

Chapter 46

THIS NIGHT LIGHT SUCH A CANDLE

THE PILOT HAD the Beechcraft fuelled and waiting.

“Decided not to go on that adventure, huh?” he asked as we climbed in.

“Guess I had about as much as I could take in Ottawa.”

“*Ottawa?*” He made it sound as if a sofa-flavoured bicycle were more believable. “Say, hope you don’t mind my asking, but you guys *are* related, right?”

He made a **V** with his fingers and waggled them in front of his eyes.

“Brothers.”

“Wish the wife could see you. She’d go nuts. Now, buckle up. We’re cleared for take-off. Beautiful day again. Trip back should be as smooth as the one up.”

He donned his headset and informed the tower of his status.

Luke strained against his harness as we jockeyed to the runway. An awestruck six-year-old possessed him for a while. I touched his mind and felt the first-time rush of taking off again.

When it passed, he settled back and closed his eyes. His lips fell open and his breathing lengthened into sleep.

I dozed fitfully, gripped by flashes where my heart pumped like a piston and my nerves sang like a turbine at a million rpms. The cabin wasn’t hot, yet my clothes felt thick and sticky. I licked my

lips and tasted salt. Sweat was glowing on Luke's forehead, and a smell rose off his shirt as if it needed changing. His legs were spread akimbo and the muscles of his thighs stood out beneath the denim. Even though he wasn't hard, his crotch looked full and heavy.

The forest carpet down below gave way to fields, then scaly-looking urban sprawl that crept up from the blue of Lake Ontario like eczema. The CN tower hove into view, then Hamilton with the escarpment winding through it like a river filled with trees. The north end of Lake Erie was beneath us when we circled round and started our descent.

The change in pressure woke Luke up. He smiled like someone coming out of meditation, not the deep sleep he'd been in, then buckled up and craned his neck until we'd taxied to a hangar holding six or seven planes the size of ours.

Outside on the tarmac, the pilot wished us luck and thanked me for the tip I slipped him. He didn't seem to notice that my hands were shaking when I thumbed it from my wallet.

The day was getting old, and evening shadows stretched across the parking lot. The Jaguar, which I'd never thought to see again, already looked like something from a former life.

"Why here?" I asked Luke, tossing him the keys, too wired to drive. "We really could go anywhere, do anything."

"I know."

He unlocked, slid in and popped my door.

We didn't speak again until we got to Nebo road, where he pulled off to the side.

"What's up?" I asked.

He turned the motor off. "Haven't walked this stretch of road since what we did to Garrett. Any time I left the Farm was always in the truck."

He set the brake and sat a while, staring straight ahead. Not just the day, but summer, too, was winding down. The teasels in the ditch were brown, the pampas grass like flax.

"Why here?" I asked again. "Why the Farm?"



A pickup filled with hay goes by. Gravel crunches underfoot. A red-wing blackbird warbles from a fencepost.

The house exhales the quiet of abandonment. The windows are wide open but the kitchen door is shut. The handle gives beneath Luke's hand. Ghosts of dinners past rush out. The table and the chairs are there, but Cook's big Garland's gone.

The backstairs creak as we go up, the sound of no one home. Luke turns in the room across from Dr. Colton's study. It still has all its furniture. The bed is even made, without a coverlet. Luke goes to the window.

I move up behind and wrap my arms around his waist. There isn't much to see, just the oaks and maples of the windbreak and the roof of Kirin's cabin.

He takes my hand and puts it on his cock. I squeeze it through a taut, worn skin of denim. Fifteen years of holding on builds up inside his throat. He moans and wheels around.

The kiss is fierce. Lips bruise lips, tongues probe, teeth bite. Hard-ons mash together through our jeans. In mirror image we rip off our shirts. More than just revealed, our chests are bare, like arms exposed in springtime after winter's gone on way too long.

I lick his neck and he licks mine. He grabs my biceps roughly while his own bunch in my hands. I bend to suck his nipples and there's hot breath over mine.

We break apart. Again, like two reflections, we unzip and tear off jeans. Face to face, we lie down on the bed, taking hold of cocks that feel like silk-sheathed iron rods. Pre-cum trickles out as tight fists work the fine skin up and down.

There is no awkward scrambling of limbs. His cock is at my mouth, and mine at his, as if we'd lain that way. Tongues flick out and lap the salty fluid. Fingers smear it over swollen heads. Mouths seek out the fold between the scrotum and the thigh. The smell is dizzying, like sweat and honey mixed.

I take him in my mouth the same time he takes me. Our cocks

grow even stiffer. Suddenly he's overflowing—creamy spurts that burst against my palate. I'm shooting, too, in jets that blast in time with his and taste and feel the same.

It's only the beginning. Smoothly, Luke is on his side, behind me with his arms around my chest. My back bends to receive him. His stifled groans, like whimpers, find an answer in my throat, and he's fucking me, and fucking hard.

Then it's me who's plunging into him, thrusting while he bucks and growls, gripping me and clamping down, urging me to shattering release.

We cum so deep the planted seed can never be uprooted.



Spent, we fell apart. My head dropped to the pillow. Sleep crept up to claim its due.

Luke was jerking off when I woke up. His eyes were far away, with the look I used to see on clients' faces while they beat off to a paid-for seventeen-year-old's erection. He flashed an *Oops-you-caught-me* grin and carried on. I joined in. We oozed more than we geysered when we shot.

Night had fallen and the moon was up. Through the window I could see a mackerel sky approaching.

I raised a sticky hand. "We should clean up."

"You think there's still hot water?"

"Haven't got a clue."

"I got a better idea, anyway."

"Yeah?"

Luke rolled off the bed, retrieved his shirt and used it for a rag. "Coming, lazy-bones?"

He balled the shirt and threw it at me. I wiped off while he donned his jeans, then got up and followed suit.

"Whatcha got in mind?" I asked, lacing up my sneakers.

"You'll see."



The bank of clouds had nearly reached the moon. Two thirds of the sky was curdled silver. Luke gazed up, then set off for the barn.

He palmed a switch inside and waited till fluorescents in the rafters flickered on, then headed for a corner with some jerry cans and tins of Coleman fuel.

“Here,” he said, taking down a lantern. “Fill this up. I got something else to do. Be back in a sec.”

He hoisted up a jerry can and headed for the doors.

I couldn’t see a funnel so I poured directly from a tin. The quantity I sloshed evaporated in the time it took to find a rag.

The moon had vanished when I went outside to wait. The sky was charcoal plaid with strips of lunar white between. Minutes passed. Crickets chirped—one here, one there.

The screen door creaked. Luke backed out. Jerry can between his legs, he doused the stoop and poured a trail to the barn.

“Most fucking fun we ever had was torching Bennett’s place,” he grunted, splashing the remainder of the can around the door. “This time, you’ll remember like you should. Plus it’s dark. Should be a beaut.”

“We shall this night light such a candle by God’s grace as I trust shall never be put out?”

“Said it before—should’ve called you Plato ’stead of Jimmy-Dean.”

He sauntered back and pulled his Zippo from his pocket.

“Wanna do the honours?”

“Nah. It should be you. You’ve earned the right.”

He crouched and flicked the lighter. The gasoline ignited with a pop. Cobalt flame raced off in both directions. It reached the barn before the house, where it turned ochre and began to climb. Seconds later it was snaking up the stoop.

Luke got to his feet and took lantern from my hand.

“We better get moving. Going to have to hurry if we want to catch the show.”

We jogged along the track beside the cornfield, Luke in front sure-footed, me behind and stumbling. Halfway up, a reddish glow began to stain the corn. The tassels turned to copper and the blades a dirty orange. By the time we reached the woodlot, smoke was in the air and we could hear a greedy crackling.

Luke veered right. The barn was an inferno. Angry crimson underlit a crown of oily smoke. Siding boards were peeling back like curls of molting skin. The framing underneath was pure geometry in flame.

He kept on jogging till we reached the path that forked off to the pond. He paused to catch his breath, then set the lantern down and ploughed through canes of raspberry toward a thick-limbed tree. Jumping up, he caught a branch and hooked his leg around.

“Come on,” he yelled. “Front row seats.”

My climbing skills were rusty. It took three attempts to snag the branch and scramble up.

Side by side, legs dangling, we sat and watched the blaze. The walls were nearly gone. Liquid yellow sheeted over what remained. Black smoke gyred skyward like a twister in reverse. The clouds above were ruby coals igniting on a moonlit grill.

Something deep inside exploded, sending up a fireball that flattened at the roof. Another detonation and the roof began to cave. Sparks flew high and wheeled off like swarms of orange fireflies.

The roof's descent disturbed the conflagration's symmetry. An outline of the house emerged, shimmering behind the flames. Smoke poured from the windows. Carmine tongues were licking at the frames.

Luke clapped me on the shoulder. “Had enough?”

He leapt and landed in a practised crouch. I tried to do the same but got the wind knocked out of me.

Past the tangled raspberries, he found a twig and drew his lighter from his pocket. Kneeling by the lantern, he pumped it expertly, lit the twig and touched it to the mantle. The mesh flared blinding white. He valved it down to half.

“Feel like a swim?” He straightened up and headed for the trees.

By Coleman light, the forest was a glittering vault of shadow. Leaves turned into ardent shields of silver-green. Sap winked at us from the trees. Creatures of the night espied our passage with unblinking eyes. Harvest mice went scampering by. Chitterings of angry warning sounded high above.

Luke halted well back of the clearing with the pond.

"I need you to stay here," he said. "I want to get this perfect. I'll call you when, okay?"

He walked off with the lantern. The white light dwindled left, then reappeared a good ways distant, bobbing through the trees.

"Okay, Jimmy-Dean," he hollered. "Just walk straight ahead. Watch your step.

I shuffled forward, trusting to my feet to find the roots.

The clearing was a chamber clad in frosted jade. The pond looked like a mirror made of pure obsidian. He'd hung the lantern in a willow near the little sward of stonecrop. Ripples played across the trees.

"Better if you swim across than try to go around."

I stripped down to my sneakers. The water near the bank was cool but still held summer's memory. The chill of coming fall took over further out. I gasped and kicked off for the other side.

Luke was peeling off his jeans.

"You staying in?" he called.

"It's fucking freezing."

"Never used to make a difference."

"Does now," I chattered, wading out.

He wrapped me in a bear hug till the shivers stopped, then rubbed my arms to chase away the goosebumps.

"My turn now. I'd go in if this were dead of winter."

His hand went to the small wound at his collarbone. Crumbs of grey adhesive traced a dirty square around it.

He bounced up on his toes and tore in recklessly.

"Jesusmotherfuckingchrist!"

"Told you it was cold," I yelled.

"Yeah, as if I give a sweet goddamn," he shouted back.

He dove and surfaced quickly, spluttering and flinging water from hair.

"Whoo-ee!"

I stretched out on my back to watch, propped up on my elbows. He was a sleek, aquatic mammal, wriggling and twisting, churning with his arms, diving under, bursting up, flicking off long arcs of spray that rainbowed in the lantern light. Reflections chased each other through the trees like drunken ghosts.

One of us, at last, was whole.

He broke the surface, facing opposite, and spun around.

"Going under for the count!"

The shift from witness to participant was seamless. His thought-voice filled my head and I was floating, motionless, counting off the hollow-sounding seconds. I felt the pressure in his lungs, the trill of panic in his abdomen, the thrashing of his legs as he strove up for a gulp of air.

"Fuck, man—again!"

He dove with more determination, heading deeper. Our voices joined again in an unhurried count, twice as long this time. Sinews spasmed as he pitted will and reflex. When he surfaced, it was only long enough to get the air for going down again.

Three more times he dove. Each time, the interval got longer.

His tenacity was more than pushing limits. He was practising.

Water sheeted off him as he stumbled to the bank. Breathing hard, he fell beside me. Waves of goose-flesh flickered on his skin. He turned and kissed me on the mouth. His lips were icy, but grew warm as tongues explored and wrestled with each other. My cock began to stir. He cradled it and held it while it lengthened past his wrist.

My fingers sought the hardness at his groin. The thick pole felt like home, its perfection in my fist beyond familiar. I eased the tight skin up and felt inaudible vibrations in his throat.

The kiss's warmth turned into something hungrier. Our pelvises began to rock. Luke freed my grip from his erection, moulding it around my own and urging me to stroke myself.

Satisfied I understood, he rose and padded to the water's edge. My heart began to race. I knew what he was going to do. Just thinking of it made dizzy, wondering if this had always been the object of our game.

He waded in and front-crawled to the middle. There he stopped and treaded water, spinning lazy circles, drinking in—recording—everything. His eyes picked up the lantern glow and mirrored back the clear, chrome green that watched him from the shore.

Wordlessly, he slipped beneath the surface.



The water seals around him like a second skin. Resonance, like whispers in a cave, is in our ears. He hangs suspended, gazing up. The surface looks like rags of phosphor blowing in a breeze.

Overhead, the clouds have gone a sooty tangerine.

The cold between his legs has no effect on his arousal. It feels like a cool hand tickling his balls. I squeeze my cock and thrust as if I'm fucking it.

He flips and breast-strokes deeper. The water's black but lam-bent with a billion motes. Pressure builds inside his ears. The whispering we hear is blood.

His hands touch silt that feels like liquid satin. He finds a stone and prises it with both hands from the bottom. Holding on, he rights himself and sinks until his knees are in the mud.

The forest walls blur into swirling, murky green. The wailing of a siren rises thinly in the distance.

A muffled pounding starts inside his head. I feel his ribcage singing and the tightness at his throat. Fire spreads through his lungs. The scorching heat invades my balls. I start to beat off faster.

The thudding grows. His solar plexus lurches. Dimly, I'm aware he'll never make it to the surface. Even if he drops the stone, his body will give out before he makes it to the sweet night air.

The breathing instinct peaks. He stifles it with massive will. The reflex detonates inside him and his body jigs.

My hand is pumping faster.

The urge to breathe implodes again. His limbs jerk with galvanic shock. The inky water swims with stars, pricks of light like neurons flashing in a floating brain.

The liquid darkness mutates into ancient summer nights.

I'm in the attic bedroom at the foster home.

Luke is whispering, The fireflies are out.

We're beside the other pond, awestruck at the glittering display.

It's daylight and we're wandering home from school.

Wanna steal something?

In the park behind Mt. Hope's town hall, flames are rising through the bleachers.

Let 'em burn. Come on!

He's pissing in the mess we've made in some old witch's kitchen, and rolling joints behind the foster home.

We're plotting our revenge on Mr. Bennett for the beating we received.

We're the fire that rages through his barn and changes everything.

We're princelings in a green-gold paradise.

We're Dr. Colton's protégés and Mr. Shen's disciples.

We're old Cook's little darlings and Miss Harper's special pupils.

We're boys discovering a secret gift, and brothers who have always been in love.

We're everything we ever did, together and for always.

The pain starts in my belly—the hot, familiar buzz that always blossoms into agony. This time it's fuel. My fist yanks harder, faster. In unison, we both let go. Luke's lungs cave and suck in cold black water while my cock erupts and splashes me with searing spray.

Low and soft, a howl starts, rising from my throat, wailing like the sirens getting near.

The keening fades as darkness deeper than the night descends.