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# **Beautiful Sludge**

**by  
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**Characters:**

**Luke** - Fifty-year-old man

**Jonathan** - Muscular forty-year-old gay man

*LUKE has a plunger in his hand trying to unplug his sink. He keeps repeating the action until he realizes that the drain is so blocked up that sludge is pouring under the sink. He's almost in tears. In the midst of the chaos, the doorbell rings.*

LUKE

Who is it?

JONATHAN

Your neighbor below you, Jonathan.  
Water Is coming from your ceiling.  
Do you have a leak?

LUKE

I am so sorry. My kitchen pipes are clogged, and I was trying to fix them. I didn't realize it would affect your ceiling.

JONATHAN

Why don't you let me in; maybe I can help.

*When LUKE lets JONATHAN into his condominium, he stares at JONATHAN's muscles. When LUKE speaks, he stutters.*

LUKE

Oh God. You look like you could fix anything. Oh, I am sorry. I don't know what I'm saying.

JONATHAN

We need to shut off the water before it gets worse. Do you know where the valve is?

LUKE

No. Isn't it just one shut-off valve for the entire condo complex?

JONATHAN

I should know that. I'm on the board.  
Let's look under the sink.

*When JONATHAN lies down on the floor, he realizes that there is water and sludge. But he can reach under the sink and finds the shut-off valve.*

LUKE

You've done it. You're a miracle man.  
Oh, but your clothes are wet. Let me  
get you a towel or something to clean  
up. Maybe a shirt.

*JONATHAN gets up from the floor and assesses the damage to his clothes.*

JONATHAN

You don't have to bother. I can just go  
back to my unit and clean up there.

LUKE

No, no. This is the least I can do. Just  
sit right there. I'll be back in a second.

*LUKE returns with a towel and shirt and helps JONATHAN remove his  
soiled shirt. LUKE is tempted to use the towel to wipe off the grime  
sticking to JONATHAN's chest, but JONATHAN grabs the towel and  
finishes.*

JONATHAN

I can't believe we've never met. I've  
been in this building for six months.  
I'm Jonathan.

LUKE

We must keep different hours. I'm  
Luke.

JONATHAN

I really should get back to my place

LUKE

I know it's late, but I'd like to make it  
up to you. Dinner? You pick the  
restaurant. It's my treat.

JONATHAN

That's not necessary. But I would like something to drink. Do you have wine?

*LUKE gets some wine and glasses but as he begins to pour it, JONATHAN gets up from where he is sitting and picks Luke up off his feet. LUKE is startled and laughs nervously.*

LUKE

You scared me.

JONATHAN

I'm just playing with you. You seem so serious. I didn't hurt you, did I?

LUKE

Were you just showing off your muscles?

JONATHAN

I saw the way you were looking at me. Don't get all embarrassed. And don't think I'm some kind of narcissist, but I find my looks can be intimidating. You would be surprised how many guys won't even approach me. They think I'm out of their league or some bullshit like that.

LUKE

Ha! I wish I had your problems.

JONATHAN

Why? You're good looking. A bit thin, but you just need to bulk up.

LUKE

Are you trying to become my trainer?

JONATHAN

What makes you think that? Oh, right. That's what people assume . . .

*JONATHAN stares down at his muscles.*

JONATHAN

. . . I'm an accountant by day and a gym rat at night.

LUKE

You probably have a boyfriend or maybe you're married?

JONATHAN

We broke up six months ago. I'll tell you about it sometime. Right now, I just want to check my kitchen and then crash. I hardly had any sleep last night. I think I'm becoming an insomniac.

LUKE

Why don't you finish your wine and you can tell me about your ex.

JONATHAN

I hate talking about him. He called today, and it makes me spin out of control when I hear his voice. What about you, Luke? Do you have a lover or an ex?

LUKE

No. I just turned fifty, and I've never lived with anyone. Actually, hardly ever dated. I don't even think I've ever told anyone I've loved them. I guess I didn't want to be disappointed if they didn't feel the same way. I suppose I'm risk-averse. At least that's what my insurance agent calls me.

JONATHAN

Really! That's hard to believe. There hasn't been anyone?

LUKE

Oh I've had crushes on people, but that's all they were. I never followed up with anyone. When you mentioned guys thinking they were out of your league and were afraid to talk to you,

that's kind of how I usually feel.  
Remember, I grew up during the  
AIDS years. Never met Mr. Right, I  
guess. Maybe I'm just not marriage  
material. I always had excuses to not  
get involved. It just seemed easier.  
And when people say, 'don't you have  
any regrets', I really don't. I guess I  
like being alone with myself. What  
about you? I bet you've done your  
share of dating.

JONATHAN

God, before I met Simon, I thought I  
was meeting Mr. Right all the time. I  
would date two guys at the same time!  
I couldn't imagine being monogamous  
with anyone until I got together with  
Simon ten years ago.

LUKE

So, what went wrong?

JONATHAN

I'm going to need another glass of  
wine.

*After LUKE gives JONATHAN more wine, JONATHAN kisses LUKE on  
the cheek.*

LUKE

You are such a flirt.

JONATHAN

I can't help myself. I just wanted some  
fun before I tell you my sad story. We  
adopted a teenage boy two years after  
we'd started living together. We'd both  
wanted children. Our relationship  
changed because we now had another  
human being to be responsible for. We  
took better care of our bodies. Stopped  
drinking. It was an unexpected  
revelation having Larry.

LUKE

Oh no! Are you in A.A., and I made you fall off the wagon?

*JONATHAN laughs.*

JONATHAN

Don't worry. That abstinence was short-lived. You'll see why. Larry turned out to be very difficult. I guess that's the risk with adoption; you never know. By the time he was in high school, he'd almost been arrested numerous times for stealing, drunk driving, fighting. We thought we were excellent parents setting a good example. It got so bad that we sent him to a boarding school in Northern California to finish school.

*JONATHAN stops talking and starts to cry.*

JONATHAN

This is so emotional for me. I don't even know why I'm telling you all this. We hardly know each other. There is something inviting about your manner. Do people say you're a good listener?

LUKE

I guess so.

JONATHAN

Last year we got a call from the boarding school in Crescent City. They said it was an emergency. Larry had been arrested, and we needed to fly there ASAP. It turns out Larry and two other boys were involved in a robbery of a Seven-Eleven.

*JONATHAN begins sobbing.*



LUKE

Jonathan, maybe you don't want to tell me anything more about this.

JONATHAN

Larry was almost eighteen, and he was tried as an adult. He was sentenced to five years in prison. It destroyed my relationship with Simon. I moved out six months ago, and here I am.

LUKE

I am so sorry this happened. I can't believe your lover left you.

JONATHAN

There was no discussion. He just said, 'I've had enough. I don't want to be in a relationship any more, and I don't want to be involved with parenting.' I asked him about couples counseling, but he said he wasn't interested. He won't even visit Larry even though it was a joint adoption. I really wonder about our whole relationship.

LUKE

What an asshole.

*LUKE holds JONATHAN's hand.*

LUKE

I had no idea you were going to tell me all this. This is probably more than you asked for this evening. Helping me with my sludge. Ruining your shirt.

JONATHAN

And me bringing up my own sludge. But really, this was good talking to you. I tend to keep things inside, and as I told you before, you're a great listener.

*They embrace and Luke opens the door to let JONATHAN out, but JONATHAN doesn't leave.*

JONATHAN

Would you stay with me tonight? I  
haven't slept with a man in six months.  
I'd like it to be you.

THE END