

## *Fairy Tale*

One April evening, Jeff Greene went over to Holland Printing on East 8<sup>th</sup> to see Chuck McDonough, the guy he'd been dating about four months. Chuck was a big fellow, solid and broad-shouldered, with dark shaggy hair, close-cropped beard – “and eyes, God, the most beautiful eyes,” Jeff told friends. “The color of milk chocolate exactly, and you want to just melt into them. He's kind of hard to get to know because he's real quiet; but when he does say something it's smart and funny, out-of-left-field funny. You think ‘Wow, where'd that come from?’ “

He found Chuck on the loading dock, in a circle of co-workers persuading him to join them for a few beers. Chuck presented Jeff in a most basic introduction – “this is Jeff Greene” – without any qualifier such as ‘lover’, ‘date’ or ‘friend’. The co-workers, Steve and Tommy Russo and Aaron Delong, greeted Jeff warmly, as if they knew anyway which adjective applied; and included him in the invitation.

Jeff claimed a seat next to Chuck in the booth. Chuck's blue uniform shirt had its sleeves rolled up above strong forearms and was unbuttoned at the throat, enticing with a glimpse of hirsute chest. Jeff grinned and copped a feel beneath the table, receiving only a slight sidelong glance in response. “Had lunch with Mom today, she says to say Hi. Look what she gave me this time.” He brought forth a small box, of rare inlaid wood ornately lacquered. “It's a Chinese puzzle box. It only opens by some kind of secret catch, which neither of us could find. She buys, like, whole U-hauls of stuff for her antique shop,” he explained to the others. “And she always gives me something out of them because she says it brings her luck. But it's always weird little things like this, that I never know what to do with, you know? I said ‘Thanks Mom, I needed something to keep condoms in.’ “

Steve laughed, a staccato laugh like a terrier barking. “What'd she say?”

“She just laughed. She doesn't care, she's used to me by now.”

“More so than I am,” Chuck told his friends.

“Don't worry, I'll get you up to speed,” Jeff reassured him. Steve laughed again. Jeff reached for another feel, but Chuck's hand intercepted his and set it aside.

“You can't open it?” Aaron asked, passing the box to the Russos. “Maybe there's some genie in there. A evil genie. Big badass with a scimitar, saying ‘I ain't callin' *nobody* Master’.”

“Shaft in a turban,” Chuck smiled. “I could see that. He’d make you grant *him* three wishes: Vanessa Williams, Vanessa Williams and Vanessa Williams. And center-court tickets to the Knicks.”

“That’s four,” said Tommy, inspecting the box.

“Guy’s got a fucking scimitar – you gonna argue with him?” his brother replied

Chuck went to the mens’ room before they left. Steve watched him go, then grinned at Jeff. “You like him, huh.”

“Yeah I do. He’s a sweetheart.”

“That’s good,” said Tommy. “That’s good. He’s been needing somebody.”

Jeff’s roommates were out of town, so the two of them returned to Jeff’s apartment. The housemates, a hetero couple, got snippy if Jeff brought guys home, so their dates usually concluded at Chuck’s tiny flat. Chuck had even given Jeff spare keys the previous week. They’d had dinner at a little Spanish restaurant way up Broadway, sat shoulder to shoulder on the subway home nudging and flirting; rented an old movie, lost interest in it, and enjoyed instead a long, slow, satisfying, smiling-deep-into-each-others’-eyes fuck, lit by the pale glow of old black and white images; followed by a night of sleep in each others’ arms. Waking the next morning before the alarm went off, they’d done it again: an impromptu, quick, passionate, laugh-out-loud-fun fuck. Just before they left, Chuck had brought out the keys. He took Jeff’s hand, placed them within, and closed it. “Until we can get our own place,” he said. Jeff had seen the look in the chocolate-brown eyes and, moved beyond words, held him tight; until Chuck finally remarked in his dry way, “If you keep this up we’ll have to go back to bed. Not that I’d mind; but it might make us late for work.”

Jeff hung up his jacket and took out the puzzle-box, setting it down absently. “Was something bothering you back there?” he asked. “You kept giving me the evil eye, like, ‘Do I *know* you?’ “

Chuck sat down with a wary look, waiting a moment before answering. “You took me kind of by surprise, coming by.”

“Because I almost felt like you didn’t want me there.”

“It wasn’t that. I was....I’ve never brought anybody I was seeing to meet my friends before. I wasn’t sure how they’d react.”

“He was afraid you’d flame all over him in front of his hetero buddies,” said a silvery voice. “Miss Thing wants so much to be One Of The Boys.”

They stared. A Fairy was seated on the lid of the open box.

He – it seemed to be male – had pointed ears, silver hair, an almost-human face, and shimmering opalescent wings. He wore a tunic of satinlike material. He sat in a coy showgirl pose, one leg drawn up over the other. “Look at you boys, gaping like a pair of blow-up love dolls. Like you’ve never seen one of us before.”

“We haven’t,” Chuck said. The fairy waved a dismissive limp wrist. “Well, get over it, honey, ‘cause Here I Am.”

“How did you get here? Why were you in the box?” Chuck persisted.

“Well; once upon a time – of course – there was this tacky old queen who decided he wanted a fairy servant, so he went to Tangier and sucked off Aleister Crowley in exchange for the incantation. He incantated and got Me, and bound me to the box. Then, wouldn’t you know, he dropped dead of a stroke, leaving me to hibernate until Gorgeous Blond Hunk here accidentally found the catch, and I was Free At Last. I feel like such a debutante!” He whirled round, appearing in a flamboyant prom dress and corsage.

Jeff was entirely amazed. “Oh my God. Are you real? Why are you here?”

The fairy rolled his eyes. “Am I real. *Duh*. I’m here to grant you wishes, honey, because you released me. Am I real, he asks. Wish for something, and see what happens.”

“A wish??”

“Yes, dear, a Wish. Like, ‘I wish I was rich and famous and on the cover of *People*, I wish I had a 12-inch schlong to impress the boys, I wish I had a harem of hot young things from the *A & F Quarterly*,’ Whatever.”

Jeff found himself drawing a complete blank. When that happened, he usually just said the first thing that came to mind. “I still wish I knew what was bugging you there at the bar.”

Chuck exclaimed “Wait a – “

*( - but suddenly Jeff did know. Chuck did want to be One Of The Boys, and not A Fag, as far too many schoolyard bullies had vilified him. He wanted to be seen as everything A Fag was not: strong, skilled, reliable, calm, as straight a gay man as could be; so that The Guys, Steve and Tommy and Aaron for instance, would accept him into their circles without fear or favor or P.C. self-consciousness. Now here came Jeff, whom he loved but who nonetheless had a flicker*

*of the Flamer about him: enthusing, hugging, copping feels, exclaiming “Oh my God” like some P-town twinkie. What would The Guys think of him? What would they think of Chuck, being thus flamed over?)*

“ – minute!” Chuck finished.

Jeff gaped. “They didn’t think anything – they *like* you! You know what Tommy said while you were in the head? Steve asked if I liked you and I said Yes, and Tommy said ‘That’s great, he’s been needing someone.’ “ He laughed in surprise. “That’s all you were worried about; you were afraid I’d embarrass you?”

“Internalized homophobia, dear,” said the fairy. “Some boys are just full of it.”

Chuck glared at the creature. “Who died and made you therapist? And speaking of flamers, why are *you* acting like one? I may not know much about your kind, but I never heard of your kind acting like our kind.”

“Questions, questions, questions. Do I look like an encyclopedia?” For a moment, he did. “The spell that brings us to this plane makes us mirror whoever summoned us; who in my case, like I said, was a tacky, sleazy, flamy old queen. And we like to mess with your little mortal minds; it’s our hobby. Push your buttons, tickle your ticklish spots. And since flaming gives you absolute hissyfits; well...” The fairy smiled and batted his eyes. “But this is *so* boring. Boring, boring, *boring!* Come on, honey, let’s make some wishes,” he told Jeff. He manifested a golden pencil, almost as large as himself, and a silver notebook labeled ‘Shopping List’, and stood as if ready to take dictation.

Chuck rose abruptly, placing a hand on Jeff’s shoulder. His grip was tense and strong. “Can we talk privately for a minute?”

The phrase put Jeff on the defensive. Whenever his father had said “We need to talk privately” it had meant trouble, usually trouble for which Jeff’s older siblings had framed him. He followed Chuck reluctantly.

Chuck closed the bedroom door. “Do you realize what you’ve got?” he half-whispered. “You’ve got a tiger by the tail. Or like a nuke with a hair trigger. That thing out there’s going to grant you anything in the world you wish for. Anything. You see what kind of total power that gives you?”

“All I did was ask what was bothering you. It’s not like I nuked you or turned you into a frog or something.”

“And I was gonna *tell* you, if Stinkerbelle there hadn’t interrupted. Instead you said ‘I wish I knew what your problem was,’ and bam! – the two of you had ripped my mind open and rummaged around in it. You see the danger? You’ll be talking and say off the top of your head ‘I wish something-or-other.’ ‘I wish I had a BMW’, and bam, you’ll have one; with no place to park it and no way to explain to anyone where it came from. Or ‘I wish So-and-so’d drop dead.’ And they would.”

Jeff began to retort “How about I wish you weren’t embarrassed by me with your friends?” But no sooner had he said the first few words when Chuck leapt forward and clasped a powerful hand over his mouth. Jeff had never seen him move so fast, or to such aggressive purpose. Jeff was mad: the hand-over-mouth trick had been a favorite tactic of his big brothers in childhood combat. He fought free. “What the fuck’re you *doing*??” he glared.

“Trying to keep you from making a mistake.”

“I can keep myself out of mistakes. And I’m not your punching bag either.” He yanked open the door; and stopped dead. “Oh my God, look at this.”

The fairy had amused himself in their absence by manifesting some life-size, 3 – D, star-studded gay porn: Brad Pitt and Keanu Reeves sixty-nining each other, with enthusiasm. He had outfitted himself in movie-director drag: beret, jodhpurs, cigarette holder and megaphone. His canvas chair bore the name ‘Cecil B. DemOff.’ At their entrance he waved a hand, and the erotica vanished. “My, that *was* a quickie. A pair of sixty-second men. How about wishing for more stamina, hon? Or are you afraid you’ll fuck Grumpleicious here to death?”

“Great – now he thinks he’s Dr. Ruth,” Chuck muttered.

The fairy promptly became Dr. Ruth. “Unt vat’s wrong mit vishing for Goot Sex?” she twinkled. He un-transformed. “Or anything else, for that matter?”

“Be careful what you wish for, you might get it,” Chuck replied, looking from the fairy to Jeff.

“I...*know*...that,” Jeff said. “I’m not stupid. Even though I’m blond and say ‘Oh my God’ – but you do too sometimes, I’ve heard you. So even though you think I’m a stupid twink I’m not, and I’m not gonna make some stupid wish that’ll blow up the world or whatever. So just *calm down*, okay? You’re being almost psycho about this. What is your problem?”

“Don’t you wish you knew?” the fairy said coyly.

“Well, yeah; I mean – “

*(and suddenly, bam! – he knew Chuck’s ‘problem’, or rather, the whole interwoven knot of problems. Depression, self-doubt, loneliness, isolation; repressed anger, repressed fear, repressed heartbreak, doubly repressed joy – “more repression than a banana republic,” Chuck once told a therapist. Fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of being bullied and being helpless to fight back; fear of making a fool of himself, or worse, being manipulated and forced to make a public fool of himself, to the disgust and rejection of everyone witnessing – like in old sitcoms such as “Bewitched”, where magic brought endless humiliating embarrassments down on the hapless, helpless Darrens. “A whole garden of neuroses,” Chuck told the therapist – all in the fierce light of a piercing, unsparing, unforgiving, perfectionist self-awareness...)*

Jeff saw in Chuck’s eyes, just for a second, a look of mortal horror. Then the eyes turned to stone. Chuck rose and went into the kitchen. When he came out he had a flyswatter in his hand, and fairycide clearly on his mind. “Ohmigod,” the fairy said, taking wing. “Chill, Miss Thing, chill!” He waved a hand. Chuck froze in mid-swat.

Jeff had leapt to his feet. He seized Chuck by the arms, and felt them hard and cold as ice. Chuck’s face was as blankly nonhuman as a department-store mannequin. He had chilled – or rather, had been chilled. Jeff looked wildly for the fairy, and found him sitting on a lintel, safely out of reach. “Let him go!”

He felt the ice turn back to flesh beneath his hands. He looked into eyes of fury, and behind fury the mortal horror again. He tried to think what to say. “Stop it, you’ll break something!” was all he could come up with.

“I’ll break his widdle head, is what I’ll break. Whatever it takes to make him quit fucking around in my mind. And if I’m not faggy enough for him, tough fucking shit. He can go grant wishes to goddamn Harvey fucking Fierstein or somebody.” He wrenched himself from Jeff’s grasp. He took a deep breath. Jeff could see he was trembling. “You two need to settle this yourselves. I need to be somewhere safely away.”

He picked up Jeff’s key ring from the counter, and removed the keys to his own apartment. These he pocketed. Then he took up his coat and went out, quietly closing the door.

Jeff gaped for a minute. He yanked open the door and hung over the banister. He said something, tried to say “Wait!” and “Chuck!” in the same breath, producing only a yelp.

Chuck’s dry deadpan voice receded below. “Wish for whatever the hell you want, just leave me out of it.”

Jeff sank into the armchair. “What the fuck?...”

The fairy had returned to his seat on the box. He had conjured up a little bar cart and mixed himself a brightly colored cocktail, complete with paper umbrella. “You two had a fight, and he walked out. So?”

“He took his keys back.”

“So maybe you’re a Single Guy again. Got your little black book up to date?”

“Shut up, that’s not what I wanted. I didn’t want him to leave.”

“”What *do* you want, honey?”

Jeff was not going to make the same mistake a third time. “Wait, I have to think...First I want – I wish I *understood* why he freaked out and left – “

( – *and bam!*)

*(Each time was like the Disneyland ride where they pretend to shrink everyone and tour them through the subatomic world; only this trip had no happy smiling molecules and benevolent lab-coated scientists. There was only Chuck’s mind: thoughts, feelings, fears, problems, sorrows; childhood, adolescence...)*

*(A second-string motel on the Jersey shore. Living with the family in an apartment behind the office. Father always complaining about life, complaining at Chuck because Chuck’s not the hero jock all-American boy Dad wanted for a son. Mother a worrier, worrying and whining at Chuck because he can’t seem to make his dad happy like she mistakenly thinks she can. Elder sister, despising the little brother who edged her from her place as center of the family universe, squashing him with the intimate tailor-made sadism siblings do so well. Punished and humiliated if he fights back, punished and humiliated if he cries; so retreat into silence, into privacy, as the only way to survive.)*

*(Eighth grade, English class, everyone assigned to keep a journal. He writes often about other boys, fascinated by them, by the various ways puberty is changing their bodies, not yet realizing what this fascination means. One night his sister steals it from his room, and reads the passages aloud to his parents. Summoned to the living room, seeing the notebook in her hands. Hurling himself at her, shout of wordless, helpless rage, until father’s cruel hand throws him into a chair. His mind, his very heart, ripped open; and disgust, horror, condemnation, contempt poured in like toxic acid. Lying in bed that night, hearing the ocean, wishing for a tidal wave to come drown him.)*

*(Time telescopes forward. College, some grad school, various jobs: adulthood. Some therapy, and some peace of mind. Various tricks, various boyfriends; then Jeff. Jeff: blond, green eyes, smile of pure joy, body wonderfully muscled from his profession of masseur. Jeff: bright, warm, confident, outgoing – and impulsive. Impulsive, so when that Thing, that Fairy, that flaming, taunting Thing with supernormal powers more destructive than any tidal wave, appears, and Jeff impulsively says “I wish I knew what your problem was” – bam! Chuck’s mind, his heart are ripped open, gawked at with the cluelessness of tourists on a Disneyland ride. Twice. Chuck’s warnings impulsively ignored – Jeff’s too thrilled by his new plaything to see or care. Horror. Betrayal. Heartbreak. Rage, despair. Get away, out of here, out of his grasp, safely away. One mute gesture: take back the keys.)*

*(Hurrying along East 13<sup>th</sup>. Almost home, almost safe – unless the next wish tears him out, turns him into a monster...)*

The fairy’s voice snapped Jeff back. “Honey, can you say ‘melodrama’? ‘Despair! Horror! Flaming! Woe is me, boo-hoo, boo-hoo!’ Neuroses out the ass. Let him keep his keys, you’re better off.” The cocktail glass became a microphone, and the fairy’s tunic a Diva’s gown. He sang *“I should’ve changed that stupid lock, I should have made you leave your key, if I had known for one more minute you’d be back to bother me; Oh no not I, I will survive...”* A disco ball spun above his head, then became another cocktail.

“Shut up,” Jeff repeated. “I don’t care if it’s melodrama. She *stole* his journal, and *read* it to his parents? My God, what a bitch! No wonder he never talks about them. And shit – now I’ve done the same thing, kind of. After I told him I wouldn’t, too. Shit! Okay. I wish...I wish I knew what to say to him, to tell him I’m sorry and I won’t – I’ll listen to him.”

The fairy said nothing. He sat on the rim of the box, buffing his nails. After a long pause, Jeff said “Hey.”

“Yes, gorgeous?”

“I made another wish.”

“And?”

“And, aren’t you going to grant it?”

“It’s number four, honey. You only get three.”

“What??”

“Three wishes, child, that’s all anyone ever gets.”



“Why didn’t you tell me before??”

The fairy rolled his eyes again. “Oh *please*. It’s the standard contract, it’s in all the fairy tales. What did you read growing up – *Blueboy*?”

Jeff leapt up and paced round the chair. “What am I supposed to do then?”

“Don’t look at me, I’m not Dear Abby.”

“You got me into this. You conned me into going into his mind and freaking him out.”

“Child, I told you, that’s what we *do*. We play with your weaknesses, push your buttons and see how much we can mess with your heads. We’re immortal, we have to amuse ourselves somehow. I played with him being all sensitive and private and internalized-homophobic; and you being an excitable twinkie with the attention span of a puppy – “

Jeff grabbed the flyswatter. “Oh shit,” said the fairy, and vanished.

He did not reappear. Jeff tried closing and opening the box; even tried to find and dismantle the secret catch. Nothing worked. He was alone in the apartment, at a loss.

He called Chuck’s number, heard the dry detached voice of Chuck’s answering machine. “Hi, it’s me,” he said. “Look – can we talk? I’m really sorry...I’ll be home. Call me.” He waited all evening, leaping at the phone every time it rang. Various friends wanted him to go out, various strangers wanted to sell him things; but Chuck did not reply.

Saturday morning he called, and again got only the machine. Saturday evening, Sunday morning and Sunday evening he called, heard the impersonal “Please leave a message”, and hung up in frustration. “Chuck, don’t do this to me,” he said aloud. “Where the hell are you?”

Monday morning he had some free time, so hurried over to Holland Printing. As he came up the alley he saw Steve Russo and Aaron DeLong in conversation on the loading dock. When they saw him, they stopped talking. Through the open door behind them Jeff could hear the clatter of presses. He thought he faintly heard Chuck’s voice.

“Is Chuck here?”

Steve and Aaron seemed to exchange a glance. Steve answered. “Nah, he’s out makin’ deliveries.”

“Oh.” Jeff paused. “I thought your brother was the delivery guy.”

“We got real busy and had to send Chuck out too. We’ll tell him you were here.”

They stood looking down from the steps. He sensed them closing a circle against him; a protective circle round Chuck, their friend, whom they cared for.

The afternoon's bookings gave Jeff a string of his least favorite clients, clients who were all either late, rude, lecherous, or smelly. Jeff thought of Chuck's body and its particular scent: subtle and not unpleasant; soap, deodorant, paper and printer's ink, hard work and exercise. He thought of long, slow, smiling, satisfying sex in the flickering light of an unwatched movie. He thought of the previous week, one lunchtime, when he'd taken the keys and let himself into Chuck's apartment for a nap in Chuck's bed, falling asleep inhaling his lover's scent.

On impulse he went for dinner to the little Spanish restaurant. Chuck was not there, of course. Jeff sat alone and picked at his food. The subway platforms and trains seemed empty coming back, the ride lonely and long.

He walked down First Avenue from the station. Crossing 13<sup>th</sup> he looked east; and far off beneath a streetlight he saw a familiar figure in a familiar coat, hunched against the cold. He ran.

Chuck turned round slowly as Jeff came panting up. Jeff was trying to think of all the thousand things he wished to say, and drew a blank. "I'm sorry," was all he could come up with.

Chuck asked "Where's your little friend?"

"He's gone, you're safe. He only gave me three wishes, then he left. Totally blew me off, never came back."

"What was the third wish?"

"That I'd know why you got mad and left."

"And what did he tell you?" Chuck's voice was quiet, his face wary in the lamplight.

"He showed me. About your parents bullying you all the time and your sister stealing your journal; and like, how you got to be who you are. Why you were mad I wouldn't listen and scared I was going to change you weirdly. So like I said – just, I'm sorry."

Chuck lowered his head a moment. He took a breath. "Well; for my part, I'm sorry I walked out on you. I probably should've stayed and fought."

Jeff found himself grinning again. "Yeah, you should have. I get pissed if somebody walks out on a fight. But what happened to you? I've been calling all weekend."

"I got the messages. Tommy and I went to Atlantic City. We got very drunk and very stoned, and I won \$2.50 from a slot machine. One of Donald Trump's, I'm glad to say."

As if by instinct they had turned and continued on to the old brownstone housing Chuck's apartment. Jeff continued explaining. "Then I wished I could get to you and undo how I'd

fucked things up, you know. He just sat there. I said ‘Aren’t you going to grant it?’ And he said ‘Tough shit, you only get three.’ So *I* tried to swat him, and he vanished – “

Chuck stopped him suddenly, in a listening stance. There were faint noises coming from behind Chuck’s apartment door.

Jeff felt the large strong hand gripping his shoulder. Chuck spoke in a tiny whisper. “Flatten up against the wall on that side of the door. I’ll open the locks from this side, they’re really quiet, and kick the door open.”

Jeff was aghast. “What if they’ve got a gun??”

“Listen: they aren’t burglar noises, they’re sex noises. Somebody’s screwing in there.”

Chuck, with tense determined face, pressing up against the wall. Burly arm reaching, strong hand slowly turning one key, then another, then the knob. Crash! – booted foot kicking open the door. Chuck in the doorway, in a flash faster than visible motion, low to the floor in a spiderlike crouch. Then he rose, with a look of astonishment and anger, motioning Jeff to his side.

The tiny flat was hosting another vision of Hollywood homoerotics. This time it was a three-way: Alec Baldwin and Kevin Costner lustily plugging Leonardo diCaprio, fore and aft. A little winged figure sat in a little director’s chair atop the dresser. “Oh hell, just when I was going to do the cum shot,” said the fairy. The vision faded. “But my, such a butch entrance! So N.Y.P.D.!”

Chuck stood before the dresser and pointed to the open door. “*Out*,” he said. His voice compressed an entire treatise on fury into the single word.

“What are you *doing* here??” Jeff demanded.

The fairy appeared in sackcloth and ashes – albeit very sleek and fashionable sackcloth, as though conceived by the top designers of Milan. “I’m here because, *because*, I got just the worst, longest, godawfulest bitching out from Queen Mab that you can possibly imagine. Honey, that girl chewed on me like she was a soap star and I was a piece of scenery. Blah blah blah – ‘You didn’t tell him beforehand he only gets three wishes?’ Blah blah blah – “It doesn’t count if *you* say I wish, the mortal has to say it himself!’ And so on; and on and *on*. So, to make a way too long story short, your second wish didn’t count, and I have to grant you one more.”

“Jesus H. Christ on a crutch,” Chuck muttered. “Too bad she didn’t tell you to quit being such a goddamned flamer.”

“Oh, come on, honey, get in touch with your inner queen.”

“Fuck my inner queen.” Chuck began opening kitchen cabinets. “Do I have any Raid?”

“Look, child, I *told* you: I’m the way I am because of how I was called up. I was incantated into this plane by a Flaming Old Queen; and until I grant Gorgeous Blond Hunk here his last wish, I’m still bound by the F.O.Q.’s spell.”

“Is the wish transferable?” Jeff suddenly demanded. “Because I want Chuck to have it this time.” Chuck stopped and stared at him.

“Sorry, dear, no; you have to say the Magic Word all by yourself. But, *but*, it can be his wish you say.”

“That’s what I want then.” He turned to Chuck. “What do you wish for?”

Chuck thought, and came to stand by Jeff’s side. “I wish that whatever spells are binding you be broken, so you can go free.” Jeff repeated the words. Instantly the fairy transformed into what was presumably his true appearance: a glowing, pulsing, myriad-hued entity floating in midair, illumining their faces and the apartment. It looked rather like a crystalline lattice of energy fields, and like a giant snowflake, and like a tiny nebula, and like a really cool special effect. It washed a wave of gratitude through them, and warped out of sight.

They sat on the bed. Jeff noticed that Chuck’s hands were trembling. He covered them with his own. “It *was* stupid,” Chuck was saying. “What if it had been burglars, and they did have a gun? This is New York; I can imagine burglars whose kick is to screw in apartments they rob.”

“It wasn’t, and they didn’t. And you were absolutely amazing. If you’d said ‘Police! Freeze!’ I’d have totally believed you, if I was a burglar.”

“I was furious, is what I was. This is where I *live*. I *don’t like* people invading my space.” He fell silent. Abruptly he rose. He went to the dresser, opened a drawer, and brought out the spare keys. These he placed in Jeff’s hand, gently closing it round them.

After a quiet moment, he spoke again. “I kinda would’ve like to have seen that money shot.” He gestured at where the erotic vision had stood. “You suppose diCaprio’s that well-equipped in real life, or was it just our little fiend’s wishful thinking?”

“We can find out – there’s a movie where he shows it. I don’t know what it’s called, but he plays some famous gay poet.”

“Rimbaud. I know the one you mean. He plays Rimbaud to William Hurt’s Verlaine. So he gets naked, huh?”

“My friend said so... You want to rent it?”

Chuck quietly smiled. “We could do that.”

They found the film in question. It was not very interesting, and the glimpse of diCaprio’s privates was uselessly brief and blurred; so they instead enjoyed a long, slow, comfortable, satisfying fuck, and fell asleep in each other’s arms.