



Solstice

A Torquere Press Single Shot by Sean Michael

Prologue

Aquan couldn't believe it when he saw it. A single calla lily. Its white petals curled protectively around the orange-yellow stamen. He almost missed it in the newly fallen snow. Liet was away for two more days, he was going to miss the flower entirely.

Aquan thought that was a terrible shame. Well, spending a week away from his lover was an even bigger shame, but he wanted to do something special to celebrate Liet's return.

It was growing colder though and the flower would not last two more days. And if he picked it, it would die.

He bit his lip, looking around the large garden, trying to think of some solution.

Their cottage was simple, ivy and roses growing everywhere in the summer, frost and icicles in the winter. There were three rooms inside -- the common area, Liet's workroom and their

bedroom. The little touches of magic were everywhere -- faerylights flickering in the lamps, the tiles cool in the summer and heated in the cold.

He could see the window to Liet's workroom now, the lines of crystals catching the light.

Oh! He could turn the flower into a crystal.

Then it would last forever. It would be his gift to Liet, his welcome home to his lover who he missed so much. They'd only been together two years and each time Liet had to go somewhere he was so lonely, and so happy when Liet returned. It would be good to be able to give Liet something so special.

Liet had a stone that turned matter into crystal. He'd even watched Liet do it, was pretty sure he remembered the incantation.

Aquan carefully picked the calla lily and ran into the house, going into Liet's work room. The room sparkled with magic, with promise, with something that was the essence of his green-eyed lover.

The crystals were lined carefully -- ruby and emerald, sapphire and topaz, rosy quartz and deep amethyst.

He crept in; it felt strange, almost wicked, to be in here without Liet.

The crystal he wanted was at the end of the row. White, almost clear, it glistened like the snow under sunshine. It seemed to call for him, the pale veins within holding the light, almost glowing, almost ringing.

He reached out, careful not to touch anything else, not to say anything or make any noise -- he didn't want to awaken any of the magics that lived here. The crystal seemed to vibrate in his hand, the power of it moving along his skin. The light grew and spread, sparkling behind his eyes, inside his chest.

Oh, it was so big. So very big.

He almost put the stone back, but the flower in his other hand seemed to call to him, to demand that he preserve it. He backed slowly from the room, worried that if he spoke the incantation there, he might release some other magics.

He walked -- out of the house, out in into the garden, the magic seeming to surge through him. He brought his hands together, the crystal and the calla lily touching, and began to whisper.

"Stone and air, earth and fire, bring the magics I desire."

Nothing happened. Oh, the magic was still moving through him, as it had been before, but nothing new appeared to happen. So he repeated the words, louder this time.

Icy cold began to creep up his body, the lily's petal hardening, going clear.

It was working!

Excited, he repeated the words, even louder now, laughter filling him.

Oh, wouldn't Liet be surprised.

Such a wonderful gift for his lover. One of a kind, unique and only from him.

Chapter One

Everything was perfect. There were pastries and candied fruits, mulled wines and beautiful sheets upon a feather-stuffed bed. There was a copper tub filled with steaming water and flower petals. The very best of all things.

The solstice was upon him, the darkest night of the year. The night when the gods sat around their great table of stars and pondered the hearts of mortals, judged whether they were worthy. For sixty years, Liet had offered all of himself to their will -- his craft, his words, his skill. He offered it all for this one night of freedom, this dusk to dawn.

Liet took his cane, stepped carefully out to the garden, the crust of snow sharp and crunching beneath his feet. For sixty years, he had walked this path, gone to look upon a perfect face raised toward the moon.

The crystal was pure, almost see through. There wasn't a scratch or fault upon it and he'd spent sixty years making sure it remained so. The statue's skin was smooth, cold to the touch. As the sun shone its final rays upon the day, they reflected off the crystal figure, the eyes seeming to glitter, a sharp, bright blue.

Liet's eyes filled with tears as he slowly knelt before the statue. He whispered a soft prayer to the gods who held his heart in trust, begging them to not forget their promise to him, their bond.

He heard a breath that was not his own. And then a second, the cool, silky touch of a flower petal sliding across his cheek. His tears spilled over, sorrow and joy as one within him now, inseparable, braided together by the memory of a solstice long past...

He'd been gone nearly a week, working with a diviner to find the best lands for a drought devastated village to grow food on. Being away from his sweet lover was the hardest thing, but Aquan would not have been welcome and so now he hurried in out of the cold.

His hearth was also cold though, the fire burned right to ashes, a hush over the little cottage.

Liet hurried through the cottage, calling Aquan's name again and again, panic filling him. His lover would not leave, would have no call to go. The villagers avoided the glade with a passionate fear.

As he came from their empty bedroom, he noticed a slight dissonance in his work room, the song the magic sang there off just a touch. He frowned, heading into the room. The stones upon the window were muttering, complaining, their voices... He stopped short, staring out the window into the garden.

Sweet Yalena in the Heavens. No.

No.

It could not be.

His Aquan, shining in the winter sunlight, a flower held in one hand.

He ran outside, blinded by tears and the sun reflecting from the statue formed of a crystal as clear as ice. It was a perfect reproduction, complete in every detail.

It was not until he saw the icy heartstone of Wilha, lying deserted upon the ground, that he truly comprehended what happened. His Aquan must have invoked the stone's magic, turned himself into pure crystal. But why? Why would Aquan tamper with his magics? His lover knew how dangerous they could be.

No matter. No. He simply had to undo what had been done.

There would be a way.

There was always a way.

But there hadn't been a way.

Nothing he tried melted the crystal cheek beneath his fingertips. Not blood or tears, pain, pleasure, hope, fear. Nothing. Finally, at the end of his ability, broken and lost, he had prostrated himself before the gods and offered anything -- anything -- if they would return his Aquan to him. And they had.

For one night every year.

One single night, so long as he did their bidding. One night of hearing that voice, of seeing his Aquan's eyes.

One night, from dusk 'til dawn, he was whole.

One night his lover was returned to him, cold crystal melting into heated flesh and always, always, his Aquan pressed the flower into his hand and said the same words.

"My Liet. How I have waited for you."

He kept his head bowed longer this time. He was aged now, wrinkled, skin tough as leather, hair silver as the stars. "Aquan."

Smooth, youthful fingers slid beneath his chin, encouraged him to turn up and look into the face of his lover who aged only one day for every year that passed. "Liet, my love. You came for me."

"Always. In all things." He searched the beloved face, drinking in every feature, hoarding the sight. Aquan's fingers slid over his face, tracing the lines and wrinkles, only love in the blue eyes. His tears were endless, the loneliness within him dissipated for this one night.

Aquan wrapped hands around his arms, tugging him up. "Come out of the snow, my love. Bring me to your bed."

"I had a bath drawn for you, beloved." He stood slowly, leaning on his cane. With every winter his joints felt filled with glass, each step slower than the one before.

Aquan's arm slid around his waist, Aquan himself slipping beneath his arm, supporting him as they walked back toward the house. "That sounds lovely, Liet. I'm so cold. I need your kisses to warm me."

"Every kiss I have is yours." They moved into the cottage, the candlelight welcoming and warm.

"Promise, Liet? For always?" Aquan turned to him, those blue eyes so young.

"For always, my love." He helped Aquan into the heated water, brought over a tray of sweets and fruits and candies to tempt his lover.

Aquan sat back with a soft moan, hand sliding along his arm. "Feed me, Liet. They are sweetest from your fingers."

Liet chose the best pieces, feeding Aquan slowly, watching his lover enjoy. Those eyes never left his, glittering, so full of love, just like in all of his best memories. Of course, he was an old man, now. No longer the young man filled with hope, or the man in his prime, but an elder. How he must look to Aquan.

"Enough, Liet. I have tasted every delicacy there is but the one I truly want. Please. Kiss me."

"Are you sure you still want my kisses, beautiful one?" The question was asked, even as his lips were offered, given freely.

"Until the end of time, Liet." Aquan's lips pressed against his, a soft cry filling his mouth.

So sweet, so fine. The flavor made him gasp, made him arch as if he were a younger man.

The kiss continued until he could not breathe and Aquan's lips parted reluctantly from his own. "The water grows chilled, I want to shiver from your touches, not from cold."

"Come to our bed, most loved." He found a soft towel, dried the sweet, lean body. Such beauty.

Aquan arched beneath his touches, body eager for each one.

"How I have missed you." He moaned, leaned to kiss one smooth shoulder.

"Yes. Yes, my love. My Liet. Oh." Aquan's fingers worked at the fastenings of his clothing, pulling them open.

He ducked his head, embarrassed, hiding. "I... I am no longer beautiful, Aquan."

"Tshaw! You are the only thing my eyes long to see, Liet." Aquan pressed kisses over his face.

Oh, that sound -- rebuking and loving all at once -- it filled his waking dreams.

His cheeks were held between Aquan's hands, his lips taken in a soft kiss, Aquan drawing him toward the bed. Liet followed easily, willingly, wanting nothing more than Aquan's joy. They lay together on the bed, Aquan's hands warm on his skin, gentle, not letting him hide. If his tears fell, Aquan did not mention it, the passion between them blossoming slowly.

Those eyes held his, adoring and loving. Aquan, as always since the first solstice night of freedom from the crystal, wasted not a moment of their time together.

He clung to his lover, hands relearning flesh that was more familiar now as hard, cold crystal. But for this night Aquan was neither hard nor cold, no instead he was warm, pliant and giving. The fine flesh was smooth as any crystal, and each touch drew out such sounds of pleasure from his lover.

His Aquan tasted of life and youth, skin scented with oils. Liet was taken back to before the accident, to when they were young together, both of them drunk upon the beauty of their love...

As always when he came home from being away, Aquan was waiting for him, watching for him. He never made it up the path without being assaulted by his warm, eager lover.

"Oh, Liet! I thought you would be gone forever!" Those blue eyes shone at him from beneath dark lashes, Aquan's smile bright. Forever had been only overnight this time.

"Silly goose. As if I could leave you." He held his Aquan close, tongue sliding deep to taste the hint of cider and spice. The flowers were blooming, the sun shining and warm.

Aquan's arms went around his waist, the sweet body wriggling closer, pressing against him. The magic between them was sweet and strong, love a stronger bond than any other.

Aquan's slender fingers wormed their way beneath his tunic, warm and gentle, stroking his skin.

"I have a gift for you, beloved." He moaned the words against Aquan's lips, purring with pleasure.

"Yes, you do. You've come home to me."

"Sweet lover." The grass was soft and sweet smelling where he eased them down, mouth sliding over Aquan's throat.

"Yours," whispered Aquan, pushing into him, so eager for every touch.

Buttons and ties came loose at a whisper, Aquan's skin bared for his will. Aquan purred, his own fingers nearly as quick as Liet's spells and soon they were both naked, moving together. The heat between them was the sweetest thing Liet had ever known, overwhelming him and sending him soaring. Aquan's kisses were warm, peppering his face, those knowing, gentle fingers sliding over his skin to awaken each inch. His own fingers drew complicated sigils over the soft skin, stroking and petting.

Aquan was gasping for breath, legs tangling with his in restless movements.

"Love." His shaft was hard as crystal, rubbing along Aquan's belly.

"Yes. Oh, please Liet, I must feel you inside me. It has been so long."

And despite the fact that it had been no more than two days, Aquan's words rang with desperate truth.

"One day you will learn patience." He slicked his fingers within his mouth, pressed them deep inside Aquan's body. Oh. The heat, the pressure. Aquan arched, his reply lost to a cry. His lover's slender body moved on his fingers, Aquan fucking himself. Liet bent, tongue sliding over one tight pink nipple, teeth sliding along the tip.

"Liet!" Aquan shouted and bucked, hands coming to grasp his shoulders. He nodded, purred around the tight flesh. Aquan tossed his head from side to side, the smell of the grass rising around them as Aquan disturbed it. "Oh, don't stop, Liet."

"Never." He bit Aquan's nipple carefully, then sucked more and more fiercely as his fingers played within Aquan's body.

"Love! I'm going to!" With that Aquan's body squeezed his fingers hard, the beloved body shaking as heat splashed against his chin, against Aquan's belly. He moaned, lapping the salty fluid up, moaning low at the flavor.

"You now, Liet. I need to feel your heat inside me." Those blue eyes were still glazed with pleasure, Aquan's words soft and breathless, needy.

His moan echoed, entire body shuddering as he covered his beloved.

Aquan's legs slid around his waist. "Oh, please, don't make me wait."

Liet could deny his lover nothing, pressing in deep, whispering an incantation to ease his way. Aquan's eyes rolled, that sweet mouth open on an "o", swollen lips red and wet.

He leaned for a kiss, soul afire, body shaking as it was held in perfection. Aquan's lips welcomed him as readily as the rest of him did, arms sliding around him, holding him completely. They moved together, the scents of sex and earth and sky overwhelming his sense, making him arch.

"Love. Love you, Liet."

"Yes. Beloved." His hair fell around them, black as night.

Aquan's body squeezed him, the soft, pink tongue licking at his lips. Pleasure slid up his spine, hot and bright. So right.

"More," whispered Aquan, body rocking up to meet his.

He arched up, hips driving him deeper, harder.

"Yes. Oh, yes, Liet." Aquan shuddered and shook beneath him, cock hard again, leaking for him.

He nodded, body shaking as his pleasure threatened to crest.

"Please, yes. Fill me with yourself, Liet."

"My beloved one!" Seed poured from him, the magics making him shiver and tingle.

"Yes!" Aquan jerked beneath him, body squeezing him tight as Aquan's seed splashed between them. He nuzzled and cuddled, body pressing Aquan into the soft grasses. His lover made no complaint, only held him, eyes shining at him, hands stroking along his skin. "I love you, Liet."

"As I love you, beloved. What mischief have you found in my absence?"

"Me? Mischief? Never!" Aquan rolled them, looking down at him now. "I have been very good and you mentioned a gift..."

"Did I?" He chuckled, fluttering his eyelashes, teasing outrageously.

"Oh, you did! And I'm not going to let you up until you show me!" Laughing, Aquan started to tickle him, fingers finding his ticklish spots.

Liet rolled, laughing, chasing Aquan's fingers. Aquan leapt up and ran toward the cottage, laughing and dancing away. Liet took a long, quiet moment, watching the tight, fine backside as Aquan moved.

His lover turned, face bright and laughing. "You're supposed to be chasing me!"

"I was watching. You're beautiful."

Aquan beamed at him and came running back, grabbing his hands. "I love you, Liet."

He nodded, grinned as he grabbed his clothes. "I know."

"You do? Good." Aquan settled against his side, walking in with him, happiness painting the pale face.

The ring was in his belt bag and he fished it out, held it out to his lover. The stone was a pure, sweet blue, shining and glinting in the sunlight.

"Oh! Oh, Liet!" Aquan threw both arms around his neck, hugging him tight. "Did you make it yourself?"

Liet nodded. "The stone is a bit of the water where I visited, captured forever, for you."

"Oh, Liet. It's beautiful, thank you." The stone was nothing compared to his Aquan's eyes.

"I'm glad you like it, beloved." He slid it on Aquan's finger, the fit perfect.

"It's beautiful, but it's even more special because you gave it to me."

"Next time, you should come with, bathe in the waters. They are healing."

"Oh, could I? I hate it when you have to go away. I would be with you always for all time."

"I would like that. You would love the water, how it bubbles over the stones." His Aquan was innocent and precious and he worried so.

"As long as it wouldn't cause trouble for you, Liet."

"You are never trouble, Aquan. You are my joy."

"As you are mine." Aquan laughed then and ran again, leading him into their bedroom.

Their love had colored all their days, that laugh keeping him warm.

It still did. For a single night of the year.

Liet leaned close, kissed Aquan's shoulder, jaw, cheek. "My beloved."

"Still, Liet? After all this time?"

His laughter was harsh, almost bitter. "No one has ever been so loved as you, Aquan."

His lover frowned, hands soft as they slid along his cheeks, those blue eyes filling with tears. "I am sorry, Liet. So sorry."

"No. No. No sorrow from you." He kissed Aquan softly, kissed the tears away. "Soon you should be free to live, beloved one. Soon you will see the spring again."

"You've found a way to free me from the crystal?" Aquan beamed at him. "Oh, Liet, you are most brilliant!"

He placed his fingers over Aquan's lips, hushing the boy, petting. "No, beloved. I am old. I will not see another winter. The gods have promised your freedom as payment for my service."

Aquan's eyes widened as the words sank in and he shook his head. "No! No, Liet. I do not wish to be free if I cannot be with you."

"You are young. You will have a life." A life beyond him, a life free.

"I don't want a life, I want you." Aquan shook his head. "It isn't fair. I made the mistake -- you shouldn't have to pay!"

"Nothing is fair. I would work a dozen lifetimes to earn your freedom." He leaned down, resting against Aquan.

"Let me talk to your gods, let them take me and give you your freedom." Aquan's hands were clutching at him, holding onto him as if dawn were already approaching.

"Not even the gods can deny time, Aquan." He held tight, refusing to miss a moment.

"I don't want my freedom without you."

"Don't say that. I cannot bear the thought of you frozen, alone for all time."

Aquan pressed close. "And I cannot bear the thought of living without, alone for all my life."

"You are still young. You could find another." His hands traced each line, each inch of skin.

"Another?" Aquan sounded shocked. He closed his eyes to hide his agony and nodded.

"I could never love another, Liet. I would not want to." Aquan continued, pulling away from him and beginning to pace, arms hugging himself. "I thought when you died I would just remain frozen forever. I was prepared for that, Liet. I am not prepared for a life without you."

"Please..." He held his arms open, needing. "This is the last night I might be with you. Please. Please."

Crying out, Aquan returned to his side, crawling into bed with him and taking him into those arms. Liet sobbed, his tears bitter as the first solstice his lover was returned to him.

A year. It had been a year of begging and pleading and working himself half to death to fulfill every requirement his gods had set in front of him. But tonight, as the sun's last ray touched the sky, his lover, his Aquan was to breathe again.

He did not know if Aquan would be aware, if his lover would be mad. Liet did not care; he simply needed his lover's touch. As the sun disappeared, the last glint leaving his lover's crystallized body, those beautiful eyes suddenly shone blue, Aquan smiling at him.

The flower slid along his cheek. "My Liet. How I have waited for you."

"Aquan..." His tears washed the soft skin of his lover's feet.

Aquan took a deep breath, stretching his body, shivering and then curling around his kneeling form. "Liet. Is it really you or am I dreaming?"

"Not a dream, beloved. Not a dream, I swear it." How could he tell his lover it was simply for a single night?

Aquan dropped to his knees, arms wrapping around him, kisses pressed to his face. "I knew you would save me. I knew you would free me."

Liet's heart broke, and he was unable to meet those beautiful eyes. "Not free, beloved, only given a respite for a single night. I have bargained with the gods for you. The longest night of the year you are flesh again."

How he had tried and tried, but sadly, this was the best he could offer.

"Only tonight?" whispered Aquan.

"I am sorry, beloved. Tonight and every winter solstice. I am so sorry..."

Aquan's beautiful eyes filled with tears and his lover held him tightly. "It's my fault, Liet. I just wanted to save the flower for you. It was so beautiful..."

"I should have warned you. I should have locked the stones away. I... Does it ache? Do you dream?"

"It's cold. I do not sleep. I can see, in a sense. Everything is refracted. I *miss* you." Aquan's mouth met his on the last word, tongue sliding between his lips.

He sobbed, opening to the touch, needing desperately. Aquan pressed close, tongue pushing deep. He carried Aquan indoors, stumbling toward the bed. Aquan's hands slid over his face, his neck, his shoulders, the touches desperate.

"I love you. Forgive me. Please, beloved." He found the bed, clambering atop Aquan's body.

"Yes, Liet, yet. Please. Love me, touch me. I need you."

His tears and kisses mingled together upon the smooth, soft skin. His hands slid over, relearning, touching, adoring his lover. Those blue eyes watched him, loved him, the lithe body moving into his touches, Aquan writhing beneath him. He loved Aquan as best he could, rubbing and caressing, hands remembering everything about the lean body. Soon the blue of Aquan's eyes was glazed with passion, clumsy fingers returning the touches as Aquan's need dug into his ass where he sat astride his lover.

"Will you take me, beloved? Let me feel you within me again?"

Aquan's eyes widened and he nodded, hands opening and closing on his skin.

He removed his clothing, baring himself for Aquan's eyes. "I have needed you so."

"Yes, Liet. I have felt your need. It renews me, knowing that you wish to love me still." Aquan reached for the oil, dipping his fingers into it and sliding them over his skin.

"Only you, Aquan. Only you." Every nerve was awake, alight.

Aquan's fingers slid into the oil again before they returned once more to his skin, anointing him. Liet spread, offering Aquan everything, anything, the heat of those fingers an addiction.

"So beautiful, Liet. My Liet. I could touch you forever."

"Yours. Yours, beloved." He searched the beautiful face, those eyes.

Aquan was totally focused on him, love and adoration and need in those beautiful eyes.

"Love you." He leaned down, kissed soft, sweet lips.

"Oh, yes, Liet. I love you. Yes." Aquan's lips yielded easily to him, opening to his kiss, his heart. One of Aquan's fingers slipped inside him, causing him to gasp, to jerk. Oh, that smile was amazing, beautiful and only for him.

"Love..." He traced the sweet smile with his tongue, eyes rolling.

"My Liet." A second finger pushed in with the first, sliding and rubbing inside him.

"Yours. Please." His eyes rolled, He hadn't been touched in a full cycle.

"Are you ready, Liet? Come ride me." Aquan's voice was husky, thick with want and with tears.

His own agony answered Aquan's, but he wasted no time on it, simply moaning and raising up to sink down upon Aquan's shaft. Aquan shouted and bucked up into him, hands reaching for him. "Liet!"

"Yours." His head fell back, throat working. "Beloved."

"Most loved. Oh, I have missed you, missed you so much." Aquan's hands slid along his belly and then up to his chest, tugging at his nipples.

"Yes. Missed you. Need you." Heat flooded him, and he shook with need.

Aquan moved beneath him, hips pushing up into him, that sweet cock moving inside him. They bucked and rocked, the soft mattress squeaking beneath them. Aquan's eyes rolled in his head, hands shaking as they moved over him.

"Love. My love..." The room trembled, the magics just barely held in check.

"It feels like heaven, Liet. You feel like heaven."

"Just a man. Beloved." So close. So close and yet he didn't want it to end. Ever.

Aquan's eyes rolled again. "Close, love. Please."

"Yes..." He bucked, seed pouring from him in a wave.

"Liet!" Aquan shouted his name out, hands grabbing at him.

"Beloved." He watched every second of pleasure, every breath.

Aquan's face was transformed in pleasure, becoming even more lovely for a moment and then the tight body beneath him relaxed, Aquan's eyes softening, finding his. "Oh, love..."

"My Aquan..." His heart. His beloved. Aquan's arms drew him down against the slender chest, his lover holding him tight. "Don't sleep, Aquan. Please. Stay with me. I've so much to tell you..."

"I will never sleep again if it means I do not have to leave you, Liet."

He reached up, cupped that perfect face. "I will be thankful for each moment."

Aquan nodded, brought their lips together. "I will never again even just touch your lips without saying a prayer of thanks."

"One day, beloved. One day you will be free."

And that day would be soon now, much as it pained him to move beyond the veil without his lover, he was happy that Aquan would no long suffer in the crystal's cage.

Aquan held him, stroked him softly. "Let me make love to you, Liet? Like I have every year since the first."

"Yes, beloved. Let me feel you." One last time.

Aquan's mouth met his, the kiss tender. He trembled, leaned into the strong arms, let Aquan hold him. Aquan's fingers were sure and gentle, knowing just where and just how to touch him. Passion kindled inside him, slow and sweet, the heat fondly remembered, longed for. Aquan's mouth slid away from his, nuzzled along his neck, licked across his nipples. He rocked, humming low, so in love. Still. Liet's cock jerked, slowly filled.

"Oh, my love." Aquan's mouth kept sliding down, nuzzling into his belly.

"Yours. I'm sorry, Aquan. I'm so old..."

"Sh. Sh. You are beautiful to me, Liet. So beautiful." Aquan licked at the tip of his cock. Pleasure washed through him, making his eyes roll. "So beautiful," repeated Aquan, the words whispering against his skin. Then his lover's mouth closed over him, pulling him deep.

"Aquan..." His fingers clawed against the blankets, thighs parting.

"Yes, my Liet?"

"You fill me with need..."

"You are not alone in that, Liet." A kiss was pressed against his hip and then his cock was taken in again, Aquan sucking gently. He reached down, fingers stroking soft, silken hair, petting his lover. Aquan hummed, the sound vibrating his prick.

Liet shivered, whispering low. "If I spend now, I cannot..."

"I wish to taste you," insisted Aquan, suction increasing.

"Oh. Oh." He nodded, gasping, hips rolling. Aquan's head rose and fell over his groin, the heat around his cock so good. He couldn't last long, not at all, hips rocking up toward Aquan's lips. One of Aquan's hands slid back up his chest, fingers tugging at his nipple. Liet dissolved with a cry, body shaking, shuddering.

Aquan swallowed hard, making sure not to miss a drop. "Oh, I've imagined that taste in my mouth a thousand times."

"I have not spent since our last evening together."

"Oh, Liet, just because I am frozen for the full cycle does not mean that you must be also." Aquan pushed up along his body, bringing their mouths together again. He smiled. Sweet boy. He had been frozen for an eternity, just waiting for his lover's touch.

Aquan's cock lay heavy and hot against his thigh, his lover's tongue dancing within his mouth. It was sweet, perfection as he reached down, stroked Aquan's cock. Aquan moaned, hips pushing that glorious heat through his hand.

"I love you. My Aquan. My beloved one." He kept stroking, petting, caressing.

"Yes, oh yes, Liet. Yours. Always yours."

He nodded. "No one will love you as I have."

"No, only you. I do not want anyone else, Liet. Please. Do not leave me."

"I cannot stop time, beloved." He held up one wrinkled hand. "I am dying."

Aquan shook his head. "No. No, Liet. Please. You cannot die without me."

"You are young, still. You will still have a full life."

"It isn't fair, Liet. Is there not some way for me to give you my life?"

"No. Do not think it." He covered Aquan's lips with his fingers. "Do not condemn me to another life of loneliness."

Aquan's eyes filled again with tears. "Oh, Liet, I have ruined your life and for what? A flower."

"You have not ruined my life. You *are* my life. Everything I have done counted toward your freedom." Every torture, every pain, every moment.

"But I wanted to grow old with you."

He nodded, kissed Aquan's palm. "I wanted that. I wanted the spring; I wanted to show you the world." Hot tears splashed against his chest. "Shh..." He rocked, held his lover close. "I had sixty perfect nights with the man I love most. Sixty nights that carried me through a lifetime."

"You deserve more, Liet. I would give you anything. Everything."

"We live at the whims of the gods, beloved."

"What if I petition them? Ask them to let us be together?"

"I..." He shrugged. Who knew what the gods would do; he was simply a man. "I cannot risk one moment of our last night together."

"But what if it wasn't wasted? What if they gave us some time back? Will you really give up that chance?"

"But what if they denied you? Sixty years I have struggled and fought, I earned a single boon..."

"What would we lose if they denied me? They cannot take away the time we have already had. You are telling me this is our last night, I am begging you to let me make it not be."

He shook his head, holding Aquan's hand. "I would not lose a second of this night."

"When did you give up hope?" Aquan asked him, curling away from him.

Liet blinked, stared. "Aquan!"

Twenty years ago? Thirty? More?

"What? Are you telling me it isn't true?" There was reproach in his lover's eyes. For the first time in sixty years.

"I..." His heart broke, eyes closing. He should have died. He never wanted to cause Aquan harm.

"I have hope enough for both of us, Liet. Take me to where you petition your gods, let me speak to them, let me beg them for time for us."

"If you wish it, Aquan." He moved off the bed, hand scrabbling for his cane.

Aquan was at his side immediately, supporting him, mouth on his. The kiss was long and sweet. "Liet. As long as there is a hope I must do this. I do it for you. For us."

"You waste the last moments I have with you. They have listened to nothing I have begged for, only demanded more and more."

"Maybe they are waiting for me to beg, as I am the one who made the mistake."

He stared at his lover. "The mistake was not yours. I should have protected the stones."

Aquan shook his head, looked at him intently. "But I knew the magics were dangerous, knew I should not have taken the crystal." Liet shook his head. No. His Aquan was not at fault. Aquan's fingers were soft on his skin. "Take me to your shrine, Liet."

He nodded, "It is cold outside, beloved. Bring your furs."

He would spend his final solstice doing Aquan's will.

Chapter Two

Aquan walked with Liet, his heart aching at the slow pace, at the proof of his lover's age. It had crept up slowly, Liet's magics and gods keeping him young, almost young enough that Aquan could believe that he was allowed life more than just on the solstice. Now Liet was ready to die, was preparing for it. Aquan would not allow it. It was his fault that the accident had happened and his lover had taken enough punishment for it.

He shivered, the sensation of being locked in crystal, of being nothing more than crystal pressing against his skin. He would live in it forever though if he could save Liet.

"We could return home, beloved. I could hold you until the morning." And his Liet? Always driven to protect him.

And it was tempting, so tempting. The cycles dragged so long, it was so hard to be without Liet and his body wanted nothing more than to curl with his lover and spend as much time as they had left making love.

He shook his head. "We must try, Liet. We must."

"What do you hope to gain, most loved?" So tired, so aged... Liet was bent now, once ebony hair pure silver, eyes still beautiful, if weighed with sorrow.

"I would share my time with you, Liet. Share my life with you. Baring that I would die with you."

"No." Liet stopped, shaking. "You cannot. You have a life before you. You are a young man..."

"Oh, Liet. What about your life? You left it behind to spend a single night a cycle with me. How could I give you any less?"

"I could do no less, Aquan, not for you, but for me." Those green eyes shone with tears. "I need you more than life."

"Do you not think I feel the same way?" How could Liet not understand?

"I..." Liet's hand reached for him. "I wish happiness for you, beloved."

"I cannot be happy knowing you are dead while I live." He took Liet's hand and squeezed.

"There is no good answer to this, beloved. I cannot stop time."

"But your gods can. Or at least they can make other arrangements. Come on, take me to them. You said you would." He felt the urgency of it, knew they only had this night, it was his only chance.

Liet nodded, moving through the snow so slowly, moving past the garden gate, down to the little stone shrine, the gods' names chiseled into each stone. Aquan swallowed as they got there, fingers sliding along the names. He realized suddenly that it was possible they would not only refuse him, but kill them both on the spot and they still had hours before the sun came up and froze him again.

Still, surely they would rather a petition that included sacrifice than one made in the throes of his final minutes. Liet opened the shrine doors, whispering soft incantations so that the fire blazed, the magic as fascinating now as it had been in the beginning.

He'd never seen a wizard at work when he'd first met Liet and though Liet had only been an apprentice at the time, Aquan had fallen in love immediately with the young man only several moons his elder.

He waited until the night of his test of manhood and once he'd passed, he was allowed to petition a lover.

Aquan put on his very best tunic and cloak, he brushed his hair until it lay flat against his head and he put together a basket of fresh bread and fine meats and cheeses and then he walked into the woods, to the small cottage where the newly minted wizard lived.

Heart on his sleeve, he knocked on the door.

Liet's eyes were green as a forest, hair black as night. Tall and lean, the wizard welcomed him with a smile that sent him soaring. He offered his basket over, along with his heart and all of himself. "I am Aquan of the Field Village. I would be yours."

"Mine?" The basket was taken, Liet opening the door to him. "Why have you chosen me, Aquan of the Field Village?"

"Because you shine. I could feel you tugging at me when you and your master came to my village and at first I thought I had been magicked, but I was not. Or at least not by you, but by love."

Liet's home was simple, but clean, little crystals and books scattered about, a white cat sitting on a windowsill, a grey owl in a wicker cage. "I remember you. You were apprenticed to the pale man with the red tunic. The sun makes your hair shine."

He nodded. "Tiso wasn't very happy when I chose to leave. He thinks I'm chasing a fool's dream."

He didn't think he was a fool, he hoped he wasn't.

"Why would love be a fool's dream?" Liet nodded to a bench. "Would you like to sit?"

He nodded, nervous enough to be eager to get off his feet. Now that he was here, his heart was thumping madly. Liet everything he had remembered and more. The magic in the cottage was fascinating, coating everything with shimmers and glitters and he carefully put his hands together in his lap. "I guess Tiso believes so because he's never found it."

"How horrible for him." Liet took the kettle, poured two cups of a deep ruby tea, handed one to him. "I have never been in love before, but my gods told me you would come."

"Me? Your gods spoke of me?" He would have thought that he was hardly important enough to merit attention from Liet's gods. But then perhaps it was Liet himself who merited the attention. Aquan certainly believed he did.

"They did. They whispered your name to me." The tea was sweet, tart, warmed him all through.

"Does that mean I can stay?" That you will love me?

"It does. I pray that you will not regret your choice. A wizard's life can be harsh, the gods demand much."

"I won't regret it." Even if the wizard did not love him, it would be enough to be able to share the same air, to be able to watch Liet.

Liet looked at him, those green eyes so warm, so happy. "I believe you."

He smiled and put his tea cup aside. "Sit next to me? Please."

Liet smelled of wood smoke and fruit and something unknown, something addictive. Driven by his love, he reached out and took Liet's hand, their palms sliding, fingers twining. Oh. Oh, the touch sent tingles through him, made him gasp and shiver. He met Liet's eyes, his heart swelling, along with other parts of his anatomy.

"Can I kiss you, Aquan of the Field Villiage?"

"Oh, yes, I would like that very much." He leaned toward Liet, eyes wide and watching as Liet's mouth grew closer.

Their lips met, Liet's mouth warm, soft, skin tanned and smooth so close. He gasped softly, this kiss more than he had imagined it could be. He squeezed Liet's hand. Liet's fingers held on, free hand stroking his cheek. Those eyes were so close to his, so very green, so very lovely and he pressed their lips a little closer. A soft noise pushed past his lips, tongue brushing his skin. He gasped again and moaned, lips parting. That hot tongue slid inside, tasted him, caressed him. He shivered, eyes closing as his mouth took Liet inside him. Inside him. He moaned and pressed himself against Liet, mouth opening wide.

"Such sweetness..." Liet's words were whispered against his lips.

"Yours," he whispered back, eyes opening again so that he could see the green of Liet's.

"Yes. I accept your offer, Aquan. Mine." Pleasure moved through him and with it was magic, Liet's words sealing them together for all time.

It had been the first time he'd felt magic within him.

Aquan reached out to stroke the bowed back, stepped close and hugged his Liet tight. They *were* sealed together still, if the gods were amenable, his time could be shared out between them, he was sure of it. He believed it with his very soul. And if not, he chose to die with his lover.

Liet turned to smile at him, eyes warm. "Beloved."

"Yes, my Liet. And you are most loved. Come stand with me. Lend me your strength as I petition your gods?"

"All of it belongs to you."

He took Liet's hand and squeezed tight. "I'm scared," he admitted on a whisper.

"There is nothing to fear, beloved." Liet's eyes, so loving, so old, smiled at him. "I will keep you safe."

"You have done so much already." He stroked Liet's cheek with his free hand and stepped into the shrine. The magic rushed through him, but not like the magic of the crystal, this was warm, almost burning. Liet was beside him, whispering the words that would wake the gods, bring them close. He trembled and took a breath. He would not fear, not here where his lover could see him, where his lover offered himself over to the gods for Aquan's very breath.

Multicolored mists appeared, swirling and swaying, the magics growing stronger. Oh, it was beautiful. Like his Liet, only too much too look upon for too long.

"Why have you summoned us, Liet? This is your night. Your boon." The voices echoed.

"My beloved wishes to speak with you."

Aquan stepped forward and stood tall. He would not fail his Liet. He would be strong and would make his case.

"I have been punished for decades for the sin of meddling with a magic I did not properly understand and could not control, but my Liet has also been punished, has been forced to live on his own bar one night in a full cycle and now he is going to die and I am to be free.

"It isn't fair, to let me live while he continues to be punished for my crime."

"His death is no punishment, child. It is the way of things."

"But I have a whole life in front of me. A life that belongs to him."

"He has only a handful of days remaining, child. He will not see the next full moon."

"Give him some of my days. Please. I cannot live with the knowledge that he grew old dedicated to a statue that only lived once a year." He could hear the note of pleading in his own voice and he dropped to his knees, hands clasping together in front of him. "Please. Do not keep punishing him for my mistakes."

"No." Liet's voice was firm. "I have lived my life. He deserves to live his own."

"No, Liet! It isn't right -- it isn't fair!"

The mists continued to swirl, to slide among each other.

"It isn't fair, but it is how it is." Liet's hand stroked his head.

He shook his head, a sob filling his chest and stealing his breath. "I just wanted to save the flower for you, Liet. I just wanted to share the joy of it with you."

"Shh... You have shared with me. Sixty perfect nights."

"No, it can't end like this. It can't." He turned his face up to Liet's, falling in love with the green eyes all over again, and then leaned his head back farther, imploring the stars. "If you will not grant him more life, then take mine so that we may be together in the hereafter."

The mists around them grew thicker, colors deeper. "We will give you this night, young, together. At dawn, you will both belong to the afterlife."

"No!" Liet sounded desperate.

"We will be together in the afterlife?" He was willing to give up his life to be with Liet forever. As they were meant to be.

"No. No, I will not. I have paid my debt to you. I will not agree."

The mist turned a soft rose, seeming to cradle Liet. "You have been a great boon to us, Liet."

"Then give him his life, let him share my days or let us hold each other forever in death," Aquan pleaded, letting his heart be known, his love.

"We cannot give him that which he has spent, Aquan. His days on this plane are gone."

He shook his head. No. No, it wasn't fair. He didn't want his freedom, not at this price.

"We can offer you this night. Offer you an eternity of spring, but Liet must agree."

"An eternity of spring? What do you mean?"

"The afterlife has no winter, no harsh summer. It is a joy, for those who have pleased us well."

"Liet? Together, forever in the spring. It sounds lovely, does it not?"

"You have a life to live..." He could see the conflict in those eyes -- the desire to relieve the aches and pains of the old body, to accept this gift warring with a long-held plan, with the belief that he should live.

He shook his head. "It would be no life without you, Liet." He squeezed his lover's hands. "I love you, Liet. I am yours. What would I do with a life where you were not?"

"Live." Those eyes were filled with tears. "Do not tempt me, beloved one."

"What life would I have without you, Liet?" For sixty years he had endured the cold and loneliness of the crystal, he did not want to endure sixty more in a cold and lonely bed. One trembling hand reached out for him, beckoning to him. He stood and took Liet's hand. "I love you, my Liet. Please. Let us be together. Please."

"My Aquan. My beloved one." Crystalline tears slid down the wrinkles in Liet's face.

He brushed them away, hope filling his heart. "Please, Liet. Please, let us be together in this eternal spring. Even if we are not bodies, our souls belong together. Maybe I'm being selfish, but I don't want to be without you any longer."

"You will miss your life..." Liet kissed his fingers.

"Not without you, I will not" He pressed close to Liet, seeing his lover in the old man before him, wanting him. "We have this night and then we have forever."

"Forever..." Oh. Oh, hope. There was hope in those eyes.

"Yes, Liet, my lover, my own. Forever. Your gods have promised it. Please. Let us be forever."

One hand cupped his cheek, so soft. "My beloved. Forever."

The mists drew closer, wrapped around them.

"Make love to me, Liet. I want to feel you in me while we can one last time."

The hand against his cheek grew warmer, the lines around those green eyes disappearing.

"Liet!" He blinked, not believing his eyes, but the bent back straightened, Liet supporting him rather than the other way around.

Young and beautiful, eyes sparkling and bright, hair black as night -- his lover was beautiful.

"Oh, Liet." He pressed their lips together, accepting this gift eagerly, though he would have loved Liet in any form, at any age. Liet pushed into his arms, tongue sliding deep, a hunger there he had not enjoyed in decades. He opened wide to Liet, as eager for his lover's possession as he had been the first time and, somehow, just as nervous that he would not live up to Liet's expectations.

Liet moaned, lifted his head. "Come home. Please Aquan. Come home with me."

He nodded and took Liet's hand, ready to go wherever his lover would take him.

Liet led him from the shrine without even looking back, his strong, healthy lover laughing, hurrying toward the cottage. His own laughter met Liet's, bubbling from him. Liet's happiness was addictive, more so than magic, more so than anything. It always had been. "Hurry. Come and love me Aquan. I have need of you."

He ran with Liet, breathless and excited. They stumbled into the cottage, Liet's mouth crashing down upon his, tongue pushing deep. He slid his hands around Liet's waist, holding on, opening wide. Liet moaned, hands stroking over his skin, petting him.

"Liet, oh!" His own hands slid along Liet's skin, stroking and sliding.

"Love you." The furs were pushed away, Liet's tunic pulled off, their skin touching.

"Oh, yes. Love you. Love you -- please love me now." He lay down on their furs, pulling Liet down on top of him.

Liet nodded, lips covering his, fingers sliding down his body. He pushed up into the touches, mouth opening wide, need consuming him. The pressure inside his body was welcome, warm, Liet strong and sure, wanting him.

"Please. More," he begged, wanting to lose himself in this, wanting it to never end.

"Yes. Forever." Liet pressed inside him, spreading him, filling him. He cried out, arms reaching for Liet, holding his lover as he was filled. Nothing had ever felt so good as this.

"My beloved! Forever." Liet arched, pushed deep inside him.

"Yes! Oh!" He wrapped his legs around Liet's waist, arching into the thrust.

Liet looked...

Happy. Transformed. And that was almost better than the loving.

"Love you, my life," he whispered.

"Yours. I gave my life for you. Would do it again."

"Just love me, Liet. Just love me."

"Forever." The kiss was deep, stealing his breath, those eyes staring into him. He could feel the magic between them, sealing them together, binding them on a deeper level than it had that first time.

Liet pushed deep, groaning, eyes rolling. "My Aquan!"

"Yes, Liet. Yours!" He could feel Liet's cock inside him, could feel the strength and heat of it, the harness and velvet.

"Yes." Liet shook, hips thrusting, pumping, pushing heat deep into him.

"Liet!" Without even being touched, his cock pulsed, sprayed seed over his belly and Liet's. Liet leaned down, panting, dark hair pouring over him. He moaned, fingers sliding on Liet's cheeks and into the long hair. "I love you."

"I love you. Aquan. Beloved." Liet kissed him again and again.

They kissed for a long time, bodies still joined, the outside world hidden by Liet's hair. Finally, he asked softly, "What's going to happen to us?"

"I do not know." Liet shrugged, smiled. "I have never died before."

He shivered at the words. Dying. But for Liet he would do it. To be with his lover forever was enough.

"Do you regret, beloved?"

He shook his head. "I'm scared. But I do not regret, Liet."

"The gods have promised us an eternity, my beloved. An eternity."

He nodded, smiled. "I hope it will be long enough."

"I'm sorry that I could not free you. That you were trapped."

He stroked Liet's cheeks, smiling at his lover. "I'm free now. I have had one night every year because of you."

And some of those years had been very special. All right. They all had been. One year he had been bathed in milk. Another year Liet had loved him over and over until his breath failed him. One year there had been feathers and laughter. Oh, he loved laughing with Liet.

"We should feed you, let you have the things in life you desire most."

He smiled at Liet. "I have already tasted the one thing I want most this night."

Liet laughed, rubbed their noses together. "There are things we must do. Free the animals. Hide the stones."

"Yes. No one else must use them and come to harm."

Liet nodded. "I should have taken an apprentice, taught them, but my hours were taken."

Jealousy flared in him at the thought of Liet with someone else and it surprised him -- he would have been happy to know that Liet was not alone and at the same time... he wanted that to be no one but himself. "We could bury them."

Those green eyes closed, Liet thinking. "Yes, yes. They came from the earth, we could return them."

He watched Liet's face, admiring. His lover was beautiful and so special. It was no wonder the gods had granted Liet a favor in return for total dedication.

He would live another sixty cycles frozen in the crystal, or a hundred more, if it would bring happiness to his Liet, if it would bring them together in time. He was lucky that the sacrifices they had already made had been deemed enough.

Aquan lay with his lover, his Liet, and waited for their eternal spring.

Epilogue

The fence had been taken over by roses, the gate covered in wisteria. The old women said there were ghosts here. Magic. Haunts. They said a magic-user, cursed by the gods, had lived here, died here, disappeared here.

Puck reached back for his lover's hand, the rock wall tumbled down enough for them to pass. "Come on. They say there was a house here, a magical house."

He'd wanted to come here for moons -- wanted to see the wild gardens, wanted to find a magical wand or a talking bird or something -- anything -- special.

Tace's hand slipped into his, warm and solid, hard worn calluses familiar against his own skin.

"Magic, Puck? Are you sure we should be here? What if there's a curse on it?"

"It's been more than a... a... million summers since anyone lived here, Tace. Or at least since Gran's Gran was weaving in the temple. The curse would be gone."

Big brown eyes met his, Tace's hand squeezing his. "You shouldn't mess with magic, Puck. Your Gran tells stories about what happened to those that do."

"Okay. Okay, but let's just look. No touching, no taking -- I promise. Just looking." Come now, Tace. Come play with me.

"Just looking, Puck. You promised." Tace swallowed and squeezed his hand again. "Okay."

"I promise. Just looking." Puck almost bounced, both of them slipping into the garden, the world seeming to disappear as they entered.

"Oh..." Tace looked around, transfixed. "Wow."

The garden, beyond the fence and gate, was a wonder, wild certainly, but the grasses were sweet and the flowers beautiful, scenting the air.

"Yes. Look at the colors, Tace. All the colors..." All the scents. The beauty.

"They make you shine," Tace murmured shyly.

Puck blinked over, meeting Tace's sweet, bright eyes. "You make me shine, silly. These are just flowers."

Tace blushed and squeezed his hand. "Puck..."

He grinned, nodded. "Yes, Tace. Puck."

Tace bumped his hip. "You make me want to forget all about exploring."

He laughed, the sound echoing and ringing. "We can do that too..."

Tace gave him an adoring look. "We could go back out and... you know."

"We could find a soft piece of grass here and... you know..." No one would find them.

Tace's eyes widened. "But..." Tace leaned in and whispered, "What about the magic, the curse?"

"How could loving each other be a curse?"

"Not that. The place. What if." Tace bit his lower lip and then pressed a kiss against Puck's lips. "Loving you is no curse."

"Loving each other is the most beautiful thing."

They moved further into the garden, the greenery heavier, damp and abundant. Tace walked with him now, a little more eager, no longer needing him to tug and encourage. The foliage opened up, the grass green and soft and rolling. "Oh. Here. Here is good."

Tace didn't even look around, just tugged him close, hips pressed to his. "Whatever you want, Puck."

"You, Tace. You." Their lips met, Tace tasted sweet and wild, all at once.

The kiss grew sloppy, Tace moaning into his mouth and rubbing their hips together.

They sank down into the grass, bodies meeting, cuddling in together. The smell of the grasses rose up around them, fragrant, sweet, but not as sweet as the taste of Tace's mouth or the feeling of the warm skin under his fingers as Tace's tunic slid up.

He moaned, lips trailing along Tace's skin.

Somewhere inside his head, he heard, "Beloved."

"My own," murmured Tace, almost in reply.

His skin tingled, itched, a gasp leaving him as the words poured over him. Tace whimpered, fingers trembling as his shirt ties were undone, the material parted.

"How I have waited..." He leaned down, licked the sweet, soft skin.

"So long," murmured his lover, fingers touching him reverently.

"Yes, beloved. Yes." So hungry to touch, to taste. So long. It had been so long.

A soft whimper sounded, clever fingers tearing at his clothes, pushing them away. So sweet, so fine. He moaned, tongue sliding upon that flesh. His lover arched beneath him, pushing into his touches, silently begging for more.

The grasses smelled so sweet, his beloved sweeter, the salt and life on his tongue an addiction.

"More, please more." The words whispered across the garden, his beloved always so eager.

"Always." His lips wrapped around one nipple, tugging.

"Yes!" That sweet body moved beneath him, fingers sliding on his skin.

The sunlight warmed him all through, the body of his most loved making him shudder. Slender legs cradled him against his beloved's body.

"Need you. Please. Let me feel you."

"Yes. Please. Fill me." Trembling hands traced his features, eyes gazing up at him.

"My love." His fingers touched the sweet, tight entrance, stretching his beloved.

"Yes! Oh!" His lover spread for him, begged for him. Hot and tight, gripping his finger, pulling him in. His lover moving, riding his finger, so beautiful.

"Soon. I have such need, most loved. Such need."

"Please. I must feel you inside me." His beloved begged, so eager and wanton.

His fingers slipped free, his shaft sliding into pure heat. His thighs went tight, shaking, hips rocking.

"Oh! Oh, it has been so long..." His lover pushed, meeting each movement, hands sliding over his skin.

"Forever. Forever, beloved." His eyes rolled, throat working, the scents of the flowers beautiful, almost as beautiful as the smell of his lover.

A soft cry sounded, the body beneath him undulating. His lover's hands clutched at his shoulders.
"Oh, not yet, too soon."

He slowed, smiling down into beautiful eyes. "We are eternal, beloved."

Slender fingers slid along his cheek. "Yes, my love."

He turned, kissed the soft palm. "Yours."

"As I am yours." The slender body bucked against him, going tight around him.

"Yes..." He arched, hips moving again, unable to resist the tight heat.

"I love you." The words whispered against his mouth, against his skin, caressing him.

"As I love you, my Aquan."

His lover whimpered, pressed his name into his lips. "Liet."

"Yes." His climax took him, sent him soaring into the sky. His lover was wrapped around him, their souls entwined for all time.

Tace blinked up at him, eyes wide, breath gasping. "P..Puck?"

Puck shuddered, staring down at Tace. "What was... did you feel..." His skin was crawling, tingling, head swimming.

Tace shivered, hands wrapping around him holding on. "Oh, Puck that was..." Tace shook his head eyes still wide, confused.

"Yes. So... so needy." The sensation inside him had been... huge.

Tace nodded, fingers warm on him. "Can we go now, Puck?"

He nodded, not scared as much as confused, unnerved. "I... Yes. Yes, Tace."

They fumbled their clothes back on and Tace took his hand, pulling him back through the garden.

"What do you think it was?" They stumbled together, hurrying through the leaves and vines.

Tace shook his head. "I don't know. Oh! Look, Puck." There among the bushes was a single calla lily, white and fine.

"Oh..." He walked over, fascinated, drawn to its beauty.

"You like it." Tace bent to pick it.

Something filled him, a panic, a horror. "No! No, don't touch it!"

Tace yanked his hand back as if burned. "Puck? I wanted only to pick it for you."

"No. No touching anything, remember? We promised. We *promised*, Tace." He grabbed Tace's hand, pulling him away.

His lover went with him, Tace nodding. "It was just a flower," murmured Tace as they pushed through the bushes to the other side of the wall.

"I know. I do. I just..." He was shivering, almost feverish. "I'm sorry. I was being silly."

Tace looked back toward the cottage covered in rose bushes and vines, the crumbling wall with its gate. "Let's go, Puck, I think your Gran was right. This place is dangerous."

"I... There is magic living there, Tace. You and me? We're just simple." Not magical at all.

Tace laughed softly. "That's what I've been saying all day!"

He popped the sweet buttocks of his lover. "So I'm slow to learn."

Tace stopped and kissed him quickly. "You're just stubborn."

His lover's eyes were dancing and Tace took off, running along the path through the trees.

Puck took off after him, never noticing the way the sunlight poured through the leaves, making the statue of the eternally twined lovers shine and sparkle in the center of the garden.

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