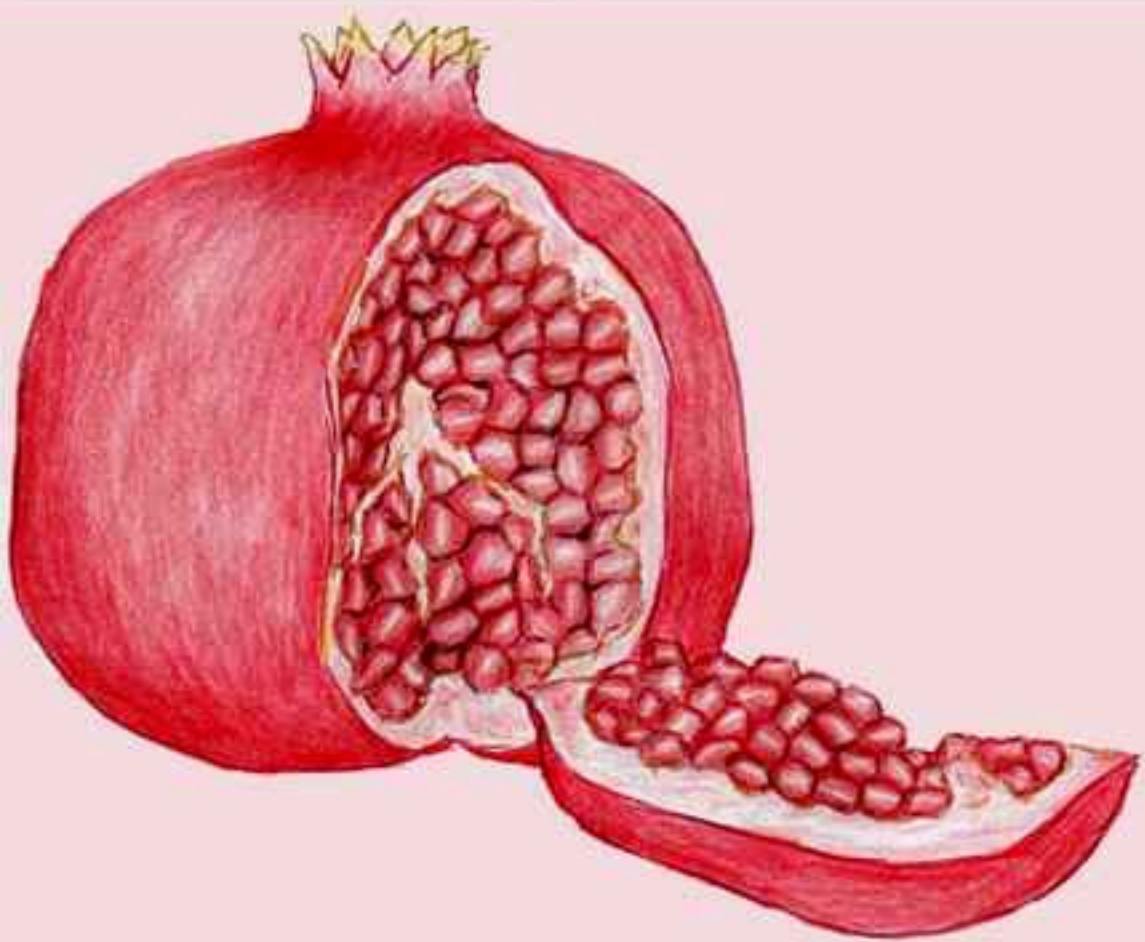


pomegranate



a torquere press birthstone
by Vic Winter

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Torquere Press

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Pomegranate
by Vic Winter

Davey split open the pomegranate, the tear-shaped seeds spilling out, red and glistening in the light. It promised a sharp, sweet flavor. He could taste it in his mouth, could feel the way each seed would explode, releasing its burst of flavor.

It wasn't his to eat, though, and Davey bit his lower lip to keep from licking it as he painstakingly removed the seeds from their web of thin, white flesh. When that one was done, there were fifty or so others in the cooler, waiting their turn.

There was a statue of Persephone carved in ice that was to be the centerpiece, the pomegranate seeds were meant to spill out around her feet. They'd be delicious so cold from sitting on the ice. It was the centerpiece for the buffet; the only things meant to outshine it were the grooms and the wedding cake, which carried through the pomegranate theme as well. Of course when he'd designed the Persephone piece, he hadn't pictured himself being stuck loosening all the seeds.

Darren and Peter had better appreciate it. Especially given he was throwing this particular wedding reception for free—his gift for his friends. Davey wasn't sure if they knew just how big a gift this was. He usually charged people a whole lot of money to plan their weddings, and that was before you added in the actual cost of the food and accessories.

But Darren and Peter had been good to him, taking him in when coming out to his family had proved disastrous. Sixteen, scared, and all alone, Peter had found him trying to turn tricks on the street and had taken him under one wing, bringing him home to Darren who'd stripped him, shoved him

in the shower, and then tucked him into bed. He probably owed them his life and what was a little thing like a reception compared to that?

Pomegranates finally done, he fluttered around the rest of the place, making sure his instructions had been followed to the letter by the reception hall and catering staff. The hall itself looked lovely: deep red roses in pale pink vases sat in the middle of every table, red ribbons draped over the backs of each chair, wine glasses with Darren and Peter's names and the date on them, also in red, waited patiently to be filled with wine, and a disposable camera sat at every place setting.

The buffet tables weren't anywhere near ready, but as the ceremony wasn't for another couple of hours, that didn't stress him. Yet. He did head to the kitchen to check on the chef and see how the delicious meal he'd planned was coming along, though. Just because it was too early to start stressing the matter, didn't mean he couldn't make sure things were running smoothly.

The aromas that hit him as he entered the long kitchen were glorious and he stood for a moment in the doorway, happily breathing it all in.

Luc laughed from halfway down the room, wiping his hands on a dishcloth and heading for him. "Look at you, standing in the doorway like a bumpkin."

He stuck his tongue out at Luc. The chef had been with him since he'd opened his wedding planner business several years ago. Brilliant in the kitchen, Luc had been unable to make a name for himself on his own. Now he was in high

demand thanks to his amazing skills in the kitchen and Davey's now booming business.

"No drooling on my food," Luc warned, going back to the stove and stirring a huge pot. Luc took a little spoon from his pocket and gathered up a bit of the sauce, moaning and smacking his lips at what he tasted.

"I won't drool on it if you won't tease me so." He went over to Luc, opening his mouth expectantly. Anything that merited that kind of moan had to taste good.

Luc obliged him with a spoon of his own, dipping it into the sauce for him before handing it over. Davey moaned just as loudly as Luc had once he'd tasted the sauce. Nobody made Alfredo like Luc. The secret was in the fresh ingredients used for the dish; he should know, after all, he was the one who received the bills: heavy cream, fresh parmesan, garlic cloves and a touch of white truffle. It would go over chunks of fresh lobster meat sitting on homemade angel hair pasta nests.

"Well at least one dish is ready. Are we on track for everything else?"

"Yes, Davey." Luc's voice was filled with exaggerated patience and Davey barely restrained himself from sticking his tongue out again. He was an adult; tongues should only be out for licking bowls, or spoons as it happened, clean, or for licking people.

"I'll have you know my picky attention to detail and annoying insistence that things be done just so and on time are why my services are in such high demand."

"And here I thought it was my brilliant cooking that made us famous."

"Well that certainly doesn't hurt." He winked at his chef—it paid to stroke the man's ego; each mouthful of delectable food proved that point. And Luc had stayed with him once the man's name was made. Davey was more than happy to repay that loyalty. "We're a good team, mon ami."

"Oui. We are both very good, but together, we're magnificent."

Davey certainly had no reason to argue with that. A glance at the clock assured him that he also had no reason to be standing around. "Are the crudités ready for the pre-reception?"

Luc nodded to the prep table at the front end of the room. There were a half dozen trays there, filled with all manner of goodies. "The rest are in the fridge and must stay there until it is time to bring them out."

Davey nodded. There was another half hour before the front room of the reception hall had to be ready. But it wouldn't hurt to check and make sure that the coat checker had arrived and knew what to do, and that the table set up to hold the trays of food for the guests to snack on until the grooms arrived from their picture taking was ready.

"Buzz me if you have any problems, Luc."

Luc waved him away, already deeply entrenched in preparing the Wellingtons. Davey left him to it, mentally checking items off his mental list as he made his way to the front of the building.

Everything was in order and he hoped it was because he had been doing this long enough and was just that good

rather than because he was missing something crucial that was going to come back and bite him in the ass later.

* * * *

Alan took pictures of Darren and Peter each getting ready for the ceremony. He took pictures of them getting into the Model T Ford replica, which would take them to the park where they were having their ceremony. He took pictures of them getting out of the Model T at the park. He took pictures as they walked up the makeshift aisle to where an arched trellis stood, covered in vines with red berries.

In other words, he was a picture taking fool.

That was how Davey liked it. The only time he wasn't supposed to take pictures was during the ceremony itself, and while people were eating. And frankly, with the ceremony just starting, he was pleased to be able to slip into one of the chairs in the back row and just relax.

He enjoyed people watching, and weddings brought everyone out in their finery, on both their best behavior and then, later after the open bar had been well-used, their less than best.

Davey came rushing up along the outside of the right aisle, slipping unobtrusively into one of the front row seats. It wasn't his usual *modus operandi*, but this wedding and reception were for people Davey knew very well. The entire thing had been done as a freebee from what Alan understood. Well, he was getting paid, but by Davey rather than the grooms.

Alan had been working with Davey for almost a year now. He'd had a lucky break when Davey's usual photographer hadn't been able to cover a third wedding on the same Saturday. Apparently there'd been a mix-up and one of the photographers who worked for LaSalle Studios had been on holidays.

Alan had jumped at the chance to do a job for Pomegranate Weddings, and had proven himself ably. Davey'd called him a month after the wedding in question, raving about his photographs and telling him how happy the wedding couple had been. He'd been working regularly with Pomegranate and Davey ever since.

It was good, steady work. And while weddings weren't the most creative work a photographer could have, they put food on the table, and Davey liked it when he experimented. Usually so did the clients.

There was also the fact that it meant he got to see Davey several times a month, sometimes more often than that. Given that he was in love with the slender wedding planner, this was definitely a plus for the job.

He didn't often get to see Davey relaxing, though, the man usually always in motion, making sure that everything ran smoothly. Today Davey simply sat in his chair, fingers occasionally sliding across his face as he wiped at tears. Of joy, Alan assumed—it was a wedding after all.

Davey was a good looking guy, and smart and funny and so damned organized it wasn't funny. Alan guessed you kind of had to be anal to be a wedding planner, at least if you were any good at it. He'd fallen in lust with Davey on their first

meeting. Slender, blond, with pretty grey-blue eyes, Davey was exactly Alan's type. But it had been the genuine smiles when Davey'd been raving about his work that had prompted Alan to fall in love.

Davey had an amazing smile. The genuine lit up his eyes, hell it lit up his whole face. It had literally warmed Alan inside, that smile, and made him feel like the only other person in the universe. He worked hard to earn it on every job and most of the time, he did.

The ceremony came to an end with Darren and Peter kissing for a long time. Alan noticed Davey clapping enthusiastically and had to grin. He guessed it was a good thing for a wedding planner to love weddings.

He raised his camera, zoomed in and took a few surreptitious shots of Davey. Then Darren and Peter separated, turning toward them and holding hands, and Alan got back to work, snapping away—making memories for the wedding couple.

* * * *

It wasn't the first time Davey was a guest at a reception he'd planned. While he did do straight weddings as well, Pomegranate Weddings was a very out company and a large percentage of his business did come from the gay community, of which he was a member. While it was a fairly large community here in Toronto, he did know a good number of its members and so he was often an invited guest. He thought, actually, that it gave him a unique perspective and helped him keep his business at the cutting edge.

As a guest, he could tell how successful, or unsuccessful, the reception was. And as a wedding planner, he knew where to look for things that were or weren't working. It allowed him instant feedback and meant he was constantly changing and improving the services he provided.

This reception was different, though, because Darren and Peter meant so much to him. He was torn between wanting everything to be absolutely perfect, and therefore needing to micromanage, and wanting to be able to sit back and enjoy the wedding and reception.

He'd been fussing enough over getting the front room of the reception hall ready for post-wedding guests, that he'd nearly missed the beginning of the ceremony. Luckily traffic had been surprisingly light and he'd manage to be in his seat just as things started.

It had been a beautiful ceremony—Darren and Peter had written their vows, and every single touch he'd wanted for the venue had been perfect. He waved to the happy couple as they started down the aisle. Darren smiled and blew him a kiss while Peter waved back. Davey took a moment to watch them continue on down, waving and smiling at their guests, and then he high-tailed it out of there, wanting to get back to the reception hall before it was inundated with guests expecting to be fed and entertained.

He caught sight of Alan taking pictures and nodded happily. He'd wanted his best photographer on the job today and he knew Alan would do him proud. There would be interesting creative shots, as well as the usual wedding poses, all of which would show Darren and Peter off at their best. It

didn't hurt that Alan was cute as hell, with his black curly hair, his deep brown eyes and his dark complexion. He always looked very handsome at a wedding and today was no exception.

Davey stared a moment longer and then shook himself. He'd been half-smitten with Alan since the first wedding the guy'd worked for him. When he'd seen the first batch of photos from the man, that had turned into full on crush.

There was no time for wool-gathering about that right now, though. He had to make sure everything was still running on time and in perfect order back at the reception hall.

* * * *

Alan took Darren and Peter to the park by the harbor and they took hundreds of pictures. He did love the digital age—it allowed him to take as many pictures as he wanted, to experiment and do things that you just couldn't risk using old-fashioned equipment. With digital pictures, he could reject ninety percent of them and not be out rolls and rolls of film. It worked for him. It also meant he could do the more experimental shots that kept things interesting for him and if the client really didn't want that kind of thing, no harm, no foul.

They were late getting to the reception. Not because he'd kept Darren and Peter too long taking pictures, but because you never could predict Toronto traffic and all it took was a single accident to snarl the flow up for miles. In the end, they were nearly an hour late and, as he hopped out and began to

snap pictures of Darren and Peter as they got out and made their way to the reception hall, he had to figure that Davey was likely having a coronary.

To his surprise, the man seemed really quite calm as he hurried over to intercept the grooms.

"Hey, guys. Oh, don't you both just look fabulous! And so happy. Congratulations!" Laughing, Davey gave the grooms hugs. "Everything is set up for the receiving line. I'm going to bring you in the side way so you don't have to walk through all the people in the front room. We'll get you set up and open the doors for people to come into the main hall and voila! There you are. Either of you want or need anything before that happens?"

Darren nodded vigorously. "I need the bathroom, honey. And Peter didn't eat this morning, so while I'm a little peckish, he's a ravenous beast."

"I am not!" Peter's stomach rumbled loudly. "Well, of course I'm *hungry*, but I can wait if I have to."

"No, no, I'll show you where the bathrooms are and then go get you a canapé or two. Your guests are having a wonderful time at the pre-reception and won't mind if it's another twenty minutes or so before the reception line gets moving." Davey hurried Darren and Peter toward a side door.

Ah, no wonder Davey wasn't freaking out; he'd organized things so that if there were delays, things still ran smoothly. The man really was good at his job.

Alan trailed Davey and the grooms, checking out Davey's ass the whole way. It was a nice view. Of course because he was paying more attention to Davey's ass than how quickly

he was following, Davey turned at the door and motioned for him to hurry up.

"Come *on*, Alan."

He put on some speed, catching up to the door and going in just in time to see Darren and Peter disappearing through a door marked 'Men'.

"Did everything go okay at the picture-taking?" Davey asked, betraying that he'd maybe been more stressed out over their tardiness than he'd let one.

"It went great. I got all the usual shots, as well as some really cool creative stuff. There's one in particular that came out fantastically. I thought you might like to get a large copy of it framed to give to them. Like as a present. If you like it, I'll print it up for you at no cost." Alan rolled his eyes at himself. He had it bad for Davey.

"Oh, I can't wait to see! Hopefully it'll be worth the extra time you took." Davey's lips pursed tightly and Alan knew he was trying not to go into a rant.

Alan bit back his chuckle. "There was an accident on the Gardiner—it took us nearly an hour to get here from the harbor."

To his surprise Davey nodded and relaxed. "Yes, I had a hunch traffic was going to be a problem today. I set things up so we had some flexibility."

He did laugh then. "You managed to control the uncontrollable."

Davey huffed at him. "Darren and Peter are dear, dear friends and I just want everything to be perfect."

"Hey, I know." Alan put his hand on Davey's shoulder, trying to ignore the way it made his palm tingle, to be touching the man he'd spent the last nine months fantasizing over. "I meant my comment as a compliment. You're amazing at what you do."

"Thank you," Davey preened a little, and then patted his hand. "I need to go get the grooms something to eat so they don't faint on me. You'll do the usual reception photographs and maybe work a little magic at the same time?"

"Of course."

"Excellent! Enjoy the reception." Then Davey was off, all efficiency and wedding planner extraordinaire again.

It was pretty damn sexy.

* * * *

The reception was in full-swing and everyone was having a blast. Dinner had been utter perfection, and Davey'd even managed to sit at his assigned seat and enjoy his meal along with the rest of the guests.

He kept waiting for the other shoe to drop. It wasn't that he wanted something to go wrong, but something always did—it was the way of things. Sometimes it was just something small, sometimes it was something big, but nothing ever ran a hundred percent smoothly and it was freaking him out more than a little that so far, Darren and Peter's reception hadn't had a single bump.

Oh, sure, the grooms had been late getting to the reception hall, but he'd built time in for that. And sure the grocer had shorted Luc the lamb, but again, Davey had over-

ordered everything so Luc had been able to make more of the other appetizers instead. A family of four who'd RSVP'd 'no' had shown up anyway, and two people who'd said they were coming alone brought dates. But Davey had an extra table already set up, as well as extra meals in his count and they'd been seated and fed without any fuss whatsoever.

None of that really counted; he'd been expecting it.

After the DJ set up and the first dance played, Darren and Peter swaying together on the dance floor, the real party started and Davey slipped back to the kitchen to make sure the kitchen was ready for the cake-cutting and that preparations for the late night snack were going as planned.

"I was wondering when you'd be back here to poke a thorn in my side." Luc flashed him a grin, kitchen whites still clean.

"I'm just double checking you don't need anything, Luc, that's all."

"I don't need anything. We're on track for the midnight buffet." Luc grinned and nudged him. "My dinner was a hit, wasn't it?"

"It was amazing. Everyone said so."

One of Luc's eyebrows quirked. "And what do *you* say, boss?"

"I say it was exquisite and you've outdone yourself today. Thank you, Luc."

Laughing, Luc gave him a hug. "I knew it was an important one for you. And now you should go back out there and have fun. You are a guest, non? Everything here is under control."

"Yeah, I guess I should go back..." He couldn't shake the nagging worry that nothing he hadn't already planned for had

gone wrong. It was unbalanced for everything to have gone so well.

"You have planned the perfect wedding reception—go enjoy it, silly!" Luc all but shoved him out the door.

Sighing, resolving not to worry about it, Davey went back to the reception hall. He didn't have to work too hard at getting into things. A conga line led by Darren and Peter had formed and was snaking its way through the room, picking up stragglers who were still at their tables instead of out on the dance floor. Davey grabbed onto the end of it, taking a few steps to get into the kicking and moving forward at the same time. A moment later someone grabbed onto him and he was no longer the last person on the line.

They made slow progress through the reception hall and by the time the line worked its way back onto the dance floor, they pretty much had everyone there on the line. It broke apart under sheer numbers once they hit the small area of the dance floor and everyone just stayed where they were and started dancing.

The DJ was one of Davey's favorites and he was really good at judging the mood of the crowd and would change his set accordingly. By the time he hit them with a slow song, Davey was hot and flushed and more than ready for the change of pace. He headed off the dance floor, planning to hit the bar for a cranberry fizz before taking a breather at his table.

Alan caught him at the edge of the dance floor, and leaned in to be heard. "Come dance with me."

The offer caught him off-guard—when Alan had grabbed him, he'd been expecting this to be the big problem he had to deal with before things could continue. "Me?"

"No, the other guy I'm holding." Alan laughed. "Yes, you. Come on, I've taken a couple thousand pictures of people dancing and you're a guest."

Why did people keep reminding him that he was a guest at this reception?

"Come on!" Alan pouted a little. "I've been waiting nine months to ask you to dance with me and now the song's almost halfway through."

"The DJ will probably play a few in a row," Davey answered. *Oh, good one*, he thought to himself. *The man you've been crushing on asks you to dance and you're standing here like an idiot.*

He took Alan's hand and turned back to the dance floor. He didn't pull them too far into the crowd before turning and sliding his arms around Alan's neck. Alan's hands slid around his waist, he was pulled in a little closer and they began to move slowly together.

Davey couldn't remember the last time he'd danced. Oh, he wound up taking a turn or two on the dance floor at most of the receptions he planned, but that was usually with one or both of the clients, or sometimes a best man or bridesmaid—a thank you for the wonderful work dance.

This was ... this was different.

Alan was a little bit taller than him, and certainly more solid, and Davey really felt like he was being held. He smiled up into dark brown eyes. Alan smiled back and tugged him in

a little closer. Oh yes, this was different. This was no duty dance.

Davey leaned his head against Alan's shoulder and let himself relax. He let go of the worries he had, let go of being in charge of making sure everything ran smoothly for the wedding couple and their guests, and was just a guest. For ten minutes—two and a half slow songs, he simply danced.

The DJ changed the music, bringing the energy levels back up and Davey reluctantly let his hands slide from Alan's shoulders and took a step back. "I was on my way for a drink when you stopped me and I'm drier now than ever. Will you join me?"

"Sure." Alan's smile was enough to warm Davey from the inside out, and he almost bounced his way over to the open bar.

"Cranberry fizz and a..." he looked over at Alan.

"I'll just have water."

At his raised eyebrow Alan shrugged. "I'm still on duty, too."

Of course. There was the cake still to be cut and Darren and Peter's departure to capture in film. It was rather nice, not being the only one not drinking, not being the only one still on the job.

He clinked his glass with Alan's and they wandered back to the table where Alan had left his camera bag.

"You having a good time?" Alan asked him.

"I am, actually. I was worried earlier because nothing big had gone wrong yet."

"What? Wouldn't it make more sense to be happy everything's run so smoothly?"

"Eh. That kind of seems like tempting fate." He grinned over at Alan. "If my worrying about it can keep fate from stepping in and throwing something big down, I'll just keep worrying, thank you very much."

Alan just laughed at that, and Davey found himself transfixed. Alan was good-looking, he knew that. Hell, he was attracted to the man, now wasn't he? But relaxed and laughing, Alan was quite stunning and Davey wished suddenly that he was there *with* Alan, that they'd be going home together after the reception.

A surge of longing went through him that he was having trouble tapping down and he was about to excuse himself when his watch started beeping at him.

"Ah, it'll be time for the cake soon, and I have to make sure the hotel hasn't given away the honeymoon suite." He stood, but didn't just hurry off. Instead he tilted his head and held out his hand, smiling as Alan's slid into it. "Thank you for the dance. It was nice."

"Yeah, it was."

He nodded and smiled, squeezed Alan's hand and ignored how hard it was to turn and walk away. He had things to do, the last couple hours of a very important reception to oversee.

Still, he couldn't shake the wish that tonight he was just another guest.

* * * *

It was nearly two weeks after Darren and Peter's reception before Alan saw Davey again.

There was another wedding to photograph the following weekend, one where one of Davey's assistants was in charge because Davey had two other receptions to deal with on the same day.

However, he had an appointment Thursday afternoon at Davey's to show him the pictures he'd taken from the last few weddings. Each wedding was on a different memory card, all neatly labeled. He and Davey usually went through the cards together, usually deleting about half the selection themselves. Then Davey would make an appointment with the wedding couple to go through what was left and arrange to have the ones they wanted printed up.

They had pictures from four weddings to go through, so Alan showed up early in the afternoon. Davey's office was on the ground floor of a two-story renovated warehouse. The second floor, done loft-style, was where Davey lived and Alan had always been intrigued by the glimpses into Davey's home that were visible over the three foot wall that edged the second floor.

Now that they'd danced he was more curious than ever.

Alan was anxious to see Davey, too. He thought that there had been a mutual attraction thing going on between them, but they hadn't spoken more than a quick call to book today's appointment since Darren and Peter's reception. That had been all business and Alan was a little disheartened. It had taken him almost a year from when he'd first met Davey to

get anything at all going with the man, and now it looked like maybe it was going to be brushed into the back of the closet.

He went through the front door of Pomegranate Weddings, a soft buzzer sounding, alerting Davey to his presence. The man was over in the lounge where a huge oval coffee table held court, containing everything from photography samples to wedding magazines. The centerpiece, a crystal and glass sculpture of an artfully arranged bowl of pomegranates, complete with shiny red seeds spilling out, had been a gift from a grateful bride of a glasswork artist and was Davey's pride and joy.

A young couple sat on one of the leather couches that surrounded the coffee table, laptop open in front of them, a folder in the bride-to-be's hand.

Davey waved him over. "Alan—perfect timing. This is Juan and Anita and I was just telling them all about you."

"You should probably only believe half of it." Alan gave the couple a wink and held out his hand, shaking with first Juan and then Anita. "It's nice to meet you."

"Just give me a minute to finalize a couple of details, Alan, and then I'll be right with you. You know where the coffee is, yes?"

"Sure thing." He nodded at the couple. "You've made the right choice, coming to Davey for your reception. He's the best in the business."

Another nod and Alan made his way deeper into the room. At the far end was Davey's office and the spiral staircase up to his loft home. Before you got that far, though was a bar with stools around it, and a small kitchen area beyond that.

This was where Davey would have his clients sample everything from appetizers to drinks to the wedding cake.

Alan pulled down a glass and poured himself a cup of the expensive coffee Davey served, and grabbed a piece of cake from the bottom of the fridge. He knew Davey kept the no longer servable, but still edible food on the bottom shelf for staff. The cake he'd pulled out was vanilla with a butter cream frosting. It was just barely pink, which he knew meant it was Davey's signature pomegranate cake. There were a few pomegranate seeds decorating the top, as well, and several on the plate beside the cake in an artful arrangement.

Taking it and his coffee to the bar top, he settled on one of the stools and kept his moans of delight silent. Luc made amazing cake. It was one of the reasons why Davey's business was doing so well—he had a knack for finding people who were extremely good at what they did and he not only hired them on, but he kept them happy and loyal.

Just like him.

He watched as Davey finished up with the couple, shaking hands and exuding nothing but confidence and capability. And flaming like the fussy queer he was. It was a part of his attraction for Alan. An attraction he'd thought he'd finally confirmed was mutual at Darren and Peter's wedding, but now ... he wasn't so sure.

Davey locked the door behind Juan and Anita and quickly neaten up the coffee table before grabbing the laptop in one hand and a pair of coffee mugs in the other. "You're my last appointment of the day," Davey told him with a smile as he left the laptop on the bar and went to set the mugs in the

sink. "They've both got big families and they're going to spend a fortune on their wedding. They want it big and elegant and baroque—it's going to be a blast to set up!"

Alan hid his smile in his coffee cup. There was the other reason why Davey was doing so well. He loved what he did with a passion. Small or large, Davey loved making things beautiful, he loved taking what was to most people a big mess and organizing it, making everything run like clockwork. The man was anal retentive to the max and had found a way to make it work for him.

Pouring himself a cup of coffee, Davey grabbed a fork and came over. "You don't mind if I steal a bite, do you?"

He pushed his plate over to sit between them; he didn't mind sharing with Davey at all. "Of course not. There's a bunch on the staff shelf in the fridge, though."

Davey nodded and took a tiny little bite, making it last in his mouth for a lot longer than Alan would have thought possible. "I've been indulging far too much lately and I hate the gym, so I need to cut back."

Alan looked Davey up and down and shook his head. He couldn't see a need for it—Davey was still as slender as the day he'd first met the man. "You look good to me."

"Thank you." Davey preened a little and Alan could see it wasn't a showy preen, it was honest. It was the first indication he'd had that maybe he hadn't been imagining things at Darren and Peter's wedding.

He gave Davey a warm smile. Davey gave him an equally warm smile back.

Hand landing on his, Davey squeezed briefly. "We'll talk after we've taken care of business, okay?"

"Yeah, that works for me." After all, Davey had not only said Alan was the last appointment of the day, the man had locked the front door.

* * * *

They spent just over three hours going through all the pictures and transferring the good shots onto disks for the clients, leaving Darren and Peter's wedding for last. Davey worked very hard at ignoring the way his body wanted to get to the personal business now, thank you very much. Instead, he concentrated on choosing the best possible packages for his clients.

It wasn't an easy task, either. Alan was good enough that there were very few really throw-away shots. Some of the clients wanted to stick to traditional stuff, and it was easier to pull their packages together as anything too artsy or different was automatically rejected from the client package. For several of the clients, he and Alan put together two or three packages and the clients could pick the one they wanted. Some clients wanted to make their own albums, others wanted Alan to print their selections up for them, and Davey noted which ones fell into which categories and made notes to follow up with Alan after speaking to certain clients.

Davey was going to put together a photo album for Darren and Peter as a part of his gift to them, so he was running several lists—one for the pictures he wanted Alan do up, the other for the CD going straight to Darren and Paul. As a

result, they were going through those pictures fairly slowly, because Davey wanted to make sure he had exactly the right shots for the album.

"Oh," he said suddenly as they came to a group of six or so shots of himself at the wedding ceremony itself. He hadn't realized that Alan was shooting him at the time, so his body language and expression were completely natural as he greeted Darren and Peter as husband and husband for the first time.

Alan was very good and all his pictures managed to capture something of the subjects whether he knew them or not, but these half dozen photographs of Davey had captured something else as well. Davey could tell that the photographer of these pictures cared for his subject.

"Damn, I meant to take those out before we went through them."

He shot Alan a look. "Why?"

"Well ... because they're..." Alan's voice faded away as he scrolled through the photographs in question.

"Because..." Davey prompted.

"They're personal."

Well, if he hadn't been sure about Alan's feelings and the emotions he was picking up in the photographs, that was confirmation.

"We can take them out of the package for Darren and Paul if you want, but I'd like to have copies for myself. It's obvious the photographer does excellent work." He met Alan's eyes. "You've made me look beautiful."

"You are beautiful. Especially when you're happy like that. It just shines through you."

"I..." He needed to get this last set of photographs finished so he could give the CD and the album Alan would put together for him to Darren and Peter when they came back from their honeymoon at the end of the month. "We should finish this now."

"We should. Then it's done and we have the rest of the day with no commitments." Alan hadn't turned back to the slideshow on the laptop, yet.

Of course neither had he. And if Alan didn't stop looking at him like that he was going to forget all about the work they had to do. He shook himself and they turned back to the photographs together, breaking eye contact.

Davey was smiling, though, as he worked, and it was easier to pick out the photographs he wanted for Darren and Peter's album. He just chose the ones that looked how he felt.

* * * *

Alan had to admire Davey's ability to focus. He was only half paying attention to the pictures scrolling by on the laptop, whereas Davey was making notes, putting together both a CD collection and a list of which photographs Alan would print up and put together in an album.

Of course it might have been more flattering if Davey was having as much trouble paying attention to the job at hand as he was. As it was, by the time they were done, he was starting to think he'd been imagining things again. Surely no one was that good at compartmentalizing, not even Davey.

He'd thought, for a long minute or two, when Davey had first seen the photographs of himself, full of joy and happiness, gorgeous with it, in fact, that they were finally going to get to that talk. Or, well, maybe more get to what came after the talking. He'd been halfway to leaning in to steal a kiss when Davey had redirected him back to the pictures. Business before pleasure. Easy enough for Davey to say, obviously, Alan was having a lot more trouble focusing on the work when the pleasure was right there in front of him, tempting him, tantalizing him.

Davey poked him in the ribs with a sharp finger and Alan blinked, cheeks heating as he realized he'd been off in his own world. "Sorry, what was that?"

"I said, I think that's a wrap for now. Unless you have anything else to add. About the pictures," Davey added as Alan opened his mouth.

He snapped it closed again. No, he had nothing more to say about the pictures, the CD collections or anything else. He did, however, have a lot to say about what he wanted to do next.

"Let me just put this away then and shut down the computers and then, if you'd like, I'll take you upstairs and show you my place."

"Yeah, I'd like that. Is there anything I can do to help?" Anything he could do to make shutting the office down go faster?

"You could do the dishes for me, honey. It's just a few cups and your plate."

"Yeah, I can do that." It would not only make things go a little quicker, it would give him something to do instead of just sitting and waiting and imagining all sorts.

Davey bustled around the place, efficiently turning off lights and computers, cleaning up, and giving the front space a good sweeping, while Alan took his time washing and drying the few dishes. They wound up being finished at the same time, Davey helping him put the dishes away into the little cupboards the kitchen boasted and then they were done. All the work stuff that could be done had been done and he found himself leaning closer.

Davey's fingers slid across his lips, stopping him in his tracks. "Not here. Upstairs. In my home."

His protest died on his lips as Davey took his hand and led him to the back where the stairs were. As they climbed them, he once again found himself checking out Davey's ass. It really was a fine ass, there was no doubt about that. Unlike when they were on the job, though, Davey called him on it this time.

"I know what you're doing, Alan."

"Undressing you with my eyes?"

Davey laughed and turned at the top of the stairs, looking down at him. "Save your eyes the strain and use your fingers." The words might have been teasing in nature, but Davey's eyes and voice were deadly serious.

"Not on the stairs." He could just imagine the headlines—lovers killed in stairway tumble at wedding planner's. It would ruin Davey's reputation. He grinned and pushed up the rest of

the way, pushing Davey right along with him up the last couple of step. "Besides, you promised me a tour."

"I did?"

"Yes. I want to see where you live. Save the bedroom for last, though."

"I like the way you think." Davey smiled at him from beneath blond lashes, and Alan grinned. Davey was such a pretty flirt, and today, the flirting was going somewhere.

Davey showed him the whole apartment. There were huge windows and a skylight in the living room, and Davey had big, dark furniture that made a nice counterpoint to the light flooding into the place. Everything looked new and chic, but also comfortable. It looked live-in-able. The kitchen was down the hall from the living room and Alan just gave it a cursory glance, noting the copious amount of counter space and knowing that Davey had to have all sorts of chef toys as Luc did a lot of cooking here. There was an ample bathroom just beyond the kitchen, a commode, a sink, and a sizeable vanity with a mirror over it and a single chair in front of it.

The bedroom was far more interesting to Alan just now, though he was trying very hard not to just wait for the chance to jump Davey's bones. But he'd been mooning after the man for nearly a year now, and his body was more than convinced that that so counted as foreplay.

"I've been waiting for months to get into your pants," he told Davey, face immediately heating as he realized what had just come out of his mouth. "Your bedroom. I meant your bedroom, really. I've been waiting for months to get into your bedroom."

Davey sniggered. "They're basically the same thing, though, aren't they?"

"Well. Maybe," he muttered, looking around to avoid having to look Davey in the eye.

This was another large room, again very airy because of the floor to ceiling windows and another skylight. However, these windows had navy cotton curtains for privacy and the skylight was frosted so it let in the light, but didn't let anyone see in. "Wow, it's really bright."

"It is. Do you want to see what this button does?" Davey asked, eyes twinkling as his fingers hovered over a little panel with a couple of buttons.

"Uh ... sure?"

Davey laughed and pressed the button. A low motorized sound started up and Alan's eyes were drawn up to the skylight where a cover was being drawn in place on moving rods. In no time the light from the ceiling had been blocked entirely. There was still enough light to see by coming in through the dark blinds, but without the bright coming in from the skylight, the room was much darker. Much more intimate.

"Oh, nice." He definitely approved. Especially of the current mood lighting.

Davey must have thought so, too, because he went over to the elaborate shelving unit behind the bed and turned on his iPod, which was docked in the middle of a pair of speakers. The music was soft and gentle. Perfect for a seduction.

"The master bath is truly amazing, but I'm thinking I can give you the tour in there later after you've had a thorough tour of the bed ... room."

"I thought we were going to talk about things," Alan teased, heading straight for Davey and the bed behind him. It looked like it was a king size bed, the comforter a dark navy that matched the curtains, the pillow shams the same. It looked like it would make a nice landing spot.

"Talking's overrated," Davey answered, watching him get closer.

"It is." He stopped when they were toe to toe, smiling into Davey's eyes.

They stood like that, just staring at each other for the longest time. Alan wanted to lean forward and take the kiss Davey so obviously wanted him to have, but he didn't move and neither did Davey. The moment held and then stretched and finally Davey's hands slid up his chest to curl around his shoulders.

"I think I've been waiting for this moment for so long, I don't know how to move past it," murmured Davey.

"How long?" Alan asked. He had to know.

Davey shrugged. "Oh, I could have easily jumped your bones the first day we met, but our first post-wedding meeting sealed the deal for me."

Alan groaned. He'd been swept away from the start, too. They'd wasted so much time. "Why didn't you do anything about it?"

"Because we're work colleagues, and friends now, too, I would hope. It never seemed to be the right time to risk

either of those." Davey's hands opened and closed on his shoulders.

"And now?"

"Cat's out of the bag now, isn't it? And I promise you that getting Puss back into the bag is usually far more work than it's worth."

Alan laughed at Davey's metaphor. The man was right, though. Maybe they'd both been waiting for the right time.

And now it was here.

He closed the distance between their lips, the moment where all the waiting, the anticipation, the build up finally here.

Davey met him halfway.

* * * *

Alan's lips pressed against his and Davey breathed a sigh, his lips parting, letting Alan in.

He'd thought about this, fantasized about it, many times. Mostly in his custom built shower with one hand on his prick, the other tweaking his nipples and sliding down to cup his balls. He'd thought about it for months, nearly a year. And now it was happening.

It was funny how some things were better than you imagined, and others weren't nearly as good. You never knew which way they were going to tumble, either, although it often seemed that the more you'd imagined it, the less the reality matched or lived up to the fantasy.

Kissing Alan was way better than anything he could have imagined.

Alan's lips were warm against his, tongue hot as it slid into his mouth. Firm, but pliable, the kiss wasn't in any way one-sided, they were both participants. He'd never imagined how Alan might taste like coffee and cake, the sweet sugar and butter cream married to the sharper, bright taste of the pomegranate seeds. Alan tasted of something else, too, down below the coffee and cake flavors. And it was that taste that settled in Davey's belly and made his cock swell even harder than it already was. It was the taste of Alan himself, something male and heavy, and colored with wanting. Davey could get used to that taste.

And he'd never imagined how Alan would smell. He hadn't really noticed it when they'd danced at the wedding—there were so many other smells and things going on—but now, in the quiet and stillness of his bedroom, he could smell Alan. The scent was similar to Alan's taste, but lighter, softer, and it went straight to his gut, making him want. He wanted to see if Alan smelled different or just *more* when they made love, and after.

Alan's fingers found the buttons of his shirt and started to work them open. The air was cool against his skin, but Alan's questing fingers soon warmed him up, sliding over him as he was bared. It was a slow, thorough process that soon had him moaning into their kisses and rubbing his lower body against Alan's, trying to encourage the man to go faster. Alan didn't, though, his pace remained torturously slow, fingertips testing every inch of his skin.

Davey's nipples drew up tight as Alan's fingertips slipped by them, and he moaned, begged. "Please. Touch me."

"I am touching you."

"No. My nipples. Please. You're teasing."

Alan grinned and rubbed his nipples a little harder, making them ache, a zing of pleasure shooting from both little nubs to his balls. "You're sensitive."

"Sensitive enough. God, Alan, can we just rip each other's clothes off and hump like mad things? We can do it slower later."

"Is that what you want to do?"

"God, yes!"

Alan laughed and pushed his shirt off his shoulders in short order, tugging the tails out of his pants and tossing it over his shoulder. Grinning, Davey returned the favor, getting distracted as soon as he had Alan's chest bare. Nice muscles and pretty nipples that were as hard as his own, and six pack of abs. They all drew his fingers and made him forget to push Alan's shirt right off.

Luckily, Alan was more with it, shrugging off his own shirt before starting in on Davey's belt buckle. When Alan had him down to his boxers, Davey returned the favor, and they wound up being naked around the same time.

Oh, Alan was beautiful and Davey felt his breath catch in his throat, hand reaching out to trace muscles and slowly work its way down. They both groaned as his hand wrapped around Alan's prick. It felt hot and silky, like fire in his hand and against his palm. And he could smell it, smell the way Alan wanted him. It made the male, musky smell stronger, deeper.

Groaning, he kissed Alan again, taking Alan's tongue into his mouth and sucking as Alan's hips pushed the hard cock through the tunnel of his hand. Then Alan's hand wrapped around his cock and Davey cried out, everything disappearing, everything but his cock and Alan's cock and their hands.

Their hands bumped and pushed as they stroked and Alan's hand opened, brought both their cocks together. Davey slid his hand around both of them, too, and together they jacked both cocks off. It felt amazing, pleasure zinging along his cock and shooting up and down his spine. He could feel the amazing heat of Alan's prick as it was squeezed against his, the silk of their skin gliding smooth and easy together with just enough friction to make him crazy.

He held onto Alan with his free hand, arm wrapped around Alan's shoulder, fingers digging into skin. His kisses lost focus, and he started to jerk, his body giving in to how good it all felt. He tried to warn Alan, but he could only gasp, and then, eyes wide, he was coming, heat spraying up over their hands, their cocks suddenly slick and easy in their double grasp.

Alan groaned, hips moving faster and Davey squeezed tight as he could, thumb sweeping over the tip of Alan's prick every time it pushed by. It wasn't long before Alan's cry rang out in his bedroom, that smell of man and musk and need increasing, suddenly so much stronger, strong enough to fill his room with the smell of the two of them mixed together.

He melted against Alan, still panting for breath, his hand slowly letting go of their cocks to dangle against Alan's thigh.

"Mmmphr."

He looked up at Alan. "What?"

"I said that was really good."

Davey laughed. "You did not!"

"Sure I did."

"There's no way that noise was long enough to be that."

"You're a smart guy—use your imagination."

Still laughing, Davey pushed Alan onto his bed, effectively ending the argument by following Alan down and kissing him senseless. More senseless. Whatever, he was kissing Alan and neither of them could talk and it totally didn't matter what Alan had tried to say, only that they were both here and naked and in bed.

* * * *

They necked for ages, bodies wrapped together, hands sliding on skin. Alan got to start up his explorations again, discovering what spots made Davey shiver with excitement, which ones made him laugh. The urgency had faded with their orgasms, and they took their time building it up again.

Soft kisses let him taste Davey's mouth and neck and shoulders. They shared breath back and forth until he felt lightheaded. It made him laugh—he was just so happy to be here with Davey, to finally be in Davey's bed with the man himself instead of in his own bed fantasizing.

The quiet pace began to speed once he rolled on top of Davey, grinding their hips together. It felt so good to have Davey's silky skin beneath him, to have Davey bucking up

into him. It wasn't long before they were rocking hard together, their cocks sliding against each other's bellies.

Groaning, Alan rolled again, putting Davey on top of him, grabbing that sexy ass in both hands and squeezing. Davey cried out and ground down against him. He met each movement, gasping as he got closer, his balls drawing up. His cry came seconds after Davey's, their come spreading out between them, slicking their bellies.

Alan collapsed back onto the bed, groaning as he more or less melted into the mattress, his fingers sliding idly over Davey's skin.

"God, that felt amazing. *You* feel amazing."

"Yeah, so do you. We should have done this sooner."

"Well, I won't argue with that." Davey laughed and Alan smiled, loving the sound—he always had, right from the first day they'd gone through his photographs. "But you're here now, and that's what counts."

"Yeah." He wrapped his hands around Davey's head and brought their mouths together again, sharing another long, slow, mind-blowing kiss.

"You'll have to stay, you know," Davey told him as they settled again, Davey next to him, the edge of the navy comforter drawn up over them both.

"Yeah, I'd like to stay."

"No, no—you *have* to."

He chuckled. "What is this—come into my parlor said the spider to the fly?"

Davey shook his head. "Nope. You ate my pomegranates. You know what happened to Persephone, don't you when she ate Hades' pomegranates?"

"She had to stay with him one month for every pomegranate she ate—I've had tons, Davey, way more than six."

"Like I said, you'll have to stay."

Well, that worked for him.

* * * *

One Year Later

Davey finished checking the reception hall, making sure the centerpieces and candles were all in place before nodding. It was ready. Even the statue of Persephone was standing at the back of the cake table, pomegranate seeds spilling out around her feet in an invitation to feast.

Satisfied, he made his way to the kitchen. It smelled divine as soon as he opened the door. Luc was really outdoing himself with this particular menu. The man himself was working over a pot of something, his sous-chefs spread out at various tables. There were appetizers already plated, the mouthwatering morsels beneath cling wrap to keep them fresh. He stole a lamb lollipop, the nutty coating making it crunchy, the flavors blending beautifully in his mouth.

"Davey! Mon dieu, what are you doing here? Out! Out!" Luc brandished his spoon like a sword.

"I'm just making sure that everything's in order." He could tell that it was, Luc was sweating, which meant he was

working hard, but he wasn't yelling, which meant so were his sous-chefs and that nothing had gone terribly wrong.

Luc shook his head. "That's what your assistant is for."

"You know I like to double check things for myself." Some called him anal, but he knew he'd built his business on attention to detail.

"Oui, I know this. But this is *your* wedding. How do you think Alan would feel if he knew you were here instead of getting ready to marry?"

"He wouldn't be surprised at all."

Davey whirled around at the sound of Alan's voice. "What are you doing here? You're supposed to be at the carriage house, getting ready."

Alan held out his arms. "I knew you'd be here and besides, look at me—I am ready. And the same could be said of you."

Davey did look. Alan looked amazing, in a dark grey morning coat with a white shirt and a cravat the color of pomegranates. Davey shook his head, keeping his focus on the conversation—it wasn't like he could jump Alan until before they got to the hotel anyway. "*I* am not supposed to be at the carriage house."

Alan chuckled. "No, babe, but you are supposed to be at the main house, making yourself handsomer than ever. For me. Not down here micromanaging. Lisa knows what she's doing."

"I *had* to check, Alan. I had to."

"I know. That's why I came down—to bring you back to where you should be." Alan's arm slid around his shoulders,

turning him away from the kitchen and leading him back out through the reception hall and outside.

It was a glorious day, the sky was clear and so blue, the sun shining down warmly, but not too hot. There were flowers everywhere, the trees casting shade on the rows of chairs that waited for their guests. A light breeze blew up, enough to keep things cool, but not enough make anyone cold or blow anything out of place—even Mother Nature was co-operating with his plans today.

"Did you really come down just to keep me from micromanaging?" He wasn't sure if that put him out or not.

"No, that was just a bonus." Alan winked and led him over to a bench on the path back to the main house. Once they were both sitting, Alan took something out of his breast pocket. "I wanted to give you this."

"Oh, Alan! I thought we were going to exchange our gifts tonight! Yours is in my bag—at the hotel." No fair. They were supposed to exchange gift together.

"It's all right, babe. I kind of wanted you to have this to wear for the ceremony."

Davey took the blue velvet box from Alan. It wasn't the right shape for a ring, it was much too long for that. He shook it, speculating. A bracelet perhaps. Or a necklace. Rather girly for a wedding gift for one of the *grooms*.

"Just open it," laughed Alan.

So he did, his breath catching as he saw the heavy silver—definitely masculine—chain and the red garnet, shaped like a pomegranate, that hung from the necklace. "It's stunning." He looked up into Alan's eyes. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." Alan took it out of the box and slid it around his neck, fastening the chain closed. "Someone once told me that garnets are for love and constancy and make a good gem for marriage gifts."

Davey smiled, fingers stroking the smooth gem at his throat. He would have been the one to tell Alan that. He could go on for hours, talking about weddings and all things related. He'd never been sure Alan was always paying attention. But obviously Alan had been listening.

"You really love me," he murmured.

"I adore you, Davey. And of course I love you—you think I asked you to marry me just so you would have another reception to plan?"

He hugged Alan tight. "I love you, too."

"I know. Now go on and get dressed. After all your fussing, you'd better not be late to your own wedding."

Laughing, Davey hurried up to the house. Alan had a point. And if he made his lover wait, he would never hear the end of it. There would be jokes and reminders from Alan for the rest of his life.

The rest of his life. He did like the way that sounded.

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