

Leo McGarry's Famous And Yet Deadly Secret Cure for Nerves by Xanthe



<http://www.xanthe.org/leo-mcgarrys-famous-and-yet-deadly-secret-cure-for-nerves/>

Story Notes:

This fic takes place immediately after the events of Debate Camp. The timeline on the show doesn't make it clear whether the events of Game On take place immediately after Debate Camp and I don't think it really matters one way or the other so in this fic they do I don't think it's all that important!

Dedications: Thanks to Phoebe as always :-). Any continuity, canon-errors etc are all mine. UK spelling and grammar used. :-)

Keywords: This story is set in my June 17th universe

1. Chapter 1 by Xanthe

2. Chapter 2 by Xanthe

Chapter 1 by Xanthe

2002

"Hey. I wondered where you were." Leo joined the president leaning on a fence, looking out into a dark copse of trees in the Saybrook Institute compound. There was a faint scent of intermingled flowers – Leo didn't know their names but the smell was pleasant enough. The sun had long since gone down and it was time, Leo thought, for the president to be in bed; they had an early start in the morning, and a big couple of days ahead of them, but Jed

clearly had other ideas.

"It's a beautiful night. I wanted to be alone – I'd go for a walk but you know, I'd feel stupid doing that with all these guys trailing along behind." Jed nodded in the direction of his secret service agents who were gathered a discreet distance away – far enough to be out of earshot but within clear sight of the president.

"You wanted to be alone?" Leo frowned, glancing at the cigarette in his friend's fingers. Jed only smoked when he was stressed, and, Leo supposed, he had every reason to be stressed right now.

"Yeah." Jed shrugged. "We've been working this debate camp thing for all its worth for the past 2 days and I'm tired and crabby. If I have to answer one more debate question *and* stay polite then I'll probably disappear in a puff of pissed off presidential smoke." He blew out a lungful of smoke as if to illustrate that point.

"Very impressive alliteration," Leo commented.

"Thank you," Jed grunted. "Two days of thinking up smart answers will do that to you. God, I'm beginning to wish we'd never agreed to this damn debate."

"You'll be fine." Leo shrugged.

"There see – that's one of the things I really hate about you, Leo," Jed replied moodily, flicking cigarette ash onto the grass beneath them.

"What did I say?" Leo asked, with feigned surprise. He hadn't known Jed intimately for 40 years without being familiar with his lover's more explosive moods and he had two equally good methods for handling them – one was to go head to head with his friend in a heated argument and the other was to simply absorb the flak as calmly and implacably as possible until Jed got whatever was bothering him out of his system. Leo usually employed the latter method, as he was doing right now; there were times when Jed liked a heated debate, but Leo was pretty sure that now wasn't one of them.

"You'll be fine," Jed mimicked. He threw his cigarette on the ground and stomped on it with his shoe. "You always have this unshakeable faith in me, Leo. It's annoying."

"Ah." Leo grinned.

"I mean, where can I go with 'you'll be fine'?" Jed asked, warming to his theme. "It boxes me into a corner. If I do well then it belittles my achievement as you can just give me that knowing 'I told you so' look and be all laid back and complacent about it, and if I screw up you get to yell at me so either way you win and I don't," he said grumpily.

"I don't yell at you," Leo replied smoothly.

"Hmm," Jed replied, in no mood to concede that very valid point.

"When did I yell at you?" Leo asked.

"Oh I don't know. I was using 'yell' in a metaphorical sense," Jed complained. "No, wait, I remember - you did yell at me once when we were talking about the relative merits of a proportional response. You definitely yelled at me then."

"I may have raised my voice – and so did you," Leo pointed out. "I wasn't yelling at you. It was a heated debate."

"Hmm," Jed said again.

"And it was either that or watch the world go up in flames so I think it was a subject worth getting heated about," Leo added. "That's about the only time I've ever had to *stop* you wading into a military confrontation. Usually I have to drag you kicking and screaming in the other direction."

"Alright, alright, you've made your point," Jed snapped, reaching into his pocket for another cigarette which he lit and drew on moodily.

Leo settled his arms comfortably on the fence. Jed had been in a bad mood for most of his time at the debate camp and Leo wasn't remotely surprised or fazed by it. They were all getting tense as the day of the televised debate drew closer and Jed's nerves often manifested in little explosions of temper which Leo was easily able to either defuse or absorb. The last 48 hours hadn't exactly been a picnic for Jed as he'd been called upon to spend hour after hour rehearsing debate questions with the staff, at the same time as dealing with a tense military situation. Jed was never more ill at ease than when wearing the mantle of Commander In Chief and it was during those sessions that he relied on Leo more than at any other time – he respected Leo's judgment, aware that his friend had actually seen armed combat while he had not. Jed was never at ease with taking hard military decisions. He and Leo had an ongoing disagreement about how to deal with military situations; Jed's natural instincts were what Leo called fudge and Jed called compromise – and it was up to Leo to occasionally push Jed into being more hawkish than was his inclination.

"So...you're nervous about the debate?" Leo asked. Jed moved his neck from side to side as if trying to relieve a persistent ache and then he gave a little grin and shot Leo a slightly mischievous sideways glance from under his eyelashes.

"Yeah, I'm nervous. What are you going to do about it? Administer Leo McGarry's Famous and Yet Deadly Secret Cure for Nerves?" Jed asked, his eyes glinting in the darkness. Leo gazed at him for a moment, and then quirked an eyebrow.

"Does it work?"

Jed gave a bark of laughter. "Yeah!"

"Then you'd better watch out," Leo grinned.

1966

"Jed – it's for you!"

Jed threw his book on the floor with a growl, walked over to his bedroom door and wrenched it open savagely. He was in no mood to talk to anyone right now – didn't people know he was trying to study for god's sake? He ran down the stairs and into the hallway of the house he shared with 8 other students and glared at Eric Lewis who was brandishing the telephone at him.

"Who is it?" Jed hissed.

"Leo," Eric replied, handing him the phone and fleeing under the weight of Jed's irritable glare. Jed grabbed the phone and barked:

"Leo - it's me," into it, still glowering.

"Hey, you don't sound so good," Leo commented.

Jed struggled for a moment, torn between holding onto his current foul mood, and allowing Leo's mellow, good natured tones to soothe him, as they usually did. He normally loved it when Leo called and they'd been known to talk for hours with Jed sitting on the narrow stairwell in the hallway of the student house. As he talked, he could picture Leo lying on his bed in his room in Michigan; Leo had somehow, and Jed still wasn't sure how he'd done this, managed to find a bedroom that came complete with its own private telephone line. The most Jed had managed to swing was single occupancy of his own room – he'd shared for his first three years but for his final year he had a small room all to himself, which suited him much better – especially when Leo dropped by in the battered old beater that he called a car and stayed over. That didn't happen often though; their colleges were a couple of hundred miles apart so they often split the difference and met somewhere between the two in order to spend a few hours together.

"I have my final Economics exam tomorrow," Jed hissed at Leo as if that explained everything.

"I know," Leo replied. "That's why I'm calling. I know this is the big one and you wanna nail it. I was just calling to say good luck."

"Oh." Jed sat down on the stairs and began to pick moodily at a piece of wallpaper that was peeling away from the wall.

"You'll be fine," Leo said confidently.

"You don't know that," Jed muttered.

"Jed, trust me, I do," Leo replied calmly. "You have the biggest brain of anyone I ever met. If you don't ace this exam then there isn't a hope in hell for the other guys taking it."

"Leo, I'm not anywhere near as smart as you think I am. I had to work really hard this term and there's still some stuff I need to know that I just don't have a handle on," Jed said, picking at the peeling wallpaper some more. "God knows I've studied and studied but there's this one last book I just need to get through..."

"Before tomorrow?" Leo asked incredulously. "Jed, were you planning on staying up all night studying?"

"I won't be able to sleep anyway," Jed protested. "I didn't get any sleep last night – all I could think about was that I hadn't read this book. I went over to the library first thing this morning and got it but I need more time to study it properly."

"Yeah, and I'll bet it's the one econ book in the stacks that you still haven't read," Leo commented. Jed gazed at his fingernails moodily – that comment wasn't far from the truth. "Jed, did your professor say you had to read this book to pass the exam?"

"No," Jed conceded.

"Is it possible that you didn't read it because you don't need to as it isn't relevant? Jed – I'm betting that you've done all the studying you possibly can for this exam until you're word perfect on everything - and that you're just making excuses about reading this book to distract you so you don't think about how nervous you are," Leo observed with unerring accuracy.

Jed was silent for a moment. "Maybe," he agreed grudgingly.

Leo's sigh at the other end of the phone was both audible and exasperated. "You didn't sleep last night either?" He asked.

"No – you know I get insomnia, Leo. There's no way I even expected to get any sleep this close to the exam."

"You'll do better if you at least get *some* sleep," Leo told him firmly.

"Yeah, well, tell that to my brain," Jed chuckled. "The minute I close my eyes all I can think about is Keynes's Internal Rate of Return and Adam Smith's Theory of Value and Distribution."

"Jed – will you do something for me?" Leo asked in a thoughtful tone of voice.

"Mmm. Maybe. Depends what it is," Jed replied warily.

"Is the book upstairs in your room?"

"Yes."

"Okay. I want you to go and pick it up, bring it downstairs, and leave it in the hallway. Just leave it - put the book down and walk slowly away. Think you can do that?"

"Not sure," Jed mused, levering some plaster out from under his fingernail with his thumb.

"Then, when the book is safely out of reach, I want you to go back upstairs, lie on your bed, close your eyes, and think of nothing; nothing at all. Will you try and do that for me?" Leo asked.

"Well, I'll try," Jed said uncertainly. "But it won't work."

"You won't know unless you try," Leo pointed out reasonably.

"Okay," Jed sighed. "Thanks, Leo. I'm afraid I'm a lost cause though."

"No you're not. If you go to bed now, you might get a few hours sleep even if it takes you a couple of hours to switch off."

"Mmm." Jed shrugged, having absolutely no faith whatsoever in Leo's strategy, although he was grateful that his friend cared enough to at least try and help.

"Are you gonna do like I say?" Leo asked.

"Probably," Jed replied.

Leo sighed. "That'll have to do I guess. Good luck for tomorrow – not that you need it, but good luck anyway."

Jed smiled to himself. Talking to Leo always made him feel better no matter what kind of a mood he was in. "Yeah. Thanks," he said softly.

Jed put the phone down and gazed at it glumly, wishing Leo was here right now and not miles away, and then, with a sigh, he picked himself up and returned to his room. He gazed at the book in question with a fatalistic look and then picked it up.

"We can go through the motions but you and I both know you've already won," he told it.

He walked the book out of the room, took it down the stairs, and placed it on a shelf next to the phone in the hallway. The book gazed at him maliciously from its plain brown cover. It seemed to be taunting him. Jed scowled at it and then did as Leo had advised and backed slowly away up the hallway towards the stairs again. The book didn't cease its baleful glaring for a second so Jed decided he'd have to run for it. He fled up the stairs and into his bedroom and slammed the door shut behind him. Then he flopped onto the bed, closed his eyes, and tried to do as Leo had advised.

Think of nothing, he told himself sternly. Nothing...

An image of the book came tantalisingly into his mind. He could see the chapter headings...supposing he was sitting in the exam tomorrow and all the answers he needed were covered under one of those chapter headings? It was too much for Jed to bear, so he got up, opened the door, and returned down the stairs. The book was sitting where he'd left it 10 minutes ago. Jed retrieved it and sat down on the stairs again, book in hand. He flicked it open and tried to read, but the words just seemed like a meaningless jumble on the page. His eyes stung and his eyelids felt so heavy he could barely keep them open. He read the same paragraph three times and realised it had made no sense to him whatsoever.

"Oh god," he muttered to himself. "Leo's right. I'm so tired I won't even be able to think straight during the exam tomorrow." He got up, threw the book on the shelf, and then let himself out of the house, taking a deep breath of the cool night air. He'd go for a long walk and try to clear his mind that way; maybe that would work.

Jed walked relentlessly for three hours straight. He was so tired he wanted to throw himself down on the grassy verge and sleep wherever he fell but his brain was still too active – it refused to be turned off. He tried to do as Leo had advised and empty his mind and think of nothing at all but it only worked for a second or two and then he was back running over all the things he needed to know for the exam and working out example essay answers in his head. Finally, he realised that he was soaked and it had been raining steadily for at least 20 minutes without him noticing. It was only that realisation that drove Jed back to his house, dripping wet. He stomped moodily up the stairs, threw open his bedroom door, slammed it shut behind him and then...gave a startled gasp as he was pushed up against the wall.

"What the...?" He began, confused.

"Quiet!" A voice hissed in his ear.

"Who...?"

"I said, be quiet," the voice repeated. Jed struggled for a moment but his assailant was young, fit and strong – and clearly had the upper hand. Jed gave in and slumped against the wall and the man behind him gave a grunt of approval. He put one hand on the back of Jed's neck to keep him in place and his other hand moved lower...and then lower still. It was curiously caressing and Jed's panic disappeared instantly as he felt a familiar tingle spark through his body; there was only one person this could be.

"Leo?" He said, with a bark of relieved laughter.

"You're drenched," Leo chided, by way of reply, patting Jed's damp clothes with what sounded like a snort of disgust. "What the hell were you doing out hiking in a thunderstorm?"

"I tried the lying on the bed thinking of nothing trick and it didn't work," Jed sighed.

"And you thought getting half drowned would help take your mind off tomorrow?" Leo asked.

"I'm not sure I was thinking about anything other than the questions that might be in the exam," Jed said. "Leo, can I get up now?" He tried to move back, only for Leo's hand to close more firmly around his neck, pushing him back against the wall.

"No," Leo replied. "I know you; if I let you up you'll end up talking me to death about the exam and that's precisely **not** why I'm here."

"Why are you here?" Jed asked, staying where Leo put him, feeling somewhat excited by the whole scenario. He heard Leo give a little chuckle behind him, and then he gasped out loud as Leo's warm lips nuzzled at his cold, damp neck, just below his hairline.

"I'm here," Leo said, in portentous tones, "to administer Leo McGarry's Famous Cure for Nerves."

Jed couldn't help himself; he snorted – loudly. "Okay, I'll bite," he said, grinning into the wall. "What exactly is Leo McGarry's Famous Cure for Nerves? It's clearly so famous that I haven't even heard of it."

"It's famous – but a deadly secret," Leo told him. Jed snorted again – this was at least distracting him for his worries about the exam though.

"Ah – so it's really 'Leo McGarry's Famous and Yet Deadly Secret Cure for Nerves.' Hmm, isn't that a contradiction in terms? Famous but secret?" Jed asked.

"Nope. Something can be famous among a very small group of people," Leo replied.

"How small?" Jed demanded.

"Two," Leo conceded. "You and me."

"You and me?" Jed laughed. "Except I've never heard of it so that makes it just you. It can't be famous if only one person knows about it."

"I knew you'd talk me to death if you got the chance," Leo lamented. "However...I also know ways of keeping you quiet."

"No you d...ooooh...shit!" Jed found himself rendered suddenly speechless as Leo's warm tongue found that spot just behind his ear that always made his knees go weak. He clung on to the wall for dear life as Leo licked him vigorously and then sighed as Leo's hands slid down the inside of his damp pants and made warm, erotic contact with his buttocks. Leo kneaded Jed's butt thoroughly as he licked behind his ear and nuzzled at his neck and Jed could almost feel the steam rising off him as he melted against the wall.

"I rest my case," Leo said in a tone of some satisfaction. "Now, it's time to administer that famous cure I think." There was a distinct grin in his voice as he said that, and a few seconds later Jed felt his friend's hands glide around to the front of his body and start unfastening his pants.

"What are you gonna...?" Jed began, wondering what exactly Leo had planned.

"Ssh," Leo said, his warm breath tickling the back of Jed's ear. A few seconds later Jed felt his pants being pushed down his legs along with his briefs, and then he gave a squawk of surprise as his buttocks were parted and a finger slid smoothly inside his body.

"Oh shit," Jed gasped, struggling in vain to find some kind of handhold on the smooth wall he was pressed up against. He pressed his palms flat against the wall and hung there, his body responding as it always did to Leo's caresses, every nerve ending starting to tingle and vibrate. He felt Leo slide another finger inside him and then another; Leo's fingers appeared to be lubed and Jed tried to turn his head to at least catch a glimpse of his lover in the dark room, but Leo increased the pressure on the back of his neck with his other hand, making it impossible.

"The Famous and Yet Deadly Secret cure doesn't work if you try to look," he said.

"You're making up the rules as you go along!" Jed complained.

"It's my cure – I can do that," Leo told him smugly and there was no arguing with that so Jed just resigned himself and rested his head on his hands. It had been several weeks since he'd last seen Leo and everything always felt so right when they were together. His worries about the exam had now receded to the back of his mind, completely pushed aside by the distraction of having Leo here, playing this deliciously tormenting game with him.

Jed gave a hoarse yell as Leo's mouth descended on the back of his neck again, licking and sucking at his damp skin, warming him in time to the rhythmic thrusting of his fingers. Jed abandoned himself to the sensation, moaning softly to himself as Leo continued with this exquisite torment until Jed didn't think he could take it any more – and at that precise moment he felt Leo remove his fingers and draw away and then a second later his ass cheeks were parted and Leo's hard cock took the place of his fingers. They had never had sex in this position before, standing up like this, and Jed found it more exciting than he would have thought possible. He loved the fact that they were half clothed and Leo hadn't allowed him to look round – it lent the proceedings a furtive, illicit aura that aroused him; and he adored the slightly rough texture of Leo's pants as they rubbed against his ass and the back of his thighs and the warmth of Leo's hands on his still damp skin.

Jed gave another gasp as Leo slid into him with one expert thrust and Jed found himself pushed up closer to the wall, his head angled sideways, his cheek pressed against his hands. His ass muscles felt tighter with this angle of penetration and he liked the intensity of the way that felt when Leo thrust into him. He also loved the sensation of Leo covering his body with his own, his hand milking Jed's cock with every forward thrust, his lips finding the back

of Jed's neck at the same time, kissing, nuzzling and gently biting him as he moved his body effortlessly inside Jed's. Leo kept them both on the edge for a long time – slowing down his own thrusts and his pressure on Jed's cock just when they were both near to coming, much to Jed's frustration. Now all thought of exams and the unread book were completely banished from his mind; all he could think about was the intoxicating sensation of being taken by Leo against the wall in this almost primitive way and he was shocked by just how exciting it felt. It was all he could do to stay upright as Leo continued rocking his hips forward and back, sliding in and out of Jed's ass, his hands and body the only thing keeping Jed in position. He felt literally impaled on Leo's cock and the musty scent of his damp clothing combined with the heady scent of sex to make him forget about everything except the fact that he was being vigorously made love to against the wall by his best friend. Finally, when Jed really thought he'd collapse from the sensory overload, Leo allowed them both to come. It took Jed a few minutes to even realise that he had spent himself, as he hung against the wall, panting, Leo's softening cock still embedded in his body, Leo's hands warm on his hips, keeping him from falling to the ground in a boneless heap. They stood there for a moment and then Jed felt Leo's warm breath tickling the back of his neck again.

"I'm going to let go. Can you stand?" He asked.

"Dunno..." Jed replied, shakily.

"I'll keep my arm around you then," Leo said, and then he carefully withdrew and pulled away. Jed was grateful for that arm around his midriff as he sank down for a moment, and then rallied enough to find his feet. His pants were still down around his ankles and he took one step and would have fallen over if Leo hadn't been holding him up. Somehow Leo managed to throw him onto the bed in the centre of the small room and then he threw himself down beside him. It was dark and all Jed could see were Leo's teeth grinning inanely, the whites of his eyes, and the slight shimmer of his blond hair.

"So, I think Leo McGarry's Famous and Yet Deadly Secret Cure for Nerves works," Leo commented in a satisfied tone.

"You think?" Jed tried to sound as if he wasn't certain but Leo wasn't having any of it. He grabbed Jed, laughing in a way that made his body ripple against his friend's.

"You are so not going to have me about this, my friend," he said into Jed's ear. "You were doing everything short of purring just then."

"No I wasn't. I was thinking about my Economics exam the entire time," Jed told him solemnly.

"Ah, now I wish I'd taken Economics. I had no idea it could cause such explosive orgasms," Leo observed, and his hand sneaked down to find Jed's cock, which, despite being so recently sated, immediately sprang into life again when it was touched. "A-ha. I suspect you were lying to me, Jed Bartlet. In which case..." He rolled over on top of Jed, imprisoned his arms above his body, and then lowered his head to capture Jed's mouth in his own in the first kiss they'd shared since Leo's clandestine arrival. Jed opened his lips immediately and

they spent a good couple of minutes claiming each other's mouths, kissing ardently and passionately until they had no choice but to come up for air. Jed gazed up at Leo, feeling warm, relaxed and happy in a way that would have been unthinkable a few hours before. Leo smiled down on him and kissed him again, gently, tenderly, caressingly. They undressed each other, and then Leo wrapped his arms around Jed, held him down on the bed, and made love to him again, just as tenderly...and that was the last thing that Jed remembered until his alarm clock went off several hours later.

He came to with a start and glanced over at the mound under the sheets beside him, remembering the events of the previous night with a happy smile. Leo opened a sleepy eye and gazed at him.

"S'morning already?" He groaned.

"Yeah," Jed said softly. "And I feel great. Thanks for driving over last night, Leo."

"No problem," Leo mumbled into the pillow. "You sounded so pathetic on the phone that I figured extreme measures were called for so I got in the car and drove like a bat out of hell to get here – Eric let me in. I was worried when I got here and you were nowhere to be seen - I was just about to go looking for you when you showed up like a half drowned rat. So, did you sleep?"

"Like a baby." Jed grinned.

"Worked then." Leo closed his eyes again. Jed leaned over and kissed his friend's forehead. Leo had grown his hair a little longer while at college and it was wispy around the edges. It wasn't anywhere near as thick as Jed's hair and Jed suspected that Leo found it annoying so he doubted it would be long before Leo had it all cut off again – probably into the buzz cut he'd favoured when Jed had first met him. In the meantime, Jed enjoyed being in the unusual position of being able to smooth Leo's hair away from his forehead for a change. Leo made a face and waved his hand feebly in a bid to ward Jed away.

"Hey, you can do it to me. Why can't I do it to you?" Jed complained with a grin.

"S'different. You like it," Leo muttered sleepily.

"I don't. You like doing it to me!" Jed protested. "I'm just very kind and let you."

"Yeah. Right," Leo said, opening his eyes again. Leo's eyes were a very pale blue in colour - sharp, smart and perceptive with just a faint edge of teasing in their opaque depths. "You like being stroked, fondled, kissed and fucked, Jed Bartlet – and as I like doing all those things to you I think it works out pretty well." He grinned and ran a speculative hand over Jed's thighs as if to test that point. Jed's cock responded as it normally did and Leo laughed out loud. "I rest my case," he said.

Jed grinned and deliberately stroked Leo's hair by way of retaliation - and one thing led to another and they spent a quick ten minutes divesting Jed of any more last minute 'nerves'

before, regretfully, he decided it was time to get up.

"Will you be here when I get back from the exam?" He asked Leo, rolling out of the bed and stretching like a cat, naked and utterly content.

"No," Leo sighed. "I have to get back before lunch. Will you be okay?" He asked quietly, his mood changing as he gazed at his friend speculatively.

"Yes." Jed nodded. "I'm going to ace this exam, Leo!" He dropped a kiss on Leo's head and then grabbed his bathrobe and made for the door, feeling refreshed and full of confidence, ready to face whatever challenges the day ahead brought.

"Yeah, like I didn't tell you that yesterday," Leo grumbled. "But would you believe me? No...I had to schlep all the way down here..."

"Well, if I'd believed you yesterday there wouldn't have been any need for Leo McGarry's Famous and Yet Deadly Secret Cure for Nerves, would there?" Jed said with a mischievous smile. "And I wouldn't have wanted to miss *that*." He laughed and exited the room, closing the door just in time to avoid a deftly thrown pillow.

Chapter 2 by Xanthe

2002

It was getting late. Most of the staff had decamped back to DC that evening and the rest would be leaving with the president and Leo on Marine One first thing in the morning. The place seemed so much quieter now that Sam, Josh, Toby, CJ and the others had left. Jed was staring into space, his gaze fixed absently in the distance, his body language screaming at Leo to leave him alone, but Leo knew better than to pay any attention to that; it was when Jed wanted to be alone that he most needed someone with him in his experience - or at least, when he most needed either Leo or Abbey with him. Anyone else would irritate him and he'd never open up to anyone else in any case.

"You shouldn't be nervous about the debate," Leo commented. "You've got all the right answers. Ritchie can't even string a sentence together, let alone have it make sense. You'll trounce him."

Jed shrugged, and took another puff of his cigarette. "It might backfire on us, Leo," he said moodily. "You know, this whole thing about making me look smart compared to Ritchie - it could backfire. I could come across as smug and arrogant."

"You *are* smart. I happen to believe that's a good thing in a president and I'm sure millions of American voters feel the same way," Leo told him firmly.

"Yeah but there's smart and then there's too smart and I know how that can come across and how it rubs people up the wrong way," Jed said savagely.

Leo gave an inner sigh. He knew what all this was about – Jed couldn't help being smart, but sometimes he tried to back track or cover it up almost as reflex action. He'd learned that particular habit as a child, flinching from his father's unpredictable fists; Mr. Bartlet had found his son's intelligence both infuriating and challenging and Jed had tried not to court his father's temper.

"You mean it used to rub your father up the wrong way," Leo commented.

"Don't start, Leo," Jed warned.

"We can talk about this," Leo said in a reasonable tone. "We've learned how to talk about this haven't we?" They had come a long way since this had been a taboo subject between them, and after a couple of joint therapy sessions with Stanley Leo thought they had managed to find a way to navigate the particular minefield that was Jed's father, Jed's propensity to defend him, and Leo's deep dislike of him – a dislike that had been entirely mutual when Mr. Bartlet was alive.

"Yeah. We can talk about it but I hate the way you drag him into everything as if he was relevant to the slightest thing I do or say," Jed grumbled. "This isn't about him."

Sure it is, Leo thought to himself, but he didn't want to risk inflaming Jed's already bad mood even further by saying so.

"So have you decided who you're going to be at the debate?" Leo asked, deliberately changing the subject. Jed gazed at him in surprise.

"What do you mean, *who* I'm going to be?"

Leo shrugged. "That's what you're out here doing, isn't it? You're trying to decide who you're going to be – whether you're going to be the smart candidate or the folksy, waffling one. Did you know the staff has a name for your waffly alter ego?"

Jed raised an eyebrow and Leo decided to risk his friend's wrath by continuing. This point was too important for him not to address it before the debate – he knew Toby, CJ, Josh and Sam were all extremely apprehensive on this subject and he also knew that this one was down to him to sort out. Nobody else would be able to do it – nobody else would dare. "They call him Uncle Fluffy. Is it going to be Jed Bartlet or Uncle Fluffy who shows up at the debate, sir?"

"Uncle Fluffy?" Jed gave a short bark of laughter. "Who the hell thought that one up?"

"Toby." Leo shrugged. "They don't mention it in front of me of course – they don't think I know about Uncle Fluffy."

"Then how do you know?" Jed frowned.

"I know everything," Leo replied with a shrug. Jed gave a grunt of acknowledgement.

"They have the utmost respect for you, sir," Leo continued, "but I don't think they're so keen on Uncle Fluffy. So, who's it going to be?"

"I'm just saying there can be such a thing as too smart," Jed sighed, side-stepping the question.

"I hate to have to point this out, but I think the cat is already out of the bag on the whole you being smart thing," Leo replied. "I present to you exhibit number one, your honour: graduation summa cum laude from Notre Dame with a double major in Economics and History; and exhibit number two - a doctorate from the London School of Economics; and finally, your honour, exhibit number three: a Nobel prize for Economics. Not many people have a Nobel prize under their belts, sir," he said softly. "Not to mention every other medal and award in the field. If you were wanting to keep the whole being smart thing a secret you could do without all that hanging around your neck."

"Yeah." Jed shrugged. "Yeah," he said again with a sigh. Leo put a hand on his friend's shoulder and squeezed, affectionately – he wished he could give an even more overt display of reassurance but he was mindful of the fact that they were outside, and the secret service were close enough to see them.

"The day you were awarded that Nobel prize was one of the proudest of my life," Leo murmured to his friend in a low voice. "I think you do yourself, all of us, and the Nobel Institute itself a disservice by downplaying the significance and importance of that event and what it says about your intellect, Jed."

It was the first time he'd called him Jed all evening, and it was said deliberately, to emphasise that he was speaking as a lover now and not the president's Chief of Staff.

"One of the proudest days of your life? It was?" Jed looked at him in surprise.

"Sure it was." Leo smiled.

December 10th, 1984
Concert Hall, Stockholm

"Leo!" Abbey Bartlet swept up to him, wearing a very impressive cream and coffee coloured two-tone dress. Her hair was immaculately coiffured and two beautiful gold earrings were glistening in her ears. Leo kissed her on the cheek and then took a step back and gave a whistle of admiration.

"My you're looking good, Abbey. Want to leave Jed and run away with me?" He offered with a grin.

"We'd drive each other insane," she replied, with a grin of her own. Then she paused as if seriously considering it. "It's tempting though," she conceded. "Especially right now! I can't tell you how relieved I am that you've arrived."

"Trouble?" Leo glanced around the room, trying to find Jed among the throng of people waiting to go into the auditorium and take their seats.

"The flight over here was a nightmare. Jed was on some kind of trivia overdrive and couldn't stop talking the entire time and at some point he said something that upset his father – I have no idea what because I was busy trying to answer his mother's bizarre questions. I swear that even her most seemingly innocuous questions have been subtly and cunningly designed to lure me into a trap whereby it becomes quite obvious that I'm not good enough for her son. This time it was about cooking."

"Cooking?" Leo raised an eyebrow.

"Cooking." Abbey repeated firmly. "She refuses to understand that Jed cooks because he enjoys it and when he's in one of his baking moods it's all you can do to get access to the kitchen. She assumes he cooks because his mean, unwomanly wife won't cook the poor starving boy a meal so he's forced to do it for himself."

"She can talk," Leo commented dryly. "I don't think she was there most of the time he was growing up so I doubt she provided him with many home cooked meals." His eyes finally alighted on Mr. and Mrs. Bartlet, who were standing, in their finery, generating an icy froideur that he could feel halfway across the room. They weren't even looking at each other: Mrs. Bartlet was gazing at a spot somewhere over her husband's shoulder while he looked as if the whole sumptuous event was an affront to civilized taste and beneath him in some way.

"Damn," Leo commented. Abbey followed his gaze and sighed.

"Yes. Damn," she echoed, rolling her eyes.

"Mind you, I'm amazed you even managed to get them together in the same room. I don't think they've been in the same room for years - let alone flown half way across the world together!"

"You're probably right." Abbey gave a low, throaty laugh. "No wonder the flight was so tense." Her expression sobered and saddened. "I just wish that for once they could put aside their differences and think of Jed. This is *his* day, Leo; he's earned it and he deserves it, but instead of just enjoying himself now he's worrying about what he said that upset his father so much."

Leo gazed at her keenly but didn't say anything. He was pretty sure that Jed had never told Abbey how his father had beat up on him as a kid and Leo figured it wasn't his secret to share with her. It was clear that Abbey didn't have the first idea why Mr. Bartlet was in such a bad mood but Leo knew. It made him spitting angry but he could guess that for a man who felt as threatened by his son's intellect as Mr. Bartlet did, being here today and witnessing his son receiving a Nobel prize must be a particularly exquisite form of torture. Maybe the old man felt some pride in his son's accomplishment, somewhere deep inside – Leo certainly

hoped so – but right now his own petty emotions of envy and resentment were holding sway.

"Look – you handle Mr. B," Leo told Abbey. "He adores you and we all know he's not even going to shake my hand, let alone talk to me. Just seeing me here will put him in an even worse mood than he already is," he said wryly.

"Why **does** he hate you so much?" Abbey asked curiously. Leo shrugged.

"Let's just say that we've never exactly seen eye to eye and leave it at that," he murmured. "Anyway, if you do your best to jolly him along, I'll handle Mrs. B. She might not like you but she's got a soft spot for me." He grinned.

"You butter her up," Abbey said, with a grin of her own. "It's that devilish way you have with women, Leo McGarry – I think it comes being so close to your mom and sisters; you know how to make the ladies smile."

"It's a talent I've misused all my life," Leo replied with a wink and Abbey burst out laughing. Leo laughed with her – he got along well with Abbey and was immensely grateful to her for being so understanding about his relationship with Jed. He doubted that many women would share their man with a male lover, but Abbey had taken it in her stride. To begin with their relationship had been prickly and jealous, but as they had gotten to know each other over the years, Leo thought they'd each come to have a genuine appreciation of the other person in Jed's life. He liked Abbey – he liked her strong character and warm, sexy laugh and he knew she liked him. She understood that Jed had known Leo first and that during their adolescent years they had forged a bond too strong for either of them to be able to break it. She had an equally strong bond with Jed and never felt threatened by her husband's relationship with Leo – maybe because he was a man, Leo thought to himself. He knew there was no way in hell that Abbey would have tolerated her husband conducting a similar relationship with another woman, but what he had with Jed was different; Abbey was well aware of that and made allowances for it. She had Jed to herself most of the time and didn't begrudge Leo his occasional weekends or evenings with her husband – they were few and far between anyway and both Leo and Jed were discreet about it.

"Where **is** Jed, by the way?" Leo commented, glancing around the room again.

"He's working the room - you know, the way he likes to," Abbey smiled. "He's never happier than when he can be impressing people, Leo – and I think that he's also trying to avoid having to talk to his father."

That made sense, Leo thought to himself grimly. No doubt the altercation on the journey had caused all kinds of unwelcome memories to rise in Jed's mind. Leo had his own memories of Jed's father taking a swing at his son when he was an 18 year old kid, and for no reason at all except that he thought Jed was being too smart. Leo had to keep a tight grip on his anger as he thought of Jed coming here today to receive his Nobel prize, and having the day ruined by his father's envy. Today was about celebrating Jed's intellect but his father had never been able to do that and Leo doubted that he was about to start now.

"Where are you staying?" Abbey asked. "We weren't sure you'd be able to make it now you're the big, busy, hot shot lawyer."

"Aw, did you think I'd let it go to my head and forget about you little people?" Leo teased. Abbey gave him a look of mock disgust and they both laughed again. "I'm not really staying anywhere," Leo sighed. "I've got a hotel room to dump my stuff in but I have to leave straight after the banquet and catch the next flight back home."

"You came all this way just for a few hours?" Abbey asked, her expression softening.

"Did you think there was any way in the world that I'd miss this?" He replied. She shook her head and patted his arm affectionately, her eyes looking suspiciously misty.

"No. No, of course not," she whispered.

"Hey, how are the girls? Did you bring them?" Leo asked, trying to change the subject.

"No. Ellie wanted to come but Zoey's too small and Liz is incapable of thinking about anything other than boys at the moment so we decided it was better if we left them all behind. How's Mallory?"

"She's great." Leo knew he was giving a beaming smile when he thought of his small, feisty, red haired daughter.

"And Jenny?" Abbey asked.

"Yeah." Leo nodded. "She's fine. She sends her love. Okay," he sighed, "You go and lure Mr. B away and I'll move in on Mrs. B." Leo grabbed a glass of champagne from a passing waiter to give him the buzz he needed if he was to survive being this close to Jed's father for an entire evening. "Between us we'll soften them up so that Jed will feel okay about joining us later, after the ceremony."

"Sounds like a plan." Abbey smiled at him. "And Leo," she paused and gave him a coquettish smile. "The white tie and tails – a seriously good look for you!" And with that she kicked up her heels and returned to Jed's parents.

Leo watched her go with a little smile; Jed's wife was something else and she knew it. Much as he loved his own wife, he couldn't help comparing her to Abbey occasionally. Jenny was a much more demure personality and that suited Leo fine – he didn't like fireworks of the kind that the Bartlet marriage seemed to thrive on. However, he sometimes wished Jenny and he sparked off each other more, in the way Jed and Abbey did. That made him feel disloyal – Jenny had been as understanding of his relationship with Jed in her own way as Abbey was. It was a quieter, more understated type of understanding – more of a 'don't ask, don't tell' scenario, but she had given them her blessing all the same. Leo watched as Abbey drew Mr. Bartlet away from his wife, and then he moved in on Mrs. Bartlet. Her face lit up as she saw him and he kissed her cheek affectionately. He was right – she *did* like him. He sometimes

wondered whether she'd like him quite so much if she knew that he had been sleeping with her beloved first born son for over 20 years – he was pretty sure that Mr. Bartlet hadn't told her of his suspicions about the nature of his son's relationship with his best friend.

"Leo!" Mrs. Bartlet studied him intently. "You're looking well, my dear. It's all a little overwhelming isn't it?" She glanced around the room. "I still find it hard to believe that Jed won a Nobel prize."

"Your son is a very intelligent man and he worked very hard for this," Leo told her with a proud smile.

"Yes he did." She gave him a beaming smile of her own. "I wish his father was as proud of him as I am," she murmured, glancing in the direction of her husband. "I hoped he was going to at least try to get along with Jed today but they argued for most of the flight," she sighed.

At that moment there was a fanfare announcing the beginning of the ceremony. They all took their seats, and Leo clapped his heart out when Jed received his award. He couldn't help but notice that Jed was one of the youngest recipients there, and that just increased the width of the grin on his face. He turned to look at Abbey and they both laughed when they saw they were wearing matching expressions of pride and happiness.

When the ceremony was over, he sought Jed out in the crowded party at the banquet but once again his friend eluded him. Finally he decided to look outside, and found Jed standing alone on the portico, smoking a cigarette.

"Isn't it time you gave up that nasty habit?" He asked and Jed jumped and then turned around fast, a beaming smile on his face.

"Leo! I wondered if you'd be able to make it! I know you're working on a big case at the moment – I've been following it in the newspapers."

"Are you kidding? I'd never have missed this!" Leo exclaimed, enveloping his friend in a massive bear hug which Jed returned with equal enthusiasm. "I have to fly out again in a couple of hours but there was no way I wasn't going to be here, Jed." He stepped back and glanced at his friend searchingly. "So what's with the cigarette? Nerves?"

"No," Jed grimaced. "Just finding a way to avoid going back in there and..." He trailed off and shrugged.

"Abbey told me the flight over here was tense," Leo commented softly, standing beside his friend on the portico.

"Yeah." Jed shrugged, and glanced back into the room in the direction of his parents. "They shouldn't spend any time together. I know I shouldn't say this but sometimes I wish they'd just divorce and get it over with."

"They won't," Leo said.

"No." Jed sighed. "They won't."

"Hey – this is your day," Leo told him, sensing his friend's glum mood. "You shouldn't let them spoil it. Just enjoy it."

"I am," Jed said, too brightly. Leo gazed at him steadily and Jed wilted. "I argued with Dad on the plane on the way over here. I should learn to keep my big mouth shut," he grimaced.

"I don't even begin to understand why you're worrying about his moods on today of all days," Leo growled, unable to fathom why, even as a grown man with kids of his own, Jed continued to need his father's approval. Maybe because he'd never had it, Leo thought, and his anger faded as it struck him how sad that must be for Jed. Maybe it was hard to change the pattern of a lifetime, always wanting, needing, and hoping to please the one person who would never be pleased, no matter what you did. "Hey," Leo said in a softer tone. "You should come back inside – Abbey is looking like a million dollars and just glowing with pride for you and you should see your Mom! She keeps accosting complete strangers and telling them you're her son."

Jed gave a wry little grin and threw his cigarette into the bushes outside. "And Dad?" He said, glancing at Leo. "Think he's proud of me?" Leo took a deep breath.

"I don't know," he replied honestly. "But I know that I'm so damn proud'a you I could bust."

Jed gazed at him, his blue eyes dark with some emotion Leo couldn't read. Sometimes, it seemed to Leo, that they'd had to be each other's fathers. His own father had been an alcoholic womanizer who'd committed suicide when he was just a kid – leaving him to take care of his mom and sisters, and Jed's father couldn't have been more emotionally absent if he'd tried. Nothing his son did ever impressed him and Leo doubted it ever would. Over the years, Leo knew he had leaned on Jed for the kind of advice and help he would have gone to his father for, if the circumstances had been different. He knew that Jed, in turn, found in Leo a male role model whose good opinion he actively sought. Leo, as a personality, needed approval less than Jed – one more legacy of his friend's upbringing Leo supposed. He was happy to provide all the reassurance and male approval Jed required though - he'd never known someone deserve it more than Jed did.

"When I go back to work tomorrow I'll be dropping your name just like your mom is doing right now," Leo continued. "My every second sentence will start: 'My best friend, Jed Bartlet, the Nobel prize winner says...'" Leo grinned. "My colleagues will all be heartily sick of you before I'm through!"

Jed gave a little smile and then dropped his gaze and stared at the floor. Leo couldn't see his eyes but he knew Jed was just trying to hide from him the fact that it wasn't enough -no matter how hard he tried or how much approval he gave his friend he knew that it was his father that Jed wanted it from.

"I know it's not the same," Leo said with a sigh. "I know it's him you want to be saying it, but it's the best I can do – and I mean it, Jed. I'm incredibly proud of you."

Jed looked up, and Leo realized he'd misread him completely. Jed's eyes were suspiciously shiny – never one for displays of great emotion, especially not in public, Jed had been trying to hide how touched he was - not his disappointment.

"Leo, you're wrong," Jed said softly. "It means *more* coming from you than it ever could coming from him because god knows you've always loved me more than he ever did. Thank you."

"Mmm." Leo glanced around. "I wish I could kiss you right now but I guess this will have to do instead." He pulled Jed into a bearhug and surreptitiously goosed his ass in the process. Jed gave a little yelp of surprise but was grinning inanely by the time his friend released him.

"You know, I think I'm ready for my close up now, Mr. McGarry," he said brightly, glancing back into the other room.

"Knock 'em dead!" Leo grinned in reply, and they returned to the party together.

2002

"It's late. Marine One leaves first thing tomorrow," Leo said softly. "You should get some sleep, sir."

"I won't sleep," Jed commented grumpily. "I know we needed to do this debate camp thing but it's set me on edge. I don't have a problem with the questions, Leo. I can handle Ritchie." He glowered into the darkening night. "I just want to do it right on Wednesday night."

"And you don't trust yourself to do that?" Leo asked him quietly. Jed turned to gaze at him.

"Uncle Fluffy?" He raised an eyebrow.

"Yeah." Leo gave a little smile.

"How do I know I won't come over all Uncle Fluffy on the night?" Jed asked.

"You won't," Leo replied confidently.

"There you go again with that...maddening belief in me," Jed snapped. "I don't always get things right, Leo. I get plenty wrong. When you came to me and asked me to run for president, you refused to believe that a good man couldn't get elected. You said I was that man."

"And now you're not so sure?" Leo frowned.

Jed gazed at the ground and then glanced up at Leo. He had that look in his eye that he always had when he was ashamed of something - and it was all he could do to force himself to actually look at Leo. Leo knew how much Jed hated being wrong about anything - and especially hated having to admit it - so this couldn't be easy for him; in fact, Leo was pretty sure that Jed would rather have spent another 12 hours rehearsing debate questions than have this conversation so he knew how much this must have been on Jed's mind and conscience.

"Leo, I deceived the American people, I wasn't even honest with you...and I'm seeking re-election as if I didn't do those things. Maybe I'm not that good man you were hoping for." His gaze dropped back to the floor.

"Hey - this is me you're talking to," Leo reminded him. Somehow, he was aware they'd crossed that line between talking as president and chief of staff, and talking as friends and lovers. Now they were more in the latter category than the former. "I've known you for 40 years. You're as good a man as I've ever met."

"Leo, I know there are times when I haven't always lived up to that good opinion you have of me." Jed looked as if this was something he had been struggling with for a very long time. "You know...you know how it was with my father - and I'm sure you also know that I have this thing about making you proud of me." Jed grimaced and glanced at Leo again. "It's true - he never was so maybe I've looked to you for that instead. I don't know." He sighed and ran his hand through his thick, dark hair. "I don't think I *have* always made you proud, Leo. You couldn't have imagined, that day back in New Hampshire, that you were championing the cause of a man who'd end up being the first president since Jackson to be censured."

Ah. The censure. So that was what this was about. Leo gazed at his hands, gathering his thoughts; Jed had refused to discuss the censure with him since it had taken place, but Leo had known at the time that it was something his friend would brood about. Leo alone, of all the staff, had known just how profoundly accepting the censure would affect Jed's psyche. However much he hid the fact, Jed still had elements of that beaten kid he had once been - he wanted to please, wanted to impress, wanted, most of all, to do good; the censure was a living reproof, hanging around his neck like a dead weight, signalling to him and to the world that he had failed.

"Jed - you took the censure," Leo told him firmly, doubting that anything he could say on the subject would be enough. "And you took it, at least in part, for me. You stood up there and said you were wrong and you let them censure you because you believed that. How would that not make me proud of you?"

"I felt I'd let you down. I *did* let you down." Jed shrugged. "I can't promise I won't let you down again, Leo."

"Jed, you're talking to an alcoholic and drug addict," Leo sighed. "I never said either of us was perfect - I just said you were a good man and you are. You still are. Being president hasn't changed that. The censure hasn't changed that."

"I've done things..." Jed sighed.

"I know. I was there with you every step of the way," Leo interrupted him. "Jed, we both know you get prone to this kind of morose introspection when you're facing something big but if this is your way of distracting yourself from the debate then I think it sucks."

"What about yesterday?" Jed asked him unexpectedly. "In front of the joint chiefs – I don't have your instinct for military decisions, Leo. This whole thing with Qumar..." He shook his head. "The existence of moral absolutes – that's an argument you and I have been having for 40 years, Leo, and we can never agree on it. I know I frustrate you in that area. Yesterday I thought we were going to have that same argument all over again only this time with all the generals and admirals watching us. You don't usually talk to me like that in front of other people." There was a note of reproach in his voice.

"I know. I'm sorry," Leo sighed. "I nearly passed out when you called me 'honey' in front of those guys."

Jed grinned. "I wanted to shut you up. This is an argument we should have in private."

"And we frequently do," Leo grunted.

"It was worth it to see the look on your face though!" Jed chuckled. "That was priceless! I could see you thinking 'did he just out us in front of the generals?'" He chuckled again.

"Hmm. Don't sound so pleased with yourself," Leo grouched. "It wasn't *that* clever. Look, are we done here, sir because it's really getting late now and apart from anything else it's *cold* out here." He shivered and pulled his shirt collar closed. Jed had always had some kind of strange and bizarre affinity with icy weather conditions but it wasn't one Leo shared.

"Cold? It's barely brisk," Jed snorted.

"It's more than brisk. It's definitely bordering on nippy," Leo protested.

"It's nowhere near nippy. I know nippy and this isn't it," Jed retorted.

"Okay. I bow to your superior knowledge of the climate and temperature," Leo said with a roll of his eyes. "So...we're done?"

"Yeah. We're done." Jed shrugged, but he didn't move all the same. Leo waited.

"And you're going to bed?" He prompted.

"Maybe - in a minute." Jed shrugged.

"Okay. Good night, sir." Leo turned and began walking away and then stopped and turned back. "You're not going to stand out here and brood about this for half the night, are you?"

"Maybe." Jed reached for another cigarette and lit it.

"You'll be tired tomorrow," Leo warned.

"Aw, you're doing your impression of my mom again," Jed teased.

"If you can't sleep tomorrow night that'll be two nights without sleep and *then* you have the debate," Leo pointed out, stoically ignoring the comment comparing him to Jed's mom.

"I can count, Leo," Jed replied.

"Yeah, I knew there had to be a reason they gave you that Nobel prize," Leo muttered sarcastically. He wandered back to his friend's side. "Jed," he said softly. "Brood about all this if you must, but not for long; someone once said that presidential elections are won and lost on one square foot of real estate. Up here." He put his finger against Jed's forehead and tapped. "You'll win or lose depending on what's going on up here. You don't have the luxury of being able to doubt yourself," he finished softly. Jed gazed at him, his deep blue eyes registering the truth of what Leo had just said.

"Yeah. Okay," he sighed.

"Okay." Leo turned again and continued on his way up to the Institute. The staff had slept in cosy cabins in the grounds, but Leo and Jed both had rooms in the main building – not that Jed hadn't loudly hankered after a cabin of his own but Ron Butterfield had explained to him that it wasn't so good from a security viewpoint and Jed had, reluctantly, given way. Not sharing his friend's love of the great outdoors, Leo had been more than happy to have a nice, comfortable room inside the Institute and hadn't been remotely sympathetic to Jed's disappointment – only tolerating his friend's tirade on the subject twice instead of his usual more indulgent four or five times.

Leo walked briskly up to his own room. He paused to flick the drapes aside and glance out of his bedroom window and sighed when he saw the little tip of light glowing at the end of the cigarette Jed was smoking and the outline of his friend's body just about visible in the darkness. Jed was a supremely confident person, but when he had his doubts Leo knew from experience that they could be almost crippling and if Jed had too much time to brood on them it just made everything worse. The debate was in two days time and Jed had to be at the top of his game for that – Leo was of the opinion that this election would be won or lost in the debate and while he had every confidence that Jed Bartlet could beat Governor Ritchie hands down in a televised questions and answers session, he wasn't so sure about Uncle Fluffy. Apart from anything else, he didn't like seeing his lover like this; Jed was entitled to feel an attack of the nerves prior to an event as important as the looming debate, especially when he was also dealing with the Qumari military problem as well, but Leo hoped it wouldn't be long before his friend stopped brooding out there and retired to bed.

Jed finished his cigarette and stomped on it. He knew he shouldn't smoke this much – it made his voice hoarse for a start and he knew that neither Abbey nor Leo liked it very much, which maybe was part of the appeal a contrary little voice in his head reminded him. Jed gazed out at the dark woodlands just out of reach; he longed to go for a long, refreshing walk, one that would quieten the partying demons in his mind, but it really wasn't practical with the security agents tagging along behind. All that would happen was that they'd crash about in the undergrowth in the dark - and apart from anything else Jed knew he'd feel stupid walking around in the middle of the night trailing a whole posse of agents in his wake. Also, and it would have killed him to admit this when Leo was here, but it **was** getting pretty chilly.

With a sigh, Jed turned on his heel and walked back towards the Institute. He still felt that he hadn't resolved any of the issues that were troubling him, despite Leo's calming words. Maybe if Abbey had been here they could at least have had a flaring argument on some pretext or other – that might have distracted him from his own negativity. He didn't like feeling like this – it frustrated him. He was all too well aware that now wasn't the time to give in to those doubts he'd been pushing to one side ever since he had announced his resolve to run for re-election months ago – and yet, typically, now was when they'd decided to rise up and bite him in the ass.

Annoyed with himself, Jed opened his bedroom door and slammed it shut behind him, thankful to at least shut out the security agents. He took his jacket off and threw it onto a nearby chair, vaguely wondering why the room was in darkness; usually someone turned on a lamp by the bed for him in anticipation of his retiring for the night. He glanced around for the light switch and was just about to reach out a hand to locate it when he felt himself grabbed from behind and pushed, none too gently, against the wall.

"Oomph!" He protested, his initial thought being that the security agents had done a really lousy job of protecting him, and then he remembered the conversation he'd just had with Leo and he gave a little laugh. "Leo, if you're not careful my security detail will hear us and burst in here and arrest you," he said.

"Then you'd better keep quiet, hadn't you?" Leo replied from behind him. There was a pause during which they both considered this for a moment and then Jed heard Leo give an audible sigh. "Oh god, if I'm relying on you keeping quiet to stop me from being arrested then I might as well say goodbye to my freedom here and now," he grouched.

Jed gave a little gurgle of laughter; it was so good spending time with **Leo** - not his Chief of Staff and not even the wise and loyal friend of the past 40 years, but Leo, that teasing, irreverent Leo who he'd met when he was 17 years old and who didn't take any shit from him, and, most especially, didn't defer to him or call him 'sir'.

"I appreciate the, uh, motive behind this, Leo, but aren't we a bit too old for this?" Jed argued. Leo's only reply to that was to push his head firmly forward so that he had no choice but to rest his cheek against the wall. Jed decided that for dignity's sake he should struggle a bit, but found, when he did, that the same thing happened that had happened the first time they'd done this, decades previously; damnit, but Leo was **still** too strong for him.

"You're way too skinny to be this strong," he complained. "I'm sure I weigh more than you...oh, damnit!" He tried one last wriggle, totally failing to free himself in the process, and then slumped back against the wall.

"Give in?" Leo asked, a hint of triumph in his voice.

"No...ow, yes," Jed agreed as Leo's teeth grazed the back of his neck dangerously. His entire body started to tingle as Leo's lips nuzzled against his hair and then kissed their way around to his earlobe. Oh god this was good! His cock started to ache at the promise of what was ahead of them as Leo ran his hands down the sides of his arms, finishing up at his hands which he took in his own, and planted firmly on the wall in front of them.

"Hah!" Leo commented.

"What?" Jed frowned in the dark.

"Your hands are freezing, Mr. 'it's not cold, it's not nippy, it's not even brisk, Leo'."

"I lied. It's damn cold out there," Jed chuckled.

"Hah!" Leo said again.

"The security agents know you're in here, right?" Jed said, deciding it would be a good idea to get that out of the way before he became too incoherent to think properly. Leo was the only person other than Abbey who his security detail had standing orders to allow into his bedroom when he wasn't there.

"Yeah. They think we're talking or playing chess or whatever it is they think we do when we spend the night together," Leo told him.

"So you don't think they guessed that you're going to pin me against the wall and...oh shit!" Jed finished as Leo's warm hand slid down the front of his pants and started to thaw out his cold body.

"And what?" Leo teased, using his other hand to unfasten Jed's pants and push them down his legs. "Screw the president to within an inch of his life? Nope, I'm guessing that isn't what's going through their minds right now, which is a shame, because if that **was** what they were thinking they'd be right."

"It doesn't have to be against the wall you know," Jed pointed out. "I mean there is a nice big bed over there."

"It does," Leo replied firmly. "It's Leo McGarry's Famous and Yet Deadly Secret Cure for Nerves. It does have to be against the wall. That's one of the rules."

"I don't know why you get to make up all the rules," Jed grumbled.

"It's my cure," Leo reminded him. "You don't like the cure's rules?" He continued dangerously, taking Jed's cock in one hand at the same time as his other hand snaked down Jed's butt and insinuated itself between his ass cheeks.

"No!" Jed gasped. "I love the cure's rules!"

"I thought so," Leo purred. Jed gave himself up the entirely pleasurable sensation of Leo's fingers entering his body, dimly thinking that the rules seemed to have been cunningly designed to stop him from thinking about whatever he happened to be nervous or worried about when Leo did this. Yes, they could have made love on the bed, but that was far too familiar and Jed doubted he'd have been able to switch off if they'd done that. This, however, kept him off balance – in every possible way - making it impossible to think about anything except what was happening to his body. They often made love standing up – usually in the shower – but this was different; the darkness, the wall, their semi-clothed state, and the cure's mysterious rules all combined to make it unusual and exciting – distracting him from his problems.

He still couldn't believe Leo was really doing this – it had been a long time since they'd done anything as adventurous in the bedroom and Jed hoped he still had the stamina for it. Usually their love making was slow and tender, the act of two people entirely familiar and comfortable with each other after years of intimacy. They were rarely in a hurry, and they knew all the right buttons to push, but this made Jed feel as if their relationship was new and exciting all over again. He rested his head against his hands and allowed Leo to do what Leo did best – make love to him, thoroughly and completely, until he was a jellified mass of sensation. Leo's hands seemed to be everywhere, travelling over the entire distance of his body, warming his flesh, caressing and arousing him. Although this wasn't the first time Leo had administered his 'cure' since their youth, Jed had forgotten how much he liked the illicit feeling of the whole event - the sensation of pleasure snatched furtively and hastily, and the press of clothing against flesh and vice versa. It felt raw, sexy and primitive and he loved it.

It also felt good to be Jed again, if only for a little while. He tolerated Leo calling him 'sir' and 'Mr President' in all work situations only because there was no alternative – Leo had been absolutely intractable on that subject – but here, now, they were Jed and Leo again, and he liked Jed and Leo damnit! He knew that when they walked out of here tomorrow they'd be president and chief of staff again, knew that in reality they didn't stop being those titles even when he was pressed against the wall like this while Leo's hands caressed and kneaded his buttocks, but it felt good to be reminded that they were warm, vibrant, sexual, flesh and blood human beings beneath those roles.

Jed's muddled appreciation of the event gave way to the urgency of his pleasure as Leo opened him up and slid into him. He gasped, clutching vainly onto the wall for support, relying on Leo to keep him upright but Leo's hands were firm and steady on his hips and Jed wasn't in any danger of falling. He did wonder, very vaguely, how Leo always seemed to be able to carry condoms and lube with him when he did this particular trick, as well as seeming to have his hands free to apply both, seemingly without pausing from his ministrations to Jed's body, but he didn't think about that for very long as soon Leo was

thrusting into him and he could feel the texture of his friend's rough wool pants on his exposed ass, and for some reason he even found that exciting, and before long he was coming and he hung there, stars exploding in his mind as Leo continued for a couple of minutes longer and then reached his own climax.

They hung there, dizzy, for several minutes, breathing hard.

"Hah," Leo commented, in a breathless tone. "Who said we were too old for this?"

"I don't know. Some idiot," Jed replied dreamily. "Who am I?"

"You're the president, I'm your chief of staff, and *that* was Leo McGarry's Famous and Yet Deadly Secret Cure For Nerves. Does it still work?"

"Always," Jed sighed happily. "That's why we must keep it a deadly secret, Leo."

"Oh I promise I won't tell if you don't," Leo chuckled. "Ready?" He put his arm around Jed's waist and withdrew slowly from his lover's body. Jed immediately slumped against his friend, grateful now for Leo's strong, sinewy arms, which held him up as he tried to get his legs to work again. He kicked off his pants and shorts and then Leo walked him over to the bed and they fell on it.

"Oh god, I feel great," Jed breathed, turning to look at his lover with a broad grin. Leo grinned back and mussed Jed's hair affectionately.

"You look great – and you looked even better pressed up against that wall mewling like a kitten."

"I don't mewl," Jed began and then waved his hand tiredly. "Oh don't start!" They lay there quietly for a moment and then Jed propped his head on his hand and gazed at Leo.

"Uncle Fluffy huh? Toby thought that one up?"

"Uh huh," Leo nodded.

"Then I think I must have some revenge!" Jed proclaimed.

"Revenge?" Leo's eyes gleamed speculatively in the darkness of the room. "What kind of revenge?"

"I don't know, but I'll work on it," Jed promised. "And in the meantime..." He lowered his head and kissed Leo firmly on the lips. Leo reached out and put his hands on Jed's naked butt, pulling him down close, and they stayed that way for a very long time. Finally they parted, discarded the rest of their clothes, and got into the bed. Leo nudged up behind him and slung an arm over his waist.

"So, dare I mention the debate?" He asked.

"Yeah," Jed chuckled. "I'll be fine, Leo."

"Oh *now* he finally agrees with me," Leo growled into his ear.

"Isn't that one of the rules of the cure?" Jed asked innocently. "I mean, if I agreed with you on that point beforehand then I wouldn't need the cure, would I?"

"Hmm." Leo squeezed him. "You always have an answer for everything."

"Which is going to be a very good thing on Wednesday night," Jed laughed. "What was it you said – elections are won or lost on one square foot of real estate...? Ah - that's it!" Jed said triumphantly.

"That's what?" Leo asked sleepily. Jed turned and grinned at him, poking him enthusiastically in the ribs.

"How we 'get' Toby," he said. "Leo, I want you to go to Toby tomorrow and tell him I'm in a flunk – I can't answer questions, I've lost my nerve, I'm completely hopeless and unprepared for the debate."

"Why would I do that?" Leo asked.

"Because I tell you to," Jed replied airily.

"Okay - and then what happens?"

"Hmm," Jed thought for a moment. "Ah, I've got it – you tell Toby that during the next 2 minute drill he has to bolster my ego – so every time I give an answer you're all going to say 'that's terrific, Mr. President' no matter how terrible my answer is."

"Masterly and yet dastardly," Leo commented, his blue eyes gleaming in the darkness, clearly warming to the plan despite his weariness. "What's the betting he won't be able to do that?"

"Are you kidding? Of course he won't be able to do that – but speaking of betting..." Jed grinned again. "Just to make it more interesting we'll get the rest of the senior staff in on it and I'll take bets on whether he can. Oh, this is going to be good," he laughed.

"Not for Toby," Leo commented, closing his eyes again. "Sometimes I think that ingenious brain of yours is wasted on tedious little stuff like running the country..."

"Uh...oh shit..." Leo woke blearily the next day to the entirely pleasurable sensation of Jed giving him a very efficient blow job. When he was done, Jed flung back the sheets and emerged beside Leo with a level of high octane energy that showed that whatever his doubts of the previous night, today he was fully charged again and ready to go. They shared an intimate shower, which did nothing to curb Jed's high spirits, and by the time they got

onto Marine One he was positively overflowing with bonhomie – and his revenge plan for Toby which kept him gainfully occupied for the morning and gave them all some amusement – or bemusement in Toby's case.

Much to Leo's relief, Jed didn't have a relapse and on the morning of the debate he was as bright and lively as he had been the previous day – maybe a touch over-excited but Leo recognised those as the kind of nerves that would elevate Jed's performance in the debate and not hinder it. There was one last thing he wanted to say to his friend though – something he wanted to address as emphatically as possible - and something that had been on his mind since their conversation out by the fence the night before last.

"Come here for a second." He called Jed over and led him out onto the portico leading from the Oval Office. "There's no such thing as too smart," Leo said firmly, gazing at Jed intently. "There is nothing you can do that's not gonna make me proud of you," he continued softly, getting to the heart of what he wanted to say, and meaning every single word. "Eat 'em up. Game on."

Jed eyes shone in response, and a kind of peace settled around his shoulders. He was positively glowing as he turned and left, his walk almost jaunty, and Leo was pretty sure that Uncle Fluffy wouldn't be putting in an appearance any time soon.

Leo shook his head, struck by how relaxed and buoyant Jed looked compared to the hunched, uncertain man who had been chain smoking out in the cold a couple of days before.

Ah, Leo McGarry's Famous and Yet Deadly Secret Cure for Nerves, he thought to himself with a wry smile as he returned to the Oval Office: Works every time.

The End

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