

Still Waters Run Deep

by Tanaqui

"Come on, let's get you cleaned up," Heather had said, catching Jake's hand and tugging him toward the bathroom.

He watched her turn on the taps to fill the big old-fashioned tub, the water hammering in the pipes, while he began to strip off his muddy clothes. He carefully dropped each piece into the laundry basket so as not to track any more dirt around the house.

Heather glanced back at him for a moment, while she swirled the water around the bath with one hand, making sure the cast-iron tub was warmed through before he got into it. Catching his eye, she straightened and smiled at him. "Hop in."

Jake had one foot dipped gingerly in the bath—the water was painfully hot against his frozen feet—when he realized Heather was pulling her own sweater over her head. "You're getting in too?" His voice sounded squeaky in his own ears.

"Uh-huh." She smiled shyly at him as she folded her sweater neatly. "If that's...?"

"Oh, yes!" He nodded vigorously, imagining what it would be like to hold her against him in the warm water. They'd shared a few showers since the first time she'd surprised him by getting in with him, and just the thought of how enjoyable those had been spread a different kind of heat through him.

Easing one foot and then the other into the water, he carefully sat down and lay back, resting his head against the lip of the tub and spreading his arms along the edges. As the water warmed and soothed his aching muscles, he watched Heather.

He loved watching her undress. Not just because he enjoyed discovering again the beautiful, sexy woman underneath, or because it was usually a prelude to them making love. No, it was also because, along with her clothes, she shed the practical, self-reliant, sharp personality that she wore to face the world. Not that Jake didn't love that side of her too. But when they were alone like this, he saw the vulnerable side of her that she trusted to no one else. It made him feel humble and a little afraid—what if, idiot that he was, he hurt her again?—but also ridiculously proud and happy, aching with love for her.

She was naked now. He held out his hand to her to steady her as she stepped into the bath, placing her feet carefully to avoid treading on him. She hesitated for a moment, apparently unsure quite how to sit down, and then she turned and lowered herself, her back to him. He spread his legs so she could settle between them and lean back against him.

He slid one hand around her waist, pulling her closer, her warm flesh pressing against the erection he'd gotten watching her, even as the rest of his body began to relax. He dipped his other hand in the water, cupping a handful to trickle up her body until his palm curved over

her breast. She rested her head against his shoulder, her hair catching on his damp skin, and he turned to nuzzle her ear-lobe with his lips.

"Mmmm..." She made a contented noise as she settled herself more comfortably against him, running her hand along his arm.

Jake began trail his fingers gently along her flank in long strokes, feeling the tension flow out of her and her body growing heavy against him. The warm water lapped them softly as her breathing slowed. Her hand fell away from his arm, and her head lolled sideways a little.

Jake squinted down at her. "Heather?" he whispered. She didn't answer and he realized she'd fallen asleep, lulled by the warmth of the bath and the security of his arms. He allowed himself an amused chuckle: not quite what he'd been expecting or hoping for—nor Heather, he guessed—but there was a strange satisfaction in knowing he made her feel so safe and loved.

Turning his head a little so he could press his face into her hair and breathe in her scent, he let himself relax as well. They'd come a long way since that first nervous evening together, when she'd been so tense in his arms. Hell, he'd been tense, too: terrified that he'd mess up, or scare her away, or that they wouldn't work together—or that she'd simply change her mind about being there.

Since then, they'd made each other feel good in so many different ways and yet, except when she was fast asleep in his arms, and maybe not even then, she'd never been completely at ease. He let the quiet happiness of the moment, of having proof at last how completely she trusted him, envelop him.

After a few minutes, the water began to cool around them. Jake eyed the hot tap at the far end of the bath, wondering if he could manage to turn it on with his foot and run in some more hot water without waking her. Almost certainly not. Still, worth a try....

He shifted his leg, and immediately felt her stir.

"What—?" she murmured, sounding puzzled. Then she tensed. "Oh God, did I...?" She gave an embarrassed laugh. "Did I fall *asleep*?"

"Uh-huh." Jake chuckled again.

"God, I'm sorry." She tried to sit up, but he held her where she was.

"Don't be." He bent his head so he could kiss her cheek. "It was... nice."

"You want me to fall asleep on you all the time?" He could hear the embarrassment in her voice as she tried to make a joke of it.

"No." He laughed, making the water slosh a little. "It was just...." He shrugged, sending another wave of water down the bath, as he sought for the right words to express what he felt.

She turned his head so she could look at him, and he captured her lips, feeling the heat grow

in him as she returned the kiss. She lifted a hand to cup his face, and he helped her twist in his arms until she was lying half-facing him.

When they broke apart, he brushed the drying hair back from her forehead and pointed out gently, "Water's getting cold."

She gave him another embarrassed look. "Yeah. Sorry. I wasted—."

He put his fingers to her lips to silence her. "It wasn't a waste. But maybe we should, you know, actually get clean before it gets really cold?"

"Yeah." She laughed. Slithering back round, she sat up so she could reach for shampoo and shower gel and a washcloth.

"Here." He took them from her. "Let me...." She arched herself against his touch as he soaped her with the washcloth, running it over and over her. Then she was turning and kneeling and taking the washcloth so she could do the same to him. He didn't reckon either of them made a very good job of getting soap everywhere it needed to be—it was kind of hard to move around in the bath with both of them in it—but he reckoned the water was soapy enough to clean the bits they'd missed. And it definitely did the job of making both of them feel good: he could tell by the way her breathing quickened and the look in her eyes as she held his gaze that she was enjoying this as much as he was.

"Hair?" he asked, and she nodded and abandoned the washcloth and got hold of the shampoo instead. He closed his eyes and reveled in the feel of her fingers gently massaging his scalp as she worked the lather into his hair, before he returned the favor. Cupping water in his hands, he rinsed away the shampoo, while she squeezed her eyes shut.

At last, reluctantly—the water really was getting unpleasantly cold now—he lifted them to their feet. Stepping out of the bath, he grabbed a towel and quickly wrapped it around him, while she scrambled to pull out the bath plug. He was holding a second towel ready by the time she joined him on the bath mat.

She reached up her arms and slipped them around his neck, drawing him down for yet another a kiss as he folded the towel around her. He absently began rubbing her dry while he went on kissing her. Not really thinking about what he was doing, except that God, he wanted her, wanted to be inside her and have her around him, he backed them up and steered them out of the bathroom and across the landing into the bedroom.

The chillier air in the bedroom after the steamy bathroom raised goosebumps on his skin as they fell onto the bed together, but it only made the heat between them feel more intense as he stripped the towel away from Heather and her damp skin met his. Her hands unhooked the towel around his waist, and he moaned as she grasped him, straining for her.

"Jake...." The way she said it let him know she was ready for him.

"Yeah...." His reply was a little strangled as he sat up and grabbed a condom from the nightstand. She straddled him while he fumbled it on, and then he was inside her and they were moving together, and, God, it was good, so good. "I love you," he murmured in her ear, and he didn't mind at all that her only reply was small gasps as she moved over him, because

he knew that meant it was good for her.

Afterwards, when they lay together, sated with each other, she whispered, "I love you, too," against his neck. He pulled her closer, but before he could answer, his stomach replied for him with a loud growl. Heather giggled and ran a hand over the taut muscles of his abdomen.

"I guess the way to a man's heart really is through his stomach," she teased.

Jake laughed and tightened his arm around her. "We did skip dinner," he pointed out.

"Uh-huh." As if on cue, Heather's stomach gurgled as well. He could feel her shaking against him as she started laughing with him. "Something tells me we really ought to do something about that."

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