

(Author's note: Wiseguy. Sonny/Vinnie. This has been sitting in my files for months now because I didn't think it was finished. But it is finished. It just is. No rating. No warning. And for those who read the first line and, maybe, want to quit right there...just *TRUST* me...please...)

THE ANNIVERSARY

by

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“My soul knows you,” Sonny had said late one autumn night, weeks before his death.

There were those who might've said Sonny Steelgrave had no soul. That he was a cutthroat murderer, a sociopath, a selfish power-hungry Mafioso who cared only about winning at all cost. There were those who saw a hyperactive, short-tempered, self-made dictator who needed to be right, whose philosophies allowed him to run over others without a backward glance because they were in the way. They saw a spoiled prince, a game-playing child, a mad king.

But then he would lie back on the smooth sheet, dark eyes going misty and soft as brown velvet, and off-handedly make that kind of declaration. “My soul knows you.” And he would look at Vinnie in a way that Vinnie had never experienced with another person, wide open, vulnerable as a leaf in winter, and he would hold into Vinnie tight as if he were afraid of falling right through the mattress, down through the multiple floors of the hotel, straight past the casino and into the abyss itself.

Vinnie knew kings could love and still go mad. History was full of them. Love did not always conquer madness. An ability to feel deeply, even empathy did not guarantee sanity. Especially when the world around you was on constant vigil to strike if you ever showed any weakness. But Sonny wasn't mad. Not yet. Vinnie knew Sonny was about survival. If he was cutthroat, it was self-defense. If he sought power, it was only to make himself a stronger combatant. He did not have a death wish for himself or necessarily for others. He wanted to live. But he found himself at the center of a universe that seemed to want him dead at every corner. If he showed joy at the proprietary gain or planned destructiveness from his tactics, it was only because he had won the right to live another day. Sonny was one of those people who truly loved life. He embraced it with full-throated bursts of song, with a verve and energy that had everyone around him soaking up the thrum of his charisma, the staccato drumming of a heart thrilled to still be beating.

No, Sonny wasn't mad. Nor was he evil.

On the day of Sonny's death, there might've been those who thought he deserved his fate, that he was not worthy to save, that justice had prevailed. Vincent Terranova was not one of them. He had seen otherwise. And when he had said to Frank, as Sonny lay dead between them, those awful words, "I wish it was you," and Frank had told him he didn't mean it, Vinnie kept silent. He didn't dare speak. Because he did mean it. He meant it with all his heart. One man who loved him lay dead at his feet. The other was staring at him with a look of botched understanding that Vinnie knew could never be clarified. Because no one could understand Sonny the way Vinnie had, and no one could ever comprehend what had passed between them.

Vinnie had read somewhere that it can take a year for grief to play itself out. After the year was up, it did not mean you didn't care, or that you stopped thinking about the person you lost, but it meant you didn't think about them every five minutes, that whenever you heard their name or spoke of them, your eyes did not get all hot and blurry and you didn't feel like running forever until you could no longer breathe, until you collapsed.

For that one hope, as much as he dreaded it, Vinnie looked forward to the anniversary of Sonny's death. He longed for reprieve. The scar on his heart still ached as if Sonny had died moments ago. He still had nightmares. He still woke often with Sonny's name trapped like a fist in his throat.

In those first few days, after the debriefing, Frank had tried to bring the subject up. He kept saying things to Vinnie like: "This Steelgrave thing is over. You know you did right. He can't hurt you anymore. It's behind us now."

Vinnie never replied until one day he turned to Frank, snapping. "I never want to talk about it. Do you hear me? Not even to you."

Frank's eyes behind his big glasses took on a sudden, startled look Vinnie had never seen before. But he nodded. He said, "Maybe that's best, then."

Once in awhile the name would come up as a matter of case at the office, or when referring to the past. Frank kept good on his promise, though, and let it pass as an off-hand comment. He would brush the name aside, change the subject if others were involved, and after a few months Vinnie realized Frank was protecting him. Maybe Frank didn't know why, or from what. But he did it. And Vinnie realized then what a good friend Frank had become. It gave him a warm feeling to know that Frank defended him even in this, even if he didn't know the full story.

The anniversary was coming up. He was between cases. Vinnie planned to go off alone that day, take in a couple movies maybe, and surround himself with noisy crowds at the mall.

Frank was having family problems. When he called to ask Vinnie if he wanted to go on an overnight fishing trip, Vinnie hesitated. Then he thought, *What the hell*, and accepted.

Which was how he found himself sitting in a comfortable, rustic cabin miles from nowhere on the anniversary of Sonny's death. Frank provided the beer...a seemingly unlimited supply. And he plied Vinnie with the alcohol as if it were some requirement, or a prescription. Frank knew what day it was.

Earlier, the fish had not been biting. So they'd come back to wile away the afternoon. And get drunk.

He had a nice buzz going. It felt great. He said, slurring the words, "Thanks, Frank."

"For what?"

"For inviting me here."

Frank ruffled his hair, got up, and put some more wood on the fire. Vinnie watched him, his brain slow to catch up to what had just happened. The onslaught of memories were starting to pour in now. Just because of that one gesture. Frank ruffling his hair. That one innocent affectionate gesture. Sonny had done it. Now Frank.

His eyes burned.

Quickly, he took another drink. Then another. Frank turned, looked at him briefly, then looked down and dusted his hands on his jeans.

Frank came over to the couch and sat down. He handed Vinnie another beer from their fishing cooler.

Vinnie took it. He had lost count of how many he'd had, but he suddenly felt far too sober. His head was spinning, but not from beer.

Softly, Frank said, "I know you think about it. It's normal."

Vinnie glanced at him feeling annoyed but at the same time touched. He said, "It's still like it just happened yesterday."

"I'm sorry that case was so hard on you. I really am, Vince."

"Yeah."

"You never talk about it."

Vinnie sighed, took his feet off the coffee table, bent forward with his elbows on his knees. He leaned his head into his upturned hands. "It's not the case, Frank. And it's not an 'it.' It's a 'him.'"

"Okay, you think about him. He was your friend."

Vinnie turned his head, still leaning into his hands and looked at him. "Yeah. I do. So now we've talked. Can we change the subject?"

Frank frowned. "You can't even say his name."

Vinnie sighed.

"It's normal, the combination of anger and grief."

"Anger?"

"What he did to you, and to himself. He hurt you, Vince. I just wish you would talk to me about it. Whatever it is, rage, guilt, him taking the easy way out, it's gotta end."

"Hurt me? He's the one who's dead!"

"I know. And he put you through a lot. If only there was something else I could do about it..."

"What about what I put him through? I hurt him bad."

"Huh?"

Vinnie sighed heavily, not without some irritation. "Frank, I'm *not* having this discussion."

"Vince, you don't *still* feel guilty for betraying that man, do you?"

"Frank, just shut up. What do you know anyway?" Vinnie heard his voice get louder. "You don't understand anything!" He got up and went to poke the fire. His hand was shaking.

"How can I understand when you refuse to talk about it...about him. I knew this day would be hard, Vince, but I didn't know you still had so many resentments."

Vinnie didn't turn. "Resentments?"

“Well, yeah, that’s what they are, right? He forced your hand. He made you do things....”

“Shut up!” Vinnie interrupted hotly. He stared at the fireplace which was crackling and stirring with sparks. He wanted walk right into it. Just let its heat take him forever. Forever.

“What the hell are you talking about resentment for?” Vinnie said after a moment. He clasped his hands in front of him and stared at the orange flames.

“I...I don’t know what else to call it.” Frank’s voice was soft.

There was a prolonged silence.

“Hey, come back and sit down.”

Vinnie shook his head, did not move. He kept his back to Frank.

When he spoke, it was almost a whisper. “Regret, maybe.”

“Okay,” Frank replied. “I am sorry he had to die.”

Vinnie turned slowly, frowning. He felt the beginning of a sting behind his eyes. “Are you?”

Frank watched him but did not reply right away. He stared at Vinnie who stared right back. Finally, he said, “None of us wanted that, but isn’t it for the best now?”

Vinnie blinked. “The best for whom?”

Frank grimaced. “You, for one.”

Vinnie breathed very shallowly. Everything inside him was on the verge of shattering. “Me?”

“It may not be the ideal solution, but the problem is gone. Gone for good.”

Vinnie inhaled very carefully through his nose. “The problem?”

“Yes, Vince! The problem. Stop being so dense. He was a problem from the beginning. He pushed all the wrong buttons, glamour, women, expensive cars, shiny things. Hell, I told you I might’ve fallen for it all, too.”

Vinnie just stood there. Then he felt himself deflate, go numb. “After all this time...I thought you knew me better.”

“They’re everybody’s buttons, Vince.”

“You’re wrong. You’re so wrong. You thought I cared about all that?”

“You liked that Porsche. You all but flaunted the suits, the Rolex....”

“What?” Vinnie frowned, feeling his breathing start to turn to gasps. “*What?*”

“I thought....”

“You don’t think, Frank. I’m outta here.” Vinnie turned to the bedroom.

“Wait! What did I say?”

“*You* spotted the Rolex. You grabbed my wrist when you saw it. You were pissed. I never said anything about it. Or the suits. Or the Porsche. And for your information, I never fucked *any* of the women!” He moved quickly into the bedroom, then, found his duffel and started to put his things back into it.

When he turned toward the bathroom for his toiletries, Frank was standing in the doorway. “Whatever I said, I’m sorry.”

“You don’t have to be sorry, you’re just wrong about everything, that’s all.” He went into the bathroom, grabbed his toothbrush, toothpaste, razor, shoved them in his bag.

“How’re you getting down the hill?”

“I’ll call a cab.”

“If I’m wrong about everything, Vince, it’s not my fault. You won’t talk. You won’t talk to anyone. How am I supposed to know what’s really going on?”

Vinnie came out of the bathroom, grabbed his jacket from his bunk, and looked at Frank who now blocked the doorway. “I thought you knew me better,” was all he said.

Frank didn’t move out of his way. “Okay, I misjudged you. I’m saying I’m sorry.”

Vinnie glared.

Frank said, “I thought you were pissed off at yourself. All this time. I thought you were wracked with guilt over how everything turned out. And you lost a whole life. You lived in that world for a long time...almost a year. Am I wrong?”

“I’m leaving.” Vinnie took a step closer to Frank.

“Vince, everything turned out for the best.”

Vinnie said, “If you don’t move, I’ll knock you down.”

“Talk to me!” Frank implored.

Vinnie shook his head, and the sting in his eyes returned. He closed them.

“Vince, come on back to the couch. We’ll have another beer. We’ll start over.”

Vinnie turned away. “I can’t....”

“Yes, you can!” Frank’s hand was on his arm now. Vinnie could feel it gripping his bicep hard. The pinch. The solidity. The sweeping insanity of it all. And through it he saw in his memory Sonny’s eyes just watching him with a kind of sparkle that was worth more than Rolexes, Porsches and casinos all rolled into one. Frank touched his back now. Sonny had stroked him there, gently rubbing, calling his name, “Vincenzo.” Frank said, “Vince.” Sonny had leaned in and touched their foreheads together. “You and me,” he’d whispered in the dead of night when no one was watching and they were alone and could be just themselves. Frank said, “It’s just you and me now. Here, alone. You can talk to me.”

Vinnie remembered Sonny’s hand in his hair, how calm he was about the intensity between them, their wild lovemaking. “It’s the soul’s recognition of itself,” he’d said in a moment of profound clarity. That was Sonny’s justification for the things they had done, some things neither of them had ever done with anyone before. And he remembered the soft kisses that came after, and still he could feel that flutter on his lips. He heard Sonny saying, over and over, “It’s okay, Terranova. It’s okay.” Sonny’s breath was like a conflagration, his scent hot and spicy and sweet, his voice low and scratchy with desire and something more...so much more. “This is the best thing that’s ever happened to me.”

Now that voice was dead. And Frank was saying, “It’s okay, Vince, it’s okay.”

And Vinnie, feeling that fist in his throat strangling him with a name, *Sonny*..., said aloud, “No it’s not.” Took a deep breath. “It’s not.”

Frank was saying, “Then tell me why?” And Sonny was saying, “Tell me, baby, say it, oh god say it,” and Frank was clutching him tighter on the arm as Vinnie felt himself sinking, and Frank was saying, “Talk to me. What is going on?” and he was plunging into Sonny’s body (for Sonny had given him everything, even that) half-sobbing as Sonny held tight to him and said, “Tell me, tell me, tell me,” and Frank said, “Vince!” as Vinnie started to fall, and Sonny said, “Vincenzo, please...oh god please....” And Frank said, “Whoa, hey....” and Sonny moaned, “Oh...,” and Vinnie opened his mouth

and cried out to Sonny, “I love you...I love you...,” and under his breath to Frank: “God help me, Frank...I was in love with him!” and fell ungracefully to his knees.

Vinnie was on his hands and knees, palms flat on the cold plank floor; he shook quietly. Frank pulled at his arm. “Jesus, kid, come on. Get up. Let’s go sit down.”

Shakily, Vinnie stood. Once at the couch, Frank handed him his beer. “Sorry I don’t have anything stronger.”

Vinnie leaned his elbows on his knees again, head bowed, but took the bottle. They sat in silence for awhile. Finally, Vinnie whispered, “You were all wrong. I’m not angry. I’m not mad at him. I just miss him so much!”

“Okay...” Frank sounded intensely patient.

“Sometimes I wish he’d taken me with him when he went.”

“Vince, you’ve never wanted to die.”

Vinnie looked at Frank now, who gazed back softly. “How am I supposed to live without him?”

Frank frowned. “I don’t understand. You already are.”

“It’s supposed to get easier after a year.”

“What is?”

“Grief.”

Frank reached for his beer. “Vince, how deep is this grief?”

Vinnie winced. “I swore I’d never tell. He swore he never would. And I just told you.”

“You told me what you were feeling. How far did this go? Are you talking about what I think you’re talking about?”

Vinnie did not reply to the question directly, but instead asked one of his own. “Does it shock you?”

“Are you saying you and Sonny...?”

Vinnie closed his eyes, pressed his lips together to keep his breathing steady.

“You had an affair?”

Vinnie spoke with his eyes closed. “If you call an affair living with him in his penthouse. Sleeping every night in his bed. Promises were made, only I was working under false pretenses. You’re right about one thing. I can’t forgive myself. Not ever.”

“You were lovers and you never told me?”

Now Vinnie opened his eyes and looked at Frank incredulously. “Why in hell would I tell anyone?”

“I mean after, Vince. Afterwards, dammit!”

Vinnie got irritated at the statement. It was like Frank was accusing him of something. “It was none of your business!” he retorted.

“Like hell. I’ve been protecting you. All this time! I deserved to know!”

“Why are you mad at me? Because I loved Sonny or because I didn’t tell you?”

“I don’t care who you love, Vince. Sometimes we don’t get to choose.” Now Frank seemed very agitated. “But you should’ve told me!”

“But I thought.... You *hated* Sonny!”

“I hate what I thought he did to you! You didn’t give me the full picture. Vince, you should’ve told me!”

“Too late for the admonishments now, Frank!” Vinnie said hotly.

“But it’s been a year. A whole year. I didn’t know. I didn’t know you were suffering like this!”

Vinnie made a face. “So what?”

Now it was Frank’s turn to lean forward, elbows on knees, hands in his palms. “Oh god, what have I done?”

“You left me to myself, which is what I requested! Frank, I didn’t want anyone to ever know, not because I’m ashamed, but because it was dangerous for us, me and Sonny. We could’ve been killed. And after...well, I just wanted to respect his wishes. And it was no one’s business. Not even yours.”

Frank was shaking his head. When he lifted it, he looked at Vinnie with a strange gaze Vinnie had never seen before. Then he reached out, touched Vinnie’s cheek very softly, and said, “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be,” Vinnie grumbled, but the touch on the side of his face tingled.

Frank sighed heavily, his eyes squinting a little as he continued to stare at Vinnie. Then his jaw hardened. He stood up, turned and laid his hand on Vinnie’s shoulder. “Come on. We can’t stay here one more minute.”

“What?”

“We’re going out.”

“But I’m not hungry. And you can’t drive, you’re drunk.”

“I’m stone cold sober, and I’m thinking you are, too. Come on.” His hand shook his shoulder a little, then fell as he turned, heading for the door. He glanced back. “Vince?”

“Where’re we going?”

“Out. Come on. It’ll do us both good.”

Vinnie stood. “I just don’t feel like....”

“I’m not gonna stand here and argue. Trust me. We need to go. Now.”

Vinnie grabbed his wallet and his keys and followed Frank out the door.



In the car, Frank was very taciturn. Vinnie watched as they drove down the curving mountainside. It was cold and the leaves were turning but it was too early for snow. Still, Vinnie wore a thick dark red sweater with a black stripe through the chest, and new, thick jeans. Frank wore jeans and a thinner brown sweater underneath a lambs wool lined tan jacket. Vinnie’s leather jacket lay on the seat in the back. He was warm blooded. He hadn’t needed it yet.

As they came to the highway, Frank turned south, toward Philly. They passed a few steakhouses but Frank did not stop.

“I thought we were getting something to eat. I like Charlie Brown’s,” Vinnie murmured.

“We’ll eat in awhile. I just want to drive for a bit.”

“Suit yourself.” Vinnie leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes.

“I really am sorry, Vince,” Frank said after a few minutes.

“Well, don’t be.”

“I knew this day would be hard for you, but I didn’t know the extent.”

Vinnie sighed heavily.

“I misjudged you. I apologize. I thought you came around asking for your Rolex from the Rialto because you missed it. I didn’t realize maybe it was a...keepsake?”

Vinnie blinked. “Stop, Frank.”

“I would’ve tried harder to get it for you from evidence. It’s probably still there. Maybe some day....”

“Forget about it. I don’t care about it.”

“You can see how I thought it, that you cared about some of it...the lifestyle was glamorous to say the least.”

“I liked it, hell yeah, but not to the exclusion of my job. I don’t miss it. When I worked for Mel and Susan all that wealth was like something that smelled funny. I never went for that on any case, Frank. I like nice things like the next guy, but in the big picture they mean nothing.”

“I believe you, Vince. I know that now. I judged you too harsh.”

“Are you judging me now?”

“About Steelgrave?”

Vinnie bit his lower lip. “Well...yeah.”

“I’m done judging you, Vince. I just wish you’d told me.”

“Enough with that. I told you why I didn’t!”

“I just don’t want you to hate me.”

Vinnie turned to look at him. Frank’s eyes stayed on the road. “Hate you?”

Frank swallowed hard. “I’m not fishing here. But I want you to tell me the truth. How intense was this...this relationship.”

“Why?”

“I just need to know.”

“Intense.”

“How intense?”

“Enough to make me a wreck for a year.”

“But you could still work.”

“Work was a blessed distraction.”

“Okay. That’s all I wanted to know.”

Vinnie gave a pained laugh. “You want details?”

“No.”

“Good.” Vinnie eyed him as Frank glanced at him, brows narrowed. He snorted a laugh and added, “Because you couldn’t take it.”

“Yeah? Try me, kid, but not while I’m driving.”

Vinnie’s smile was shaky.

After awhile, Vinnie said, “You sure are being understanding.”

“Yeah well I’ve had a year of getting it all wrong to make up for.”

Vinnie nodded. “So, how far are we going for a steak?”

“Until I say so.”

“I’m on vacation. You’re not my boss.”

“Oh yeah?” Frank said.

“Well, if we’re going all the way to Philly to eat, I shoulda brought a novel. A long one.”

“We’re not going to Philly. Indulge your boss, all right? I don’t think you’ll be sorry.”

“Whatever you say, sir.”

“I gotta make a stop.”

“Sure,” Vinnie said. “What’s another delay?”

They pulled onto a side road off the highway lined with thick trees. After a mile or so, they pulled into a long driveway. Of course Vinnie wasn’t ignorant. He could read. The sign was somewhat unnerving.

“Don’t worry,” Frank said. “I’m not having you committed. I gotta see someone. So hang tight, okay?”

“Who’re you visiting?”

Frank did not answer. He parked the car and started to get out. Vinnie stayed seated. “Coming?” Frank asked through the open door.

“Why do I have to come?”

“You don’t. But I’d like you to.”

Vinnie scowled and got out. “Places like these remind me of Susan.”

“Yeah well she’s not here.”

Vinnie rolled his eyes and followed Frank into the big building. Like the hospital he’d left Susan in, this place had top security. There were guard stations outside. Frank had flashed his badge to get them in. And there were double doors, both with electronic locks, on the front. Otherwise, the grounds were lush, and inside the foyer the place was clean, polished, and smelled slightly of laundry soap. It was a state of the art facility, despite the fact that it was also a permanent lockdown ward, a place where they sent the criminally insane as well as people who might unwittingly do damage to themselves or others if they were left on their own, but who might not have actually committed any crime. If you ended up here, you were probably never leaving. Ever.

It gave Vinnie the creeps. He hung back as Frank strode forward.

“Maybe this was a bad idea,” Vinnie said.

Frank turned. “They know me here. Come on.”

There were a few complacent patients in the lobby, some reading, some watching TV. Obviously, these were the least problematic ones. For a criminal hospital, it was eerily quiet. Vinnie glanced around, half expecting to see someone he might know. Maybe crazy Roger Lococco had finally arrived at his destination. Although the world believed he was dead, Vinnie did not. Or maybe this was where they’d sent Daryl...but Vinnie suspected not. Making obscene phone calls in the middle of the night usually did not get you full lockdown. So who was Frank coming to see?

An orderly approached Frank. “Hi Donovan,” Frank said.

“Frank. He’s in the library, said he wanted quiet. Seemed kinda pissed off today, not really talking. He’s never like that. Always helpful. But keeping to himself today.” The orderly looked up. He was a young, strong man with thick blond hair. “You brought someone else?”

“Yeah. This is Vince.”

Donovan frowned.

Frank just moved past him, motioning to Vinnie to follow. Vinnie said, “Who are we seeing, Frank?”

Frank turned into a room where books lined the shelves. There were a couple tables surrounded by chairs, barred gold light coming through the high, security windows, and a single man sitting at one of the tables serenely reading a newspaper.

Vinnie froze in the doorway as the man looked up.

Frank stood just in front of him, saying softly, “He’s not crazy, he was just given the choice, after what he did to himself, between this or the Federal pen. He chose this.”

No expression crossed Sonny’s face as he watched them over his lowered paper.

Vinnie felt light-headed. All the beer he’d drunk that afternoon threatened to come up.

“I never told you because you never wanted to talk about it. I honestly thought you wouldn’t want to know; I thought I was protecting you from more recrimination. I’m sorry, Vince.”

Vinnie couldn’t move.

Frank added, “If you’d told me before what you told me today, I would never have kept this secret from you.”

Vinnie grabbed the threshold of the doorway to keep himself standing. He couldn’t breathe. Then he turned and used both hands to grab the doorframe on his left. He started to gasp.

Frank moved toward Sonny, who still sat unmoving. Then Sonny spoke, tone mild. “What’s wrong with him, McPike?”

Frank stopped at the edge of the table, said softly, “He thought you were dead. Until just right now.”

“What?” Sonny backed his chair up abruptly with a loud scraping sound. “You told me he never wanted to see me again!”

“That’s what I thought was best....”

But Sonny was ignoring him. He strode toward Vinnie as Frank added, “I didn’t know until today that you two were....” He gulped. “I didn’t know.”

Sonny approached Vinnie, reached out and touched his shoulder. “Vinnie, hey, you okay?”

Vinnie could not look. Not just yet. He gasped. “He lied to us!?”

“Yeah, it looks that way. He said you never wanted to see me. I was not allowed to contact you, either.”

“Jesus!” Then Vinnie turned and Sonny was staring at him with eyes swimming in shock. Then Vinnie pulled him to him, and the embrace was all the warmth he’d been missing inside his heart, in his soul for a whole year. Where everything was frozen in horror, in sorrow, now it thawed. The warmth wielded its way throughout his body until he slumped and could feel Sonny slumping against him as well.

Finally, Vinnie found enough breath to whisper, “Oh my god!” And hugged him tighter.

Sonny pulled back, with effort, clasping his face in both hands. “The last time I saw you we’d just beaten the shit out of each other. And I hadn’t yet forgiven you.”

Vinnie tried not to sob as Sonny looked at him. Sonny had on a black sweater over a tan button-up shirt. He looked wonderful!

“But now.... Your hair’s longer. You look sadder. And I know you’re a cop. But you’re still fucking beautiful... after all this time.” Then he hugged him again and Vinnie leaned against him thinking he just might never let go. If he had to get himself committed here, then so be it.

And that was when his mind started churning. ‘How can I get him out of here? How?’

“Oh Christ, Sonny, Christ!” he whispered, still not quite believing he held a live body in his arms.

The orderly stopped by the open door. “Is everything all right here?”

Frank answered. "Yeah. They just haven't seen each other in a really long time."

Donovan kept walking down the hall.

Frank stepped up to them. He touched Sonny on the shoulder. "He never told me. If I'd known about you two, what you meant to each other, I would've brought him to the hospital that first week. But I didn't know. And I had his cover to protect."

Sonny pulled back from Vinnie and turned to Frank. "I told you I'd never tell anyone about him being a cop. I told you I was doing it for him and for no other reason. I wouldn't hurt Vinnie." Sonny shook his head. "You didn't believe me!"

"I didn't know who you'd talk to. You guys looked like you'd just tried to kill each other that day."

"We had a little philosophical difference of opinion," Sonny replied flatly. "That's all."

Frank rolled his eyes ceiling-ward. "I didn't know whether or not you really were vengeful over him betraying your trust. It was decided unilaterally; it wasn't just me. They all thought it best to keep the world believing you were dead."

"But Vinnie?"

"Especially Vinnie. The case nearly broke him."

Vinnie said, "It wasn't the case, Frank. I thought he was dead!"

"I know that now," Frank said quietly.

Vinnie's brows narrowed. "I fucking buried him!" His mouth quivered. "Now what do we do?"

Frank sighed, looking hangdog. Voice low, "You get a pass. You visit when you can."

"Jesus Christ!" Vinnie felt Sonny's shoulder brush his where they stood side by side now.

"That's the best I can do," Frank said. "Steelgrave's never getting out. It would take special dispensation...like a pardon from the governor."

"But he hasn't been charged. It was decided not to charge him. And he's sane. That counts for something."

“Vinnie,” Sonny said softly. “I made the deal through your people. I can’t get out of it.”

Vinnie touched him gently on the cheek. “We’ll see about that.”

