

Hay Fever

by Tanaqui

“Hey.”

Head down under Charlotte’s hood, Heather jumped at the sound of Jake’s voice. She looked up to see him standing on the threshold of the barn, holding two cups of coffee. Beyond him, outside, it was dark, and she guessed it was later than she’d thought.

“Hey.” She smiled at him and bent back to loosening the nut she’d been working on.

“I brought you coffee.” From the corner of her eye, she saw him stoop to set one of the mugs down next to the open toolbox, before he stepped back. You have two "down"s here, plus another "bend" which you also used in the previous sentence... Might wanna rephrase it a little.

“Thanks.” She carefully placed the nut she’d just undone where it would be safe, on a flat corner of metal that already held several others, before reaching back inside for the next one. “When did you get back?”

“A few minutes ago.” He leaned against the gate of the nearest stall—Heather had driven Charlotte into the barn to get some shelter from the sleety rain falling outside—and absently scratched Whisper’s neck when the horse stuck its head out at the sound of his voice. “Looked in, but you seemed busy.”

“Uh-huh.” Heather switched the wrench to her other hand so she could spin the nut the last few turns with her fingers. “One of the seals on the water pump sprang a leak on the way home and I wanted to get it replaced.”

“Ah.” Jake sounded relieved. “Well, I hope the old girl’s not gonna break anything else for a while.”

Heather, reaching back into the engine to pull the water pump free, turned her head and cocked an eyebrow at him. She realized that, beyond his normal restlessness, there was an air of suppressed excitement about him—had been ever since he walked into the barn.

He gave her a crooked grin. “I may have something else to keep you busy....”

It took her a moment to work out what he meant, while her hands were busy lifting out the pump, and then she let out a little squeak of excitement. “Oh! You—?”

“Yeah.” Jake nodded. “I think I found us a plane. Twin-seat Air Tractor two counties over that—.” He let out an *oof* as Heather straightened and, still clutching the pump in one hand, flung herself at him. “Hey, careful!” He held his coffee at arm’s length, but she knew he didn’t mind, because he was laughing, and drawing her close with his other arm as she hugged him.

“But you found a plane!” She tipped her head back to look at him.

He chuckled. “Don’t get too excited. You haven’t seen her yet.”

“But I will? Soon?” Despite his cautious words, she could tell from his tone of voice and the way he held her that he didn’t really mean them. That, after all the false starts, this was the one. No more evenings when he’d come home and tell her he’d seen just the thing at this airfield or that, but the owner didn’t want to part with it, or wanted too much money. No more following up tips from friends of friends who knew someone who knew someone who might have a plane for sale—which turned out not to be, or not suitable, or a heap of junk....

He nodded. “Tomorrow? If you haven’t got anything more important planned?”

She punched his shoulder lightly. “What could be more important?” Certainly not trying to answer the letter she’d gotten from Edward earlier in the week, which was what she’d intended to spend Saturday doing, in between chores. It could wait a few days more—and maybe finding some subtle way to let Jake know that she’d put it aside in favor of checking over the plane would help lay to rest once and for all his fears that she still had feelings for Edward.

“Good.” He gave her another lopsided smile. “I’ll call the guy and let him know.”

“I’ll finish up here.” Heather cast a glance over her shoulder at where Charlotte stood, hood still gaping.

As she made to step back, Jake held on to her and bent his head to kiss her. “I love you,” he whispered, before he let her go and headed back to the house.

Heather took a sip of coffee—it was still too hot to drink—and went back to replacing the seal and reconnecting the pump. Jake reappeared more quickly than she’d expected, when she was still some way from being done. He lounged against the fender, handing her tools and parts. Heather smiled to herself. Most guys would be thrumming with impatience to take over, but Jake seemed to enjoy taking a back seat and watching her work.

Finally, she tightened the last nut and reached for a rag to wipe her hands. “All done.” She dropped the hood back in place and pushed her hair off her face with the back of her hand. Seeing Jake’s grin, she knew she’d managed—as usual—to leave a smear of grease.

Stepping closer, he lightly touched where she’d left the mark, his fingertips brushing across her skin. Then, to her surprise, he leaned forward and pressed his lips to her forehead. Startled, she made to move back, but his hands went to her shoulders to hold her where she was. She closed her eyes and breathed in deeply, suddenly aware of him physically, of how good he smelled against the background of hay and horse and engine oil.

His hands slid down her shoulders to rest for a moment on her breasts, before he began popping open the snaps that held her coveralls closed.

“Jake?”

“Shh,” he murmured against her skin, before he pulled away a little: far enough to let him trail light kisses down her cheek until his mouth captured hers. His hands went on working their way down the snaps while he kissed her and as she returned the kiss uncertainly, wondering what he was playing at. He couldn’t possibly want—. Not when she was dressed in coveralls and covered in grease.

When he reached the last snap and she sensed him grasp the edges of her coveralls to pull them open, she put her hands over his to stop him. She drew back and met his gaze, and saw his eyes

were dark with desire. “Jake, I’m filthy,” she pointed out gently.

“I know.” He gave her a shamefaced grin, his cheeks coloring. “Watching you work.... I just.... It’s a real turn on.”

“Oh.” She blushed as well, at the thought he’d been looking at her like that while she’d been all oblivious. Not that she minded, not one lick, not the way he was looking at her now. She lifted her hands away from his and slid them around his neck. “You like me dirty?”

He swallowed, his color deepening, and managed a hoarse, “Yeah.” He pulled the coveralls open enough to slide his hands inside and rest them lightly around her waist. She could feel the heat of his touch through the thin cotton of her T-shirt, and that he was trembling. “Yeah,” he croaked again, dipping his head and covering her mouth with his once more, his hands tightening on her waist as he kissed her hungrily.

Despite her lingering surprise and doubt, she returned the kiss enthusiastically, twining her hands in his hair, while the heat built in her rapidly. Not just because Jake clearly wanted her, but because he wanted her like *this*.

All her life, tinkering with cars had made her either one of the boys or a weird geek—but it had never made her desirable. Even though it was what she loved to do. And now it turned out Jake wasn’t just *comfortable* with the fact she was a better mechanic than he was, like she’d supposed. No: it seemed like it got him hot and bothered. It made him pull her hard against him, so she could feel how much he wanted her, and begin maneuvering her so—

She stiffened, drawing back from him a fraction, suddenly uneasy as she realized where they were heading.

He must have picked up on her uncertainty, because he broke the kiss, pulling back far enough to meet her gaze. “What—?” His murmured half-question was accompanied by a wary look in his eyes, and his touch had turned uncertain. When she didn’t answer, trying to sort out the jumble of emotions within her, he said her name, and she could hear fear in the soft-spoken word.

“I just—.” She glanced over her shoulder at Charlotte, remembering how a few weeks back, Jake had surprised her in the kitchen, and then she’d surprised herself by wanting him there, on the kitchen counter. He’d been startled for a moment, and then as eager as she was. And now he wanted... and maybe because he wanted it, she should too.

She snuck another look over her shoulder and the jolt of panic that shot through her as she pictured them making love on Charlotte made her mind up. Because though she wanted him, ached for him, the thought of having sex *there* was much too weird. Not that anyone else would know, but she would, driving Charlotte around. And though she couldn’t remember ever saying no to him before about anything like this, she knew she had to this time.

She turned back to him and licked her lips nervously. “Not... not on Charlotte.” She gave a slight shrug and offered a muttered, “Too weird,” in explanation.

She saw a moment of disappointment on his face, and then he gave her a crooked grin. “Sure.”

“I’m sorry.” She hung her head unhappily because, despite his reassurance, she knew he felt let down. For a moment, she wished she was game enough to go with the flow, and once again felt that surge of panic that confirmed she really couldn’t, before Jake gently caught her chin and tilted her

face up.

"Hey." He gazed down at her intently, his thumb stroking her cheek. "If it's no fun for you, it's no fun for me, right?" Again, the corner of his mouth lifted in a wry smile and his hand drifted up to caress her forehead where she'd gotten the smear of grease earlier. "You're still wearing coveralls, you still have dirt...." His gaze sought out hers again. "God, Heather, it's *you* I want. The car was just... because it was there."

"Really?" She bit her lip, still not quite convinced.

"Really." His lips twitched again, before his expression sobered. He once more dipped his head and captured her mouth with his. As he deepened the kiss, gentle but demanding, and slid the hand on her waist further around her to pull her against him again, her doubts melted away.

Another thought struck her. They *were* in the barn, after all. She broke the kiss to whisper, "What about the hayloft?"

Jake chuckled, his breath warm on her face. "Now, there's a thought...." He took a step back, away from Charlotte and toward the ladder that led up to the loft, and this time she let him draw her with him. When they reached the ladder, he kissed her again, and she sensed his mood had shifted once more, to something slower and more deliberate. She suspected they weren't going to be coming down from the hayloft in a hurry. Heat pooled in her belly in anticipation. That also meant....

When Jake finally drew away and reached for the rungs of the ladder. Heather held him back. "Maybe we should fetch one of the saddle blankets?"

"One of the...?" He raised an eyebrow.

"Yeah." Heather dipped her head and gave an embarrassed laugh. "Mimi warned me. Hay prickles."

"Mimi...?" Heather saw him swallow and felt the sudden tension in him where his hand still rested on her waist. "You talked to Mimi? About this? Us? Me?"

Heather looked at him uncertainly, not sure why that should have gotten him so upset. She'd never pegged him as shy about this sort of thing, and it wasn't as if the two of them sleeping together was exactly a secret. "Umm... I guess? Sometimes." Inside, she kicked herself for mentioning Mimi. For breaking the mood *again*.

Realizing he was still staring at her with—was that *panic* on his face?—Heather sighed. "She just wanted to make sure everything was okay between us."

If she was honest, she couldn't blame Jake for being a little upset; she hadn't been entirely comfortable about Mimi taking an interest either. When the other woman had asked for a second time how things were with Jake, Heather had done her best to reassure her that, yes, things *were* now better than just "nice", while attempting to tell her as few details as possible.

Seeing Jake still didn't seem reassured, she added, "And then she offered some advice." Her lips twitched. "You know what's she like."

Jake tensed again. "What's that's supposed to mean?"

Heather raised her eyebrows, again surprised at his reaction. "You know. She's Mimi. Has an

opinion on everything, and lets you know what it is, even when it's none of her damn business. It's kind of her thing."

"Oh. Yes. That." The color crept up Jake's cheeks, but she felt some of the tension flow out of him. He cleared his throat. "So, uh, what kind of advice did she think we needed?"

"Umm." Now it was Heather's turn to flush. "That maybe we should try different places? Not just the bed? And, uh, that I should tell you what I want more...."

"Ah." Jake looked at her thoughtfully for a moment, before his mouth twitched. "So this conversation the two of you had.... That was right before you climbed into the shower with me that time?"

Heather nodded, feeling her blush deepen.

Jake's half smile turned into a grin as he pulled her close again. "Good advice," he conceded, as his lips sought out hers. "The blanket's a good idea, too."

oOo

Watching a few minutes later as Heather skipped off across the barn to fetch a blanket from the rack, Jake held onto the ladder for support, relief making him feel a little weak. Of course Mimi wouldn't have told Heather. She didn't want what had happened back in DC brought up any more than he did.

And though he was glad he and Heather had been honest with each other—that he'd finally confessed how sexy he found her when she worked on the car, and she'd let him know there were things she didn't want to do, and not let him go on with something she hated because she didn't dare speak up—he reckoned there were some secrets best kept that way.

As Heather came back, Jake saw that she was grinning to herself again.

"What?" He raised an eyebrow.

She smirked. "I was just thinking about something else Mimi said. About how maybe we should try some roleplay."

Jake blinked, wondering where Heather was going with this. He didn't think their love life was in *that* much trouble.

Heather shrugged. "I thought she meant dressing up as a cheerleader, or something like that."

"Oh." Jake hastily dragged his thoughts back from the rather wilder ideas that had flashed into his mind. Ideas that, to be honest, appealed to him no more than the thought of the car hood had apparently appealed to Heather.

Focusing on her again, he saw she was grinning at him as she stepped close and slipped her free arm around his neck. "Didn't realize all I had to do was throw on some coveralls and some grease...", she murmured.

"Uh-huh." Jake pulled her against him, reveling in the feel of her as he kissed her again. Because who needed fantasy when the reality was like this?

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