Sonny was doing ok right now, no longer reeling. “No one knows I have it but my personal accountant.” *And now you*, he added, but he didn’t speak that aloud.

The condo was not too big, but very spacious and ornate.

He poured more drinks and Vinnie said, when he handed him a glass, “Ok, but you’re already drunk, so please just don’t pass out on me.”

Sonny didn’t care. He wanted to drink now. He wanted as much alcohol as possible right now because now he had a plan he wasn’t sure he could carry out unless he was pretty damn drunk. He didn’t want to hurt this guy but he thought anything could happen and if it all ended in disaster he wanted to feel it as little as possible.

A part of him thought he was being pretty stupid. You don’t have control if you get too drunk. Sonny loved being in control. Vinnie was easy with the every day stuff, more than agreeable all the time, but this might be really really hard. Did he need wits or a fogged delirium to pull it off? Maybe a combination of both.

He decided to slow down a bit, drink a little slower.

Suddenly, Vinnie asked him, “Why’d you bring me here?”

That was a little quicker than Sonny had wanted things to start out. But Vinnie was quick. Vinnie liked context and reason. He was not the aimless sort.

“I wanted to be alone, but I wanted your company.”

“Ok,” Vinnie said quietly. But the tone was not convincing.

Sonny took another slow drink. “All right, here’s a better answer if you want it. I’m angry and I’m bored and I’m restless and I’m frustrated and you being around makes me feel calmer. So you’re my drug of choice tonight, ok?”

Vinnie blinked, those blue eyes sparking for a moment. It seemed like his face might’ve flushed a little. He motioned to Sonny’s drink with a half-smile. “And that.”

Sonny looked at the drink in his hand. “I can’t taste anything.”

Vinnie put a hand to his forehead for a moment and rubbed softly. Sonny watched him carefully. Vinnie looked up. “You could just ask,” he said, throwing Sonny off a little. “I like spending time with you.”

Sonny grinned. Wow, it was going to be a blast to watch them trying to keep up with each other tonight. Vinnie did not blanch at just anything, that much was true. Who the fuck was this guy?

It might be fun to shock him. Was it time for that yet?

But he just sat back and waited. For a little while the small talk took hold. They talked about their fathers and their fathers’ early deaths. That got Sonny talking about Dave, which he hadn’t wanted to do tonight. Who was manipulating whom?

Talk turned to friendships won and lost. Girlfriends who betrayed or were superficial or were terrible fucks. They laughed a little at that.

Sonny asked Vinnie if prison was bad. He’d never done time himself. Vinnie said, a little clipped, “I survived.”

“Doesn’t sound too good.”

“It’s not supposed to be good.”

Then he asked it. Maybe he wasn’t drunk enough. Maybe he was too drunk. “Ever do it with a guy?”

Vinnie did not react except he closed his eyes. It seemed his breathing stayed even. It seemed he was about as calm as Vinnie always was. Sonny waited.

Finally Vinnie opened his eyes, looked right at him and said, “Have you?”

Oh, touche. This guy was GOOD. And he was into it now. A little tall and dark. He could take it.

Sonny let the smile twist over his face. Almost a scowl. “If I answer you, will you answer me? Honestly?”

Vinnie did not flinch. “Oh,” he said quietly. “We’re being honest tonight?”

“Well, hell, aren’t we?” All these questions and getting no answers. Not only was Vinnie good, he was educated.

Vinnie looked away at the ceiling. “I thought we were still playing each other.”

Sonny frowned. “What?”

Vinnie crossed one leg over the other, looked down and stirred his drink with his finger. "I'm not stupid."

"I know that."

"Then quit playing with me like I'm your mouse. You're drunk. You're not being serious. I'm not drunk. And I think it's probably time for me to just go home."

God damn if Vinnie didn't sound hurt. Sonny frowned. "Wait. I missed something."

Vinnie smiled. "Who's surprised?" He got up then, and set his drink on the counter in the open kitchen.

Ok, so he knew Vinnie would not be that easy. He knew the man was definitely no pushover. He got up and followed him. "Why're you pissed?"

"I'm not."

"I don't..."

"Yes you do, Sonny. You play with people's feelings. You know it, you like it but I'm not going to be one of them."

"That's not the way of it," Sonny said. Now he was getting pissed.

"No?" Vinnie challenged a little too loud.

He couldn't help it. His voice went harsh. Reverted to the dark. "No! It isn't. Or you wouldn't be here. In fact, sweetheart, you wouldn't even still be alive!"

Now Vinnie blanched. That GOT him. He backed a couple inches into the counter.

He hadn't wanted to play that card so early, but Vinnie always was a little too quick for his own good, pushing everything. At least he had him shut up for the moment.

"Who's playing now?" Sonny asked. It was going well. If he wasn't sure before, he was sure now. Cop. "There's a reason you're still alive. Why do you think that is?"

Vinnie opened his mouth, closed it, opened it again. "What do you mean?"

Sonny walked up to him real close, hands at his sides. Vinnie, bless him, stood his ground. He came almost nose to nose with him, then tilted his head toward Vinnie's ear and said softly, knowing it might be going too far. "Quantico, Quantico, Quantico. It's such a funny word. I wonder what it means."

Vinnie tried to turn away but Sonny grabbed his upper arm hard. “Oh, don’t turn away now!”

Calmly, Vinnie pulled Sonny’s hand off him and dropped it like a hot coal. “You’re drunk. I’m leaving.”

Sonny laughed a little. “You still don’t get it.”

Vinnie looked sharply at him.

“I’m not accusing you, Vinnie. No. I wouldn’t do that. I already know. I’ve known for some time. I’ve kept your secret. You’re alive because of me.” Would he buy it?

“But you’re wrong.”

Sonny turned away and put a hand to the bridge of his nose. “Christ.” He rubbed hard, then looked back at the stunned man. “How long are we going to play? Huh?”

Vinnie swallowed hard but said nothing.

Sonny sighed. Then he relented a little. God he loved this guy. “Do you want to know how I know?”

Still no response.

“Because hard as this is going to be for you to believe, we’re kind of alike, you and me. We’re the same. I see it every day. The whole world’s asleep, fucking zombies. Then you came. A little fast. A lot furious... at first. You’re the first person I’ve met in my whole fucking life who’s awake like me. You see through things. Well, so do I.”

“But that doesn’t mean...”

Sonny chuckled, “That you’re a cop?” he finished the sentence for him. “No. I found that out later. I took you on that drive for show. Oh, fuck, it was easy to convince the others you were ok on my word. They don’t even question unless you give them reason. And you’re too good. I had no worries. But it was kinda driving me crazy tonight. I wanted to tell you what I thought. And now I have. Now it’s out in the open.”

“But if you believe this about me,” Vinnie said slowly, cautiously, “why *am* I still alive?”

Sonny took a deep breath, let it out fast. He tightened his lips. Closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them again. “Good question.”

“And?” Vinnie was leaning heavily on the counter now.

“It’s really very simple.”

“How is this simple?”

“I fucking love you, man.”

Now Vinnie looked really trapped. His face paled. He lost a little ground as his knees flexed. He caught a barstool with his left hand and leaned. His eyes glistened with...what...pain? “That’s really funny, Sonny. Why are you doing this to me?”

Could it be? Did Vinnie actually have feelings in return? “What did I do? I’ve saved your life and invited you into my secret chamber. You’re closer than anyone’s ever gotten. And you’re asking me what I did?”

“That’s a riot, Sonny. You’re drunker than both of us thought.” Vinnie sounded devastated.

Sonny laughed. “Ironic, isn’t it? When the truth is all out in the open, still neither one of us can tell when the other is playing.”

Vinnie looked like he was thinking about that for the moment.

“You’re not being fair to me, Vinnie,” Sonny said quietly.

“It’s because I don’t know what you’re really up to.”

“If I’d wanted to harm you, I could’ve ten times over. Now you know how I’ve felt all these weeks. You act like you’re my best friend, but I don’t really know what you’re up to, either.” Sonny knew he’d scored a point with that one, because Vinnie nodded slightly.

Touche.

“Why did you wait until now?” Vinnie asked.

“Cause I was in the mood,” Sonny replied.

“Jesus,” Vinnie said softly under his breath.

Sonny sighed and turned around to face the couch. Then he turned back, looking at Vinnie still leaning awkwardly on the barstool. “You look like you need to sit down.”

Vinnie did not move.

“Maybe you’re wondering what I think about your job. Well, I could give a fuck. If you still want to destroy me, maybe I’ll let you. Maybe I’m done playing. Maybe I was long done even before Dave died.” On that last word, he realized his voice trembled.

“I don’t....” Vinnie started to say. Then went mute.

“It’s no joke to me, Vinnie. It never was.” He tried not to sound hurt. Now he turned and went back to the couch and sat. He grabbed his drink but merely stared at it.

“Or maybe it’s not a joke to you,” Vinnie said from the bar, still unmoved, “because you can use me.”

“Yeah. Maybe. I thought about trying to seduce you just to turn you.”

“Fuck.” Slowly, Vinnie walked over to the couch. He stood for a moment looking down. “Is that what you’re doing?”

“You think I’d tell you I’d thought about it if I was doing it?” He was scowling now; his breath came out in a huff, surprising him with his own emotion.

“Yeah, I think you might.”

Sonny leaned his head back and stared up at Vinnie through half-closed eyes. Tall and dark. His heart flipped over about ten times. His mouth went dry. Finally, he shook his head. Softly, “I’m not. But if you don’t believe me, there’s the door.” His gaze went to the unlocked front door.

“I don’t know what to believe,” Vinnie said. He pushed one hand nervously through his hair. Then he just sat down next to Sonny, grabbed the drink right out of his hand and downed it in one breath.

Sudden relief washed over his whole body. Sonny felt himself smile. *Oh Vinnie Vinnie Vinnie.*

Vinnie set the glass down on the coffee table, turned to Sonny and said, very upfront, “No, I never did it with a guy before. Unless you count playing doctor with my neighbor Jimmy Caverelli when we were just five.”

Sonny laughed, rocking forward. “Me either.” Then he laughed a little harder.

Finally Vinnie’s lips showed a small, held-back smile.

For awhile they both just sat there. Then Vinnie said, “So now what do we do?”

Sonny moved forward to the edge of the couch and a little closer to Vinnie. “Want some more to drink?”

Vinnie’s baby blues were sparkling now, even if still a little wary. “Hell yes.”

Sonny got up, went and got the bottle. They shared it for a couple minutes. They turned toward each other finally, still dressed in full suits, ties tight as nooses. It didn't matter. Sonny put his hand on the back of Vinnie's head and Vinnie let him. Then they both met in the middle, closing their eyes, mouths touching. Neither was prepared for what that single touch evoked. At the same time, they both shuddered, moved closer, mouths opening together.

When they pulled apart Sonny said, "Shit."

Vinnie stared at him with a look of disbelief. "Holy shit," he replied.

"Are we that drunk?" Sonny asked.

Vinnie put his hands flat to his face, then lowered them staring at Sonny over the tips of his fingers. "I think if that lasted even another half a minute, it would all already be over."

Sonny chuckled because there was no other response he could think of. He could hardly believe it. Vinnie had just said the sweetest thing anyone had ever said to him. He grabbed Vinnie's hand, held it tight. Vinnie gripped back with equal pressure. Then Sonny stood, pulling Vinnie with him. "C'mon."

As they moved side by side toward the bedroom down a small hall, their arms seemed to move of their own accord, reaching around each other, trying to embrace as they walked a little drunkenly, chuckling. The bedroom wasn't all that far, but they never made it.

Sonny had Vinnie up against a wall, kissing him while Vinnie was trying to remove Sonny's shirt. Then Sonny put his hand down the back of Vinnie's trousers and they both lost all power in their knees and sank to the floor. Kissing and disrobing at the same time was a challenge but they managed to undo ties and buttons and cuffs and waistbands all pretty quickly. Sonny had never wanted anyone more.

The first time was explosive, far too quick. They were both reeling for quite some time before they got the presence of mind to finally crawl into the bed. Then they got their wind back and were able to take their time, exploring everywhere and everything.

Sonny got his hands on the lube from his nightstand drawer and used it liberally on both of them. Then a little rougher than he'd intended, he flipped Vinnie over onto his stomach. He couldn't hold back, moved a little too quick. Vinnie cried out. His fists clenched hard at the sheets. He buried his head against the front of the mattress and made such a sound of despair that Sonny panicked. He drew back quickly and leaned forward, grabbing Vinnie's shoulders, pulling him to one side. "Fuck, I'm sorry!"

"Sorry?" Vinnie said, turning his head to look over his shoulder with hooded eyes. "Why'd you stop? That felt fantastic."

"Oh." Well, hell, it wasn't like he'd done this a lot, nor had Vinnie.

He pushed him down hard and Vinnie started to thrash. Vinnie was so hot and tight, even though the lube was slick and smooth, and he thought he would die being inside him like that. It only took a minute and he came so hard it felt like his whole body was breaking into a million pieces. Vinnie cried out too, and it sounded like he was sobbing. Sonny rolled off him, grabbed him and just held on.

“Your turn,” Sonny said.

Vinnie laughed into his chest. “Too late.”

Sonny reached between them, stroking Vinnie gently while Vinnie gave a little gasp, feeling the moisture there, realizing with amazement that Vinnie had come while he was inside him. “Then we’ll just wait a little while.”

“Ok.”

“Thanks for leaving that damn party with me,” Sonny said softly.

“Thanks for letting me live,” Vinnie replied, always quick on the uptake.

And oh, that was just too much for Sonny. Game. Match. Set. He grabbed him hard, pressing his lips to his. Vinnie’s arms came tightly around him.

He thought, *Yeah, a little tall and dark. That was all I needed tonight. All I ever needed.*

THE END