

## Twinge

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# Twinge

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## Summary

Lotta thinks Nino should spend the day in bed. And leaves Jean to watch him.

*What Nino wants is to talk to Jean, to spill out everything he's kept dammed inside him for so many years. And Jean would let himself be swept along by that flood but Nino thinks it will go better another time, two glasses down, in the dim corner of a bar.*

"'Invalid' isn't really the word I would use," Nino protests, because he's okay now, definitely okay. Stitched up, wrapped up, no problems getting around. And maybe there's some pain, now and again; he wouldn't really call it *agony*, just *twinges*. But no reason for him to be—

"In bed!" Lotta declares, waving a honey dipper for emphasis. "You should be there right now." A drop of honey splashes onto the tip of Jean's nose and he smiles at Lotta as he slowly wipes it away and licks his finger.

"Aren't you going to back me up?" Nino asks Jean. "I've spent enough time in bed already."

"And eat more." Lotta pushes the dish of scrambled eggs closer to Nino and drops another piece of toast onto his plate.

"No." Jean slides over a pot of blackberry jam with that slow, amused smile he's been wearing for the past 24 hours.

Nino thinks he might as well eat. He doesn't know if it's the injury or the cosy family feeling, but he's hungrier than usual, a little extra room in his belly to fill up. And anyway, if he doesn't, Lotta might slash his tires. Or, worse, cry.

"You too," Lotta says to Jean.

"I'm not an invalid," Jean replies, but he's looking at Nino, toying with a corner of crust still on his plate.

"I made too much," Lotta says. "Don't waste it!" She glances at the clock and jumps up. "I'm late! Jean, make sure he stays in bed today." She bustles out of the room, snatching up her bag and waving over her shoulder, one last piece of toast clenched between her teeth.

"You're not going to make me stay in bed all day," Nino says.

Jean dishes out a scoop of eggs onto Nino's plate and doesn't say a word.

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"Don't you have somewhere to be?" Nino thinks the couch would have done as well but stretching out on the bed is undeniably more comfortable than sitting up at the table.

"Do you want the television on?" Jean moves the chair closer to the bed and sits down.

Nino tucks his arms behind his head. "So you're going to sit there and stare at me."

"We both need new hobbies."

Nino laughs and immediately regrets it after the *twinge* nearly takes his breath away.

"I'm not very good at hiding." Jean glances around the room, like he's never seen it before, and maybe he hasn't, not really. It's a big apartment and Nino knows they never have any

other guests. "Do you want some coffee? Tea? Juice?"

What Nino wants is to talk to Jean, to spill out everything he's kept dammed inside him for so many years. And Jean would let himself be swept along by that flood but Nino thinks it will go better another time, two glasses down, in the dim corner of a bar.

So he grabs the remote instead and they watch a show about interior decorators that has more scandal and gossip than he ever would have expected could be associated with that profession but still not enough to make it interesting.

Old hobbies die hard and so even though Nino is carefully keeping his eyes on the screen, he still sees the flicker in the corner of his eye, still hears the rustle as Jean crosses and uncrosses his legs, clasps and unclasps his hands, touches his face again and again.

"Go up and smoke," Nino says.

"Who watches television at this time of day?" Jean reaches for the remote. "I'll get a movie."

"I'll go up with you." Nino pushes himself on his hands and sits up. "I like the view from the roof."

Jean is already reaching into his pocket when he stops and turns to Nino. "Lotta says it's too cold up there for you."

"Just open the window," Nino says. "I'll back you up if she scolds you."

Jean gives him a look, unspeaking, then stands and slides open the window. He lights up and takes the first long drag with his eyes closed, holding in the smoke, then blowing it outside in a lazy plume.

Nino's guts churn unexpectedly and it's all he can do to keep from springing out of bed and pushing Jean away from the window. He grasps the bedclothes in both hands and forces himself to stay still.

The smile falls off Jean's face and he gives Nino a sharp look. "What was the name of that show we used to watch in high school?" He doesn't put out the cigarette but he angles himself away so that he's less exposed through the glass.

"I remember you liked the intrigue," Nino says.

"Oh, right." Jean's smile creeps back and Nino relaxes.

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After lunch on a tray, they chat for a while, tossing out phrases like leaves into a river, watching them float away before they send the next one after. Not quite avoiding all the too-large topics, just talking in the space around them for now.

When Jean's eyelids start to droop, Nino shifts over on the bed. "I won't run off while you're napping." He resettles a pillow underneath his head and meets Jean's eyes. "Where would I

go?"

With anybody else, Nino wouldn't be quite certain of the faint flush on their cheeks, but this is Jean and Nino knows it's there. His diaphragm contracts in a way that might lead to twinging if he's not careful.

Jean blinks once, runs a hand through his hair, then goes around the other side of the bed and lies down next to Nino.

They're not touching, not even looking at each other, but Nino relishes the shift of the bed as Jean settles himself and the simple fact that they are here, together. He takes off his glasses and closes his own eyes and pretends to sleep, listening to the sound of Jean's breath, and thinking about all the caf  s they will eat in together, until he slips into a dream.

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When he wakes, the sun has moved and the room is dim. His throat is dry and he wants a drink of water. But he can't reach the jug because Jean is curled up behind him, arm over Nino's chest, leg over Nino's thigh. Breath on Nino's neck.

Nino doesn't move but he shivers, once, pressing up against Jean's weight, and wondering if he is still asleep. But his bladder tells him no. He waits for a while first, because this is perfect, he wouldn't change a thing, even the twinge from the pressure of Jean's arm. But he can't wait forever.

When he starts easing out, Jean murmurs and his arm tightens. Nino bites his lip, not entirely from the pain. Then he turns over and puts his hand on Jean's face.

Jean's eyes blink half open and he smiles. He's soft and rumpled from sleep and Nino doesn't even hesitate to press his lips against Jean's mouth.

Jean doesn't stop smiling, which makes him harder to kiss, but Nino keeps at it. And then Jean stops smiling and kisses back, slow and sweet to begin with, then still slow but with pressure behind it, not urgent but with an inevitable weight that's going to crush them both eventually.

Nino is just about to slip his hand up the back of Jean's shirt when he realises he's got to go and piss while he still can. He bites Jean's lip this time and whispers, "I'll be right back." Jean doesn't cling but he doesn't let go either, looking at Nino with those eyes and that flushed face as Nino regretfully slides out of bed.

He gulps a glass of water in the bathroom and checks the time. It's later than he thought but Lotta won't be home for at least another hour. He splashes his face and dries it off. Looks at himself in the mirror. If he had his camera right now he take his own picture and carry it around in his wallet just to remember how he feels right now.

When he gets back to the bedroom, Jean is asleep. Nino stands watching him, just for himself, the rise and fall of Jean's chest, the way his hand rests on Nino's pillow.

Then Nino goes around the other side of the bed and curls up around Jean and doesn't sleep.  
Until he does.

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