



## Lavatory Luxor

Paulo stripped off the yellow rubber gloves and flung them into the sink, satisfied nothing remained in the kitchen that he hadn't scrubbed silly. He stalked to the den where Jim was watching *South Pacific*, singing along. Loudly.

"Must you?" Paulo grumbled.

Jim tilted his head to look at Paulo, mischief in his eyes. "Don't you think I sound like Giorgio Tozzi? I mean, when I really get going?"

Paulo tolerated all of two seconds of Jim's "You may see a stranger" before he stumped out of the room.

"Hey, man!" Jim called. "C'mon! In the old days that would have earned me at least a smack with a pillow. Maybe even a nice sweaty rattle."

Jim, infuriatingly, followed Paulo down the hall to the lavette. Paulo snapped on his blue bathroom-cleaning gloves and glared at Jim, who was casually blocking the door.

"Since meeting Preston you never play with me. I may have to pout," Jim warned. "*Disenchanted evening, I lost my fuck buddy, I lost my fuck buddy, when he bottomed for my Dom.*"

With nothing to clean in the spotless bathroom, and with no escape until he heard Jim out, Paulo gave Jim his back while he rearranged the toilet paper rolls from their double row of three to a three-tiered pyramid on the ancient, rusted radiator.

It was time to defend himself. "I only had one scene with Master Rose," he began, and Jim snorted. He soldiered on. "It wasn't not even an authentic one, just a stage show," he finished lamely. It had felt like more.

Jim snorted again, more emphatically this time, and Paulo had to restrain himself from passing over a length of tissue. "Sounded pretty fucking real from what Tasim told me," he said. "Preston never did my aftercare."

The memory of Preston doing that, caring for him, after their show was more vivid to Paulo than the fuck they'd shared on stage. Desperate for a distraction from his thoughts, he tried to balance the t.p. into an inverted pyramid. The rolls kept slipping off the grooved coils of the radiator.

"Man up, buddy." Paulo hated Jim in bluff bloke mode. "You've been moping ever since you filled in for me, and that was almost a month ago."

"I'm *not* moping." At Jim's cocked eyebrow, he added, "And what the hell am I supposed to do, anyway?"

"Something besides clean this place back to the lathing. Dude, just fucking call him." Callow-frat-boy Jim was worse than matey Jim.

Paulo tried for the inverted pyramid again. "You know I can't."

Slaves to gravity, the paper rolls teetered, fell, and bounced and rolled around the gleaming floor. Defeated, Paulo retrieved them and set them back into their upright pyramid.

Realizing Jim hadn't responded, Paulo narrowed his eyes suspiciously. Preemptive strike: "If he calls me, great, but he made it pretty clear the next move would be up to him. Even if it's no move at all."

“Have it your way, but you know what the great Tozzi said.”

“No, I don’t.”

Jim opened his mouth.

“And I don’t want to.”

With a mulish look, Jim spun away from the bathroom door, singing, “*Who can explain it? Who can tell you why?*” Grateful for the end of yet another uncomfortable conversation, Paulo stripped off his bathroom-cleaning gloves and set off to find a closet to reorganize or some drapes to vacuum.

Passing the den, he heard Jim finishing a phone call. “Yes, Sir, right away.”

Frozen in the doorway, Paulo tried to glower but feared it came off more hopelessly hopeful.

“Wash that latex smell off your hands, and go over there.” Paulo forbore to comment on Jim’s triumphant smirk, and decamped before he’d have to listen to Jim’s Nellie Forbush impersonation.

The bus took forever, or at least long enough for Paulo to run through and reject about six thousand ways of greeting Master Rose, of presenting himself.

Faced with a completely ordinary door on a completely ordinary street awash in weak winter afternoon light, he abandoned his favorite fantasy, the one in which he stripped right there on the stoop and knelt before knocking. So what if it was cliché? It would make an impression.

Instead, he left his clothes on and knocked with his mittened knuckles.

He had enough time before the door opened to hum almost a whole verse of “Some Enchanted Evening.” He was going to have to kill Jim, slowly.

Later.

Because the door was opening.

Preston Rose stood in the open door looking decidedly un-Dommy in Carhartts and a t-shirt. Paulo dropped his eyes. Master Rose was barefoot. Master Rose had beautiful, long feet streaked with fine dark hairs.

Paulo's stomach clenched and rolled, just like it used to when he had to spot Frankie Rodericks for sit-ups in gym. Just like when he asked Peter Ahearn to prom. Just like the first time he'd seen Master Rose, on stage, working Jim over with expert detachment.

"Paulo," Master Rose said, quietly. There was a question in it.

Paulo's stomach squirmed. "I'm really sorry, Sir. May I use your bathroom?"

Concern and amusement flickered across Master Rose's face as he pointed down a hallway.

Paulo didn't run, not quite. He chanted the end of Hammerstein's song in his mind as he cleared the bathroom door and tried to breathe past the sick feeling. *"Once he has called you, don't puke on his floor. Once he has called you, don't puke on his floor."*

He would never admit it to Jim, but the song made him feel better. He was where he'd wanted to be more than anywhere except conservatory. He would not fuck this up with nerves.

Paulo was reduced to cabinet-snooping in search of a cup and washcloth.

His nausea became surprised laughter when he opened the under-sink cabinet. Inside squatted a neat pyramid of six rolls of toilet paper.

He still hadn't found a washcloth, but he had, he was certain, found what he was looking for.

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