

AROUND *the* WORLD



JADE
FALCONER

Around the World
by Jade Falconer

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Around the World

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by Jade Falconer

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Stephan strained to look out the streaked window as the cab inched down the road. Traffic seemed unusually bad for this time of day. "What's the holdup?" he asked the driver. He was annoyed after meeting with his publisher and hearing of the delay of his latest book release, and out of sorts—of course—because of Gary.

"Some bloody idiot's double parked, looks like they're unloading something," the cab driver complained.

Stephan sighed, finally glimpsing the problem. "It's right in front of my building. I'll walk from here." He paid the driver and got out, grabbing his briefcase.

He walked down the sidewalk, watching the scene. A tiny red car was parked haphazardly, with several young men gathered around, pulling out boxes.

A young man with fluorescent orange hair took two steps backwards, reeling from the weight of a particularly large box, and nearly fell right on top of Stephan. "Oh, sorry," he said in a soft, sweet voice.

Stephan automatically reached out to steady him, one hand on the box. The young man was tiny, and the box looked like it weighed more than he did. His hair clashed with his red jeans, and his thin, wiry arms emerged from a loose shirt with the arms cut out. His face was pretty in an elfin sort of way. "Are you all right?" Stephan asked with concern.

The young man stared levelly into Stephan's eyes for a long moment. "Yes. Thanks. I'm fine. Just clumsy. Do you live here, too?" he asked.

The look in the boy's eyes made Stephan's breath hitch. He must be imagining things. "Yes. You're moving in?" he said, realising it was an unnecessary question.

Patrick smiled. "Yeah. I'm renting a room from Stanley. On the second floor? I'd offer a hand but they're full at the moment. I'm Patrick. Nice to meet you."

Stephan couldn't help but smile back. Patrick was really adorable. And half his age. He reined in any inappropriate thoughts with effort. "I'm Stephan," he said warmly. "I'm on the fourth floor."

"So we're neighbours. I'd love to chat, but I've got to get my things inside before it rains. Maybe I can come borrow a cup of sugar later," he said with a smirk.

Stephan raised an eyebrow. The young man was certainly charming, but he was sure he'd never see him again, unless in passing. "Anytime. Flat 4B. I have lots of sugar." He stepped back and held the door open for him. He tried not to ogle the boy's ass in the tight pants.

Patrick gave Stephan one last sweet smile over his shoulder before he struggled through the door.

Stephan held the door until Patrick had gone in and disappeared. He sighed and went up to his flat. It was foolish to think of Patrick, but with his current mood he couldn't help it. The boy was almost certainly gay, but what would such a pretty young thing want with an old man like him? Even Gary, who had been his age, had left him for someone younger.

He wandered around his large and much too empty flat. All of Gary's things were gone, and the empty spaces made him remember more than he wanted. It wasn't as if he hadn't

seen it coming, though. They'd been drifting apart for at least a year. But, endings were always sad.

* * * *

Later that same evening, there came a tap on Stephan's door.

Stephan frowned. He hadn't expected anyone. He saved the document on his laptop and got up. He walked to the door and opened it.

Patrick stood in the doorway, holding a wineglass in one hand. "Hello again. So sorry to bother you, but I'm having a completely brilliant room warming..." He paused to make somewhat awkward air quotes, "party, featuring some lovely homemade pasta, and a rather large vat of Chianti, and I wondered if I could entice you," he said.

Patrick was breathtaking, clearly tipsy and swaying a little on his feet, his loose shirt hanging off one pristinely white shoulder. Stephan's heart raced, and though he knew he'd be completely out of place he was not about to refuse his new neighbour. "Well, I'm afraid I have no appropriate room warming gift at such late notice, but you'll have to let me return the favor of dinner sometime soon," he replied, running a hand through his perpetually mussed hair.

Patrick beamed at him. "Much as I would be thrilled to have dinner with you, please don't feel obliged. But come along. There's just a few people. Stanley and his girlfriend, and the blokes who helped me move." He reached out and took Stephan's hand.

Though Stephan knew he'd be woefully out of place among the twenty-somethings, he was already too smitten with this sweet bohemian young man to refuse. After all, it was the neighbourly thing to do, and Gary always told him he was too insular. He pushed thoughts of his ex out of his mind and took Patrick's hand. "Can I bring anything at all? More wine?"

"Some of us do have to work in the morning, you know. Please, don't trouble yourself. All we need is that voice of yours. Well, I say 'we' but it's essentially 'me,' so I hope you don't get your hopes up. The rest of them are glued to the Xbox."

Stephan raised an eyebrow. "My voice?" he said. He'd never really thought about it before. He did do some speaking engagements to promote his books, but he wasn't a trained speaker. He let Patrick lead him to the elevator.

Patrick tucked his hand into the crook of Stephan's elbow. "It's lovely. But I'm sure you hear that all the time, yeah?"

Stephan wondered if Patrick knew what dirty thoughts he gave him with just this innocent contact. "Not particularly, no," he answered. "But thank you." The boy was beautiful and flattering. He was doomed.

When they reached the second floor, Patrick slipped out and led the way down the narrow hall to his door. "Now, I'm not a chef or anything, but I am quite good at pasta, and if not, I hope you won't tell me how awful I am, right?" he asked, holding the door open for Stephan.

"I will be the very soul of discretion," Stephan assured him as he walked in. "Besides, I know better than to criticise." He smiled at Patrick. The boy was adorable and sexy at the same

time, and so charming. He sighed mentally. If he was only twenty years younger...

Patrick waited for Stephan to pass, then he took the other man's hand again and tugged him into the kitchen with him. As they passed the sitting room, he called out, "Heyo, Stephan is here. Everyone come be polite some time when you're done with your game," at the small cluster sitting on the couch, collective gazes locked on the television set. Patrick slipped into the kitchen and put his glass down, getting out a clean one. "Wine?" he asked.

"Please," Stephan nodded, hoping he wasn't gazing at the boy too much. "Are they truly ignoring your culinary creation for video games?"

Patrick poured a glass of Chianti for Stephan and topped his own off. He shrugged his slender shoulders. "They're tired. It was a long day." He turned and held out the glass to him. "Which is why it's your job to entertain me now," he said with a wink.

Stephan accepted the glass with a rueful smile. "I'm afraid I'm rather boring," he said. "But, I must toast a welcome to you in your new home." He held up his glass, wondering just how he'd become lucky enough to have Patrick to himself for a few moments.

Patrick grinned. "Oh, I doubt that. Anyway, here's to new friends," he said.

"New friends," Stephan agreed, touching his glass to Patrick's. He sipped at it, keeping his gaze on the younger man. The wine warmed him, and he reminded himself to not drink too much lest he do something foolish.

Patrick took a sip, then put his glass down again to get out a couple of plates. He had to stretch to reach them in the cabinet. "Stan's a bloody giant," he grumbled.

Stephan almost groaned as he watched Patrick. His shirt rode up and his cute little ass stuck out and ... the boy was clearly trying to kill him. He stepped closer behind him and said, "Can I help?" he realised his voice was even deeper than usual, because he was getting aroused.

"There's paper plates on the table," another voice said from the doorway.

Patrick turned to face Stephan, cheeks coloring. "Oh," he said. He looked over at Stanley, who was inspecting the contents of the fridge, then turned his attention back to Stephan. "So there you are," he said, pointing to the paper plates on the small table.

Stephan couldn't help but be a little disappointed that they were no longer alone, but he smiled warmly at Stanley.

"Hello, neighbour. How have you been?"

Stanley's head popped up from behind the fridge door. "Cheers, Stephan. I'm good, and yourself?"

Patrick got two plates and started filling them with pasta from the serving dish.

With a glance at Patrick, Stephan shrugged. "Well, you know, same old. Things are looking up." He knew it was foolish to even hope, but he couldn't help it. At least Patrick provided some attractive scenery.

Patrick smiled and stepped close again, holding out a plateful of ziti and a fork. "Stanley's just relieved he's getting out of half his rent." He leaned close to speak in Stephan's

ear, but loud enough for Stanley to hear as well. "Without having to make his girlfriend move in."

Stephan tried to repress the shiver that Patrick's warm breath gave him. "A devious plan," he grinned. "Stanley is a smart man." And he was quite happy that Stanley had such lovely friends.

"Shhh!" Stanley said, popping open a bottle of beer and sauntering past. "She's in the other room," he said, punching Patrick in the shoulder. He wandered back out to the living room.

Patrick laughed and got his own plate, leaning back against the counter.

"How do you know Stanley?" Stephan asked, hoping to learn more about Patrick. He took a bite and made appreciative sounds. It was delicious.

Patrick swallowed. "Oh, Lisa works at the salon with me, so that's how I met Stan." He took a sip of wine before taking another bite of food. "She taught me everything I know about toe hair," he said, nodding.

Stephan laughed. Patrick was more adorable by the moment. "So you're a hairdresser?" he asked. It made sense, given the hair color.

"Mmm, not exactly," he said with a sheepish smile. "I suppose in a sense. Dog groomer. And artist. Part-time dog groomer. Bills and all that, you know." He put his plate aside and picked up his wine. "What do you do, Stephan?"

Stephan could actually picture Patrick, wrestling with some old lady's spoiled poodle, and he snickered.

"I'm a writer. I write travel books, mostly."

"Ooh, a writer! That's exotic. Where's your favorite place to travel, then?" he asked. He hoisted himself up onto the counter, swinging his feet as he tipped his glass back again.

Stephan leaned back against the opposite counter. "Well, I quite liked India," he began. "At least you can get a proper cup of tea." He considered. "My favorite place, though, is probably the Maldives."

Patrick put his glass down and leaned back on his hands. "It sounds brilliant. I've never been further than Calais," he said with a sigh. "I'd love to hear all about it. Or see photos."

"I've got plenty of pictures," Stephan assured him. He knew it sounded like a glamorous job, and most of the time it was great. "Sometime you'll have to come over and I'll take you round the world."

Patrick wiggled his eyebrows suggestively. "Sounds lovely. I'll hold you to it." He slid down from the counter and refilled his wine glass. "More?" he asked.

"Please," Stephan said, knowing he shouldn't and holding out his glass anyway. He was quite happy he'd met Patrick; he was going to have some lovely fantasies about him. "The pasta is excellent, by the way." But the company was better.

Patrick poured Stephan another glass. "Do you do a lot of working from home?" he asked. "Other than when you're travelling, I mean?"

Stephan nodded. "When I'm not travelling, I write," he said, sipping at the wine. "As I am now. So I'm home a lot if you ever need sugar." He couldn't quite believe he was flirting with this boy. He was a fool.

Patrick smiled. "I do have a terrible sweet tooth. I only work part-time, so I'm home a lot as well." He took another drink of wine. "I'm getting a little tipsy," he said, covering his mouth with a hand. "Oh, but I didn't even show you my actual room! The reason for the party to begin with!"

"Oh, yes, please. I'd love a tour," Stephan purred. The wine was getting to him as well, and he knew he'd have to watch himself carefully. But he'd much rather watch Patrick.

Patrick tossed back the last of his wine and put the glass down decisively. "Right. I'll stop being an awful host and welcome you properly to my home," he said, expression serious. He took Stephan's hand and tugged him through the doorway to the hall. He pushed open the first door to reveal a tiny bedroom that just barely contained a full-sized bed. It was made up with a purple velvet bedspread and multiple throw pillows shaped like somewhat amorphous monster-like creatures. Beside the bed there was a table and lamp, and many boxes stacked on the floor in various stages of being emptied. Patrick held open his arms to encompass the room. "Voila!" he said with a bow. "Someday it shall grow up to be a proper room, and we shall all be so proud," he said, pretending to wipe a tear from his eye.

"I love what you've done to the place," Stephan said, looking around. "Very ... purple." Being in a tiny room with a bed turned his thoughts sexual, though, and he hoped it didn't show in his expression or voice.

"It needed a little color, so of course I gave it a lot." He turned to Stephan. "Not much of a tour, I'm afraid. But the price is right."

Stephan's breath caught. The room was tiny, so they were very close. Patrick was ethereally beautiful and if he was twenty, even ten years younger he'd have taken a chance. But he was old enough to be his father, and he didn't feel like making a fool of himself. "Welcome to the neighbourhood," he said.

Patrick's eyes widened slightly, and his face flushed. "Thanks, Stephan. I'm glad I nearly fell on top of you."

Stephan was torn. The signals all seemed to indicate Patrick was into him. But it just wasn't possible. He was far too old for such a pretty young thing. "It was destiny," he joked, moving fractionally closer.

Patrick grinned and pressed his hand lightly against Stephan's chest. "After you know me a few weeks, you'll realise that there's nothing particularly miraculous about me almost falling."

Stephan bit back a whimper. Patrick was going to kill him, teasing him so unknowingly. "On the contrary," he said hoarsely. "You seem quite graceful to me."

Patrick patted his shoulder. "You'll see, I'm sure. Either way, the important thing is that we've met." He smiled sweetly at Stephan.

"Absolutely. And I do hope you'll come and visit a lot. I do get bored when I get writer's block. Perhaps you'll inspire me." He knew Patrick did inspire him, but not to write about travel.

"You'll regret that invitation. You won't be able to get rid of me now." He sat on the edge of the mattress, stretching his legs out in front of him, ankles crossed.

Stephan paled at the image of the pretty young man on the bed. He had inappropriate thoughts again. "Really. Any time you like," he said, though he was sure Patrick would never take him up on it. He had to get out of there before he made an even bigger fool of himself. "But it's getting late. I should be going."

"Oh. Right. Yes. Sorry. Here I am going on about things in my grand castle of a room half the night." He stood again. "I'll pop over tomorrow, maybe. All right?" he asked.

"Definitely," Stephan replied. "Any time at all. Really. I usually welcome a distraction." Especially such an attractive one. "Thank you for dinner."

Patrick smiled sweetly. "It was nothing. Maybe we can do it again some time."

"I'd like that," Stephan said honestly. He was so attracted to Patrick it surprised him. "But I'd better not cook for you."

Patrick grinned as he slipped past Stephan to lead him back out of the tiny room. "No chef-like leanings, eh?" he asked.

"No, I'm afraid I defy the stereotypes in that regard at least," Stephan said as he followed the slender man.

Patrick giggled at that. "Oh? And what stereotypes would those be, Stephan?" he asked, batting his eyelashes coquettishly.

Stephan rolled his eyes. "That all gay men know how to cook, decorate and accessorise." He really enjoyed Patrick's company, he realised. "Though I do make a mean margarita."

"Mmm, I love margaritas," Patrick said, turning to face him once they were near the door. "Thank you so much for coming to my dreadful little party."

"Nonsense, it was lovely," Stephan protested. *You're lovely*, he added silently. "See you soon, I hope." He turned to go.

Patrick leaned in the door way. "Very soon," he said quietly. "Good night, Stephan."

Stephan waved and made his way back to his apartment, which suddenly seemed very empty and quiet. He put on some Rachmaninoff and sat down at his computer to write.

* * * *

A couple days later, Stephan was at the computer, outlining his latest book. He hated this part; once he started to write it would flow, but getting started was tedious. He had a pot of spiced chai steeping in the kitchen and the scent soothed him.

There was a firm knock at the door and Stephan frowned. He wasn't expecting any visitors, and the building had a strict no soliciting rule. He almost ignored the knock, but after a moment he sighed and went to the door, opening it.

Patrick's head snapped up when the door opened and he smiled sheepishly. "Um, have I come at a bad time?"

A smile sprang to Stephan's face at the sight of the pretty man. "Not at all," he said warmly. "Please come in and save me from my boredom." He stepped back to invite him in.

"I'm not sure I can offer anything more exciting than you're already up to." He stepped inside hesitantly. "Are you sure I'm not intruding?"

"Not at all! And I believe I promised you a trip around the world," Stephan replied. The very sight of the delicate young man made him feel happy, and he knew he was indeed a foolish old man.

Patrick stepped inside with a bounce. "I hoped you'd say that." He paused just inside the door to gape at the interior of the flat. "Oh, wow. You've done a lot better than we have," he breathed.

Stephan glanced around. His flat was much larger than Patrick's, and it was furnished with antiques and mementoes of his travels. "Thank you, but then again I've been at it a bit longer." He hated the reminder of how much older he was than Patrick, but hopefully that would forestall any silly notions in his own head.

"Oh, well, maybe there's hope for me yet, then, hm?" He lingered over a long table covered with framed photos. There was one of Stephan and another man embracing. Patrick picked it up. "Is this your ex?" he asked quietly.

"Yes. Part of me wanted to throw the pictures away, but, in the end I decided that would be childish. We did have a lot of good times." He tried not to sound wistful and pathetic.

"Were you together a long time, then?"

"Seven years," Stephan said. "How typical, yes? The seven-year itch is a true phenomenon."

Patrick's eyes widened. "Wow. Long time," he said. He put the photo down and turned to Stephan, running his finger

along the edge of the table. "What happened?" he asked. "And if you want to tell me to fuck off, please do. I'm just curious."

Stephan shrugged. He didn't know why, but he didn't mind telling Patrick. "Short version? Greener pastures. Younger man. I travel too much." He turned away, feeling old.

Patrick blinked. "You mean he left you?" he asked, sounding astonished. "Oh, well, you can do better than that. You should get yourself a younger man," he suggested, smiling.

Stephan snorted. "He'd just think I copied him," he said, shaking his head. "Besides, I'm not exactly a prize. Enough about my sob story. Would you like some chai? I brought it back from India."

"Some chai would be lovely, thanks." Patrick followed him into the kitchen. "Anyway, maybe you're not ready to settle down again so soon, hm?"

"Maybe. I've tried not to dwell too much." He poured them both a cup of fragrant tea. "I saw it coming, actually, so I suppose it was my fault for not doing anything about it."

Patrick nodded slowly. "I haven't really dated in quite a while, either." He accepted the cup and cradled it between long fingers. "It's just so difficult to meet people, you know?"

"Well, yes, people whom you're attracted to, and who share the same inclinations are difficult to find," Stephan agreed, letting his gaze roam over Patrick. He did wear the oddest clothes, but they suited him.

Patrick blushed. "Are you very picky, then? I don't like going to clubs and bars and hooking up with people you don't

know and will never see again. It's so sleazy and disheartening, you know?"

"I've done the bars," Stephan nodded. "Sleazy has its place, but the appeal fades quickly without some depth." He chuckled. "And at this point it's not just that *I'm* picky, I'm afraid," he added ruefully.

"Oh right. I doubt that. I'm sure you could have almost anyone, Stephan. Sophisticated, handsome, intelligent..."

"Oh, stop now, you'll make me blush," Stephan said, feeling suspiciously warm. Surely the boy was just being his usual effusive self. He couldn't mean anything by it.

Patrick smiled shyly. "It's true. I'm sure you would have no trouble finding someone if you wanted to."

Someone. Stephan sighed. Unfortunately, the one he was attracted to wasn't attracted to him. "Yes, I suppose. But I'm meant to be showing you pictures!" he said brightly, changing the subject.

"Yes. I'm ready for my trip around the world now," Patrick said with a wink.

"Right this way," Stephan said with a slight bow, and he led him to his desktop computer. It had a thirty-inch monitor, bigger than many TVs, and he used it to edit his pictures. He pulled up an extra chair and called up the slide show.

Stephan narrated the pictures, telling the stories behind them and enjoying talking to someone for a change. Patrick was just adorable, laughing at his jokes and asking questions. Stephan hoped he wasn't boring him.

Patrick listened to everything raptly. After a couple hours, he put his hand lightly on Stephan's arm. "I'm worried that

you will be too polite to toss me out if you have things to do. It is almost supper time, after all."

Stephan would certainly never kick Patrick out, but he couldn't say that. "Oh dear, you're probably bored out of your pretty skull. And starving. I'm so sorry!"

"No! No, not bored in the slightest! I didn't mean that. Although I could go for something. Maybe you'd be interested in coming down the pub with me for a bite?"

Stephan considered. Was Patrick just being nice, or did he really want to spend more time together? He decided to take it at face value. "Sounds lovely," he answered. "I think I could use a pint as well."

Patrick beamed at him. "Brilliant. Now that we're speaking of it, I'm quite thirsty."

"That's decided then," Stephan nodded happily. "And I'm buying, I'll have no argument."

Patrick sighed. "I shall let you away with it this time, so long as I can buy next time," he said. He stood up and held his hand out for the other man.

Stephan smiled and took Patrick's hand, standing up. "We have a deal," he said, pleased that the other man was already considering a next time. "Shall we?"

Patrick walked ahead of Stephan, slipping out the door. "Is the pub any good? I haven't been there yet," he asked, glancing back at him as he hit the button for the elevator.

Stephan nodded, tearing his gaze away from the boy's firm little ass. "I quite like it. It's quiet, unless there's football on." He wrinkled his nose. He wasn't much of a sports fan.

Patrick giggled. "Right. Not a big fan myself." The door opened and he went inside.

They rode down in the elevator, then walked the few blocks to the pub. Stephan opened the door for Patrick, and the sounds and smells of the pub were enticing.

Patrick pressed through the local crowd. He glanced back at Stephan with a sweet smile. "Near the back?" he asked.

"Perfect," Stephan nodded, following the young man. The pub was an amiable place, frequented by a mixed crowd, and he felt comfortable there.

Patrick slid into an empty booth at the back. He waited for Stephan to sit opposite him and then glanced at the menu. "What's the weirdest thing you've eaten on your travels?" he asked, resting his chin on his hands, elbows on the table.

Stephan considered. "Octopus in Japan was rather unpleasant," he replied. "But one tries to be polite." He hoped Patrick wasn't just being polite in his interest. "Best to not think about what you're actually eating."

"So no live monkey brains or anything like that?" Patrick asked, grinning. "Sorry, my last roommate had the food channel, so I'm a bit of an armchair foodie."

"I've been able to avoid monkey brains, fortunately," he said, but he felt bad that he wasn't quite as exciting as Patrick thought.

The waitress came by and Patrick ordered chicken and mushroom pie and a pint. "I'm morbidly fascinated by that bloke who eats all the scorpions and that deep fried guinea pig thing." He wrinkled his nose. "But *I'd* never eat anything like that."

Their drinks arrived, and Stephan offered a solemn toast: "To never eating monkey brains or scorpions."

Patrick raised his glass. "Here, here," he agreed. He clinked his drink against Stephan's, then took a sip.

The food was hearty and the beer was delicious. The company was the best thing, though. Stephan was vaguely worried he was becoming smitten with Patrick. The boy was just beautiful to him, and he hoped he wasn't just on the rebound.

They chatted about everything and anything until the place started getting too boisterous to be heard. They walked home together, and Patrick lingered by the elevator. "I'm sorry I took up your entire day," he said, leaning one shoulder against the wall.

Stephan was just a bit tipsy, and he'd never seen anyone as appealing as Patrick. He'd never before wished so fervently to be younger. "It was a wonderful day," he said honestly. He wanted nothing more than to invite Patrick up, and ravish him all night long.

"I thought so, too. Maybe we could hang out again some time. Or go to a movie. Or whatever," Patrick said, moving restlessly, shifting his weight.

Stephan's breath hitched. He couldn't be reading those signals right. Patrick was just being nice. But damn, it was tempting. "I'd like that," he said. "Any time you want." He barely restrained himself from suggesting tomorrow.

Patrick bit his lip. "Great. Well, I guess good night then." The elevator arrived and he sighed.

"Sweet dreams," replied Stephan, trying to keep the wistful tone out of his voice. He knew he'd be thinking of Patrick all night.

* * * *

Patrick visited Stephan several times over the next couple of weeks, and they gradually became more comfortable with each other. Patrick stopped at the mailbox one day while Stephan sorted through some envelopes. "Anything good?" he asked, getting out his key.

Stephan tried to ignore the flutter in his stomach at the sight of the younger man. "Mostly junk and bills," he said. Then he noticed a square envelope made of creamy, obviously expensive stock. "Hmm, what's this?" He tore it open and beamed.

Patrick stepped closer and glanced at it curiously. "Someone getting married?"

"Yes, a couple of dear friends of mine. I'm so happy for them." Stephan sighed. He envied them at the same time. He wondered if he'd ever find someone that wanted him like that.

"Ooh, I love weddings! That should be fun, yeah?" he asked, smiling.

Stephan suddenly thought of something. There was no way Gary wasn't going to be there with Johnny in tow. His smile faded as he thought of watching them fawn over each other all night. "Perhaps," he sighed.

Patrick raised his eyebrows. "What's wrong? You seemed so pleased a moment ago."

"My ex will be there, I'm certain. But I suppose I have to see him sometime." He wished he had a pretty boy toy to flaunt, too.

"Ohhh. With his new bloke you mean. Well, you just have to have a hotter date than he does." He nodded.

Then it hit Stephan. It would be perfect. But he couldn't use Patrick that way.

"It's the only thing to do, obviously. You can't let him know he's getting to you, right?" Patrick went on, tilting his head to the side.

Stephan turned to gaze at Patrick. Not only would it show up Gary, it would fulfill his own sick little fantasy. "Patrick, I..."

"Yes, Stephan?" Patrick asked as he batted his eyelashes.

Stephan gazed at the younger man for a moment, then said, "You wouldn't want to..."

Patrick's smirk turned into a grin. "Yes. I even have the perfect suit." He bounced on the balls of his feet.

Stephan relaxed. "Are you sure? I mean, it's a bit childish of me, isn't it?" The thought was incredibly appealing, though.

"How is it childish? People usually bring a date to a wedding, don't they?" he asked.

"It's childish to want to be seen with a gorgeous date," Stephan countered.

Patrick rolled his eyes. "Then I'm childish, too." He pulled his own mail out of his mailbox.

Stephan blinked. He had to remind himself that Patrick was just being nice. "You'd really do that for me?" he asked.

Patrick frowned. "I think you're overstating. It's hardly selfless of me, Stephan."

Stephan couldn't see what Patrick would get out of it, but he was just happy the younger man had accepted. "Well, it's a date then," he nodded. "I trust you'll be ravishing." Patrick always was.

Patrick flipped through his own bills. "I'll go out of my way to be every gay man's fantasy," he said, glancing sideways at Stephan and giving him a wink.

Stephan's mouth dropped open for a moment, then he recovered. "I have every faith in you," he said, his voice a bit hoarse. The boy was going to kill him, but what a way to die! "I'll just go and RSVP then."

Patrick asked Stephan to text him the date and time so he wouldn't forget, and then he smiled and wandered back to his own apartment.

* * * *

The day of the wedding arrived with beautiful clear skies and an unseasonably gentle breeze.

Stephan adjusted his tie as he waited outside Patrick's door. He felt a bit nervous, which was ridiculous. It wasn't a date, not really. Patrick was just being a friend. But yet he couldn't help but feel anticipatory. He also dreaded seeing Gary, but at least he wouldn't be alone.

Patrick pulled open the door with a look of breathless anticipation. He wore a slim cut suit, black with a crisp white shirt, and a skinny black tie. "Hey," he said with a smile, "I'm

ready. I just need my keys." He looked Stephan over from head to toe. "Ooh, very nice."

Stephan felt a surge of lust at the sight of the young man. "You look amazing," he breathed. And the way Patrick looked at him...

Patrick smiled shyly. "Hold that thought." He ducked back into the apartment and returned a moment later. "Okay. I'm completely ready. Lead on."

Stephan led Patrick down to his car and opened the door for him. He didn't often drive, but the wedding was a ways out in the country.

Patrick gasped as he slid into the interior of the sleek black Jaguar. "Oooh, I don't think I've ever ridden in one of these. Is this your car?"

"Well, I generally don't go in for stealing cars, so yes," Stephan smiled, starting the engine. He loved the way Patrick was so thrilled with everything.

Patrick blushed. "Well, you might have hired a car if it was a long drive, you know," he said, sticking his tongue out. "Smarty pants."

Stephan eyed the brief flash of tongue and couldn't help but respond, "Don't tempt me."

Patrick arched an eyebrow as he buckled his seatbelt. "How long will it take to get there?" he asked.

"Depends, as always, on the M25," Stephan answered. "It shouldn't be over an hour or so. I hope you won't be too bored."

Patrick smiled sweetly. "I'm sure not. It's lovely to get away, especially for a wedding. And I love long drives."

"Do you?" Stephan said. "So do I, but not alone. We should go out in the country sometime and, I don't know, have a picnic or something." As soon as he said it, he thought it sounded foolish.

"Oh can we? That would be marvelous," Patrick beamed. "I haven't been on a picnic in ages. It gets so depressing being surrounded by the city *all* the time."

Stephan couldn't help but smile back. "I know just the spot," he said. Suddenly he felt cheerful about the upcoming event. Patrick was just amazing.

They drove and chatted, and the time seemed to fly by.

Eventually they pulled up to their destination. The wedding was to be held in a sweeping old estate with lovely gardens landscaped for photo ops. The parking was valet, and they stopped at the front. Patrick climbed out and waited for Stephan.

Stephan scowled at the valet with distrust as he slid into his car, then said to Patrick, "I hate valet parking."

"I suspect most people with Jaguars do. I certainly would." Patrick waited until Stephan came up beside him, then he followed him in. He leaned close. "You'll have to point out your ex," he said quietly.

"I shall," Stephan promised, holding out his arm to Patrick. He sighed as they entered the vast entrance hall. He wasn't sure this was a great idea after all. Brightly dressed people milled about, holding glasses and bottles and generally looking jovial. Patrick slid his hand into the crook of Stephan's elbow with a sweet smile.

Already, Stephan could feel the eyes on him and Patrick. He knew almost all of these people at least vaguely, and they knew him. He hoped the looks, at least, were not piteous. He smiled and nodded greetings, and waited for the inevitable.

"Stephan?" came a familiar voice. A man about Stephan's age stepped in front of them, swirling a drink in his hand. "I'm so glad you came," he said smoothly.

Stephan had been prepared for any number of emotions, but strangely he didn't seem to feel anything. "Hello, Gary," he said, smiling insincerely. "Lovely to see you." Actually, Gary didn't look all that good. He'd put on a bit of weight. Stephan tried not to be pleased. "Patrick, this is Gary," he said to his date. "Gary, this is a very good friend, Patrick."

Patrick leaned against Stephan's shoulder slightly as he extended his hand out to Gary. "Nice to meet you," he said simply.

Gary's eyebrows crept up, then he smirked as he shook Patrick's hand. He nodded. "Nice to meet you." He turned his gaze back to Stephan. "Intern or something?"

"Date, actually," Stephan said simply, trying his best to betray no emotion whatsoever. He didn't need to.

Gary suppressed a laugh. "Date. My mistake." He patted Stephan on the shoulder. "Did you get a drink? I think Johnny is off at the bar. I can get you something if you like." He looked at Patrick for a moment. "I'm not going get in trouble for giving alcohol to someone underage, am I?" he asked, then grinned. "Just teasing."

Patrick's back stiffened. "I can show you ID if you like."

Stephan was torn between being amused and irritated. He thought perhaps Gary didn't believe Patrick was his date. Maybe he was as transparent as he felt. "We'll get our own drinks, thanks," he said as silkily as he could manage. "I wanted to show Patrick around the place."

Gary nodded. "Right. Well, we're at the same table, so we'll chat in a while. Let me go track down the ball and chain," he said with a wink before he headed off.

Stephan sighed. Why did they have to be at the same table? Clearly someone wasn't paying attention. He smiled at Patrick. "That went well," he said dryly. He hoped the boy wouldn't move away soon. He felt wonderful pressed against him. "I need a drink."

Patrick slid his hand back into Stephan's arm. "Do you think he was so bitchy because he's sad that you're moving on?" he asked.

Stephan snickered. "You think he was bitchy? I think he thought he was being amusing." He steered them toward the bar.

"I don't know who he thought would be amused by implying that you were out on a date with someone under the legal age to drink," Patrick said, pursing his lips slightly. He moved along at Stephan's side, staying close.

"He amuses himself," Stephan said. "And may I say you handled it brilliantly. I think this calls for champagne, yes?"

"Ooh, I love champagne!" he cooed. "You are going to spoil me for normal life."

Stephan was surprised by his immediate reaction to that. He did want to spoil Patrick. "Good," he said quietly, taking the glasses from the bartender and handing one to Patrick.

Patrick held up his glass in an impromptu toast. "To a lovely day in the country, and to making your ex phenomenally jealous."

Stephan couldn't help but grin at the pretty boy. "I couldn't have chosen a better toast," he agreed, tapping his glass against Patrick's. He didn't take his gaze from the younger man as he sipped. He hoped Gary was jealous. He should be. Patrick was beautiful.

Patrick took a sip as well, eyes twinkling evilly. "We need to step it up a little then, don't you think?"

Stephan's heart pounded at the idea of "stepping it up." He wondered if it would mean more contact with Patrick. The other man certainly seemed eager, so he replied, "Absolutely." He wrapped his arm around Patrick's shoulders.

Patrick smiled and leaned into the touch. "Good," he said quietly. "Now, why don't you show me around?"

"A splendid idea," Stephan agreed, and let his hand slip suggestively down Patrick's back as he guided him around the room, introducing him to various people and pointing things out.

Patrick greeted everyone sweetly, hanging onto Stephan's side like they were a couple in the most intimate sense.

Stephan could almost feel Gary's gaze on him as they moved around the room. He was so flattered that Patrick wasn't disgusted by pretending to be with him. He wished he really did have such a sweet, beautiful boy, but for the

moment he could just enjoy the attention. He let his hands wander, hoping he wasn't pushing. But God, did Patrick have a gorgeous body.

When the crowds started drifting out to the rows of seats, arranged outside where the actual ceremony was going to take place, Patrick glanced at Stephan. He turned towards him and pressed his hand lightly to the other man's chest, gazing into his eyes. "Is he watching?" he said quietly.

"Almost certainly," Stephan answered, heart pounding at Patrick's proximity. He could only gaze at him.

"Good," he said, breathy and quiet. He leaned in a bit closer and pressed a light kiss to Stephan's cheek. "Shall we go find our seats?"

The soft kiss took Stephan's breath away and his arm tightened around Patrick's slender waist. "Perhaps he needs just a little more to be jealous of," he said.

Patrick grinned, a laugh bubbling up. "Oh, do you think so?" he asked. Patrick slid one arm around Stephan's shoulders and pressed against his side, other hand still covering Stephan's heart.

"I definitely think so. He's glaring so hard you should be able to feel it." He could see Gary out of the corner of his eye, scowling. His gaze flicked to Patrick's lips, and his hand slipped lower as he decided to go for it. He pressed his lips to the younger man's.

Patrick hummed quietly against Stephan's lips. He melted against him, moving to stand in front of him more, both arms encircling his neck as they kissed.

Stephan almost whimpered, the kiss was so perfect. It felt so real. His body reacted but he tried to suppress it. He leaned back reluctantly, eyes glazed, and smiled.

Patrick licked his lips. "Mm, champagne," he whispered. He didn't pull away. "I think he might have looked away just at the wrong moment."

"Then we must do it again," Stephan said hoarsely. He wanted this beautiful boy so badly, for more than sex. He buried that thought and kissed Patrick again, more aggressively.

Patrick sucked in a breath through his nose and kissed back. His lips parted slightly, and his fingers laced into Stephan's hair.

Stephan moaned. Patrick kissed very well and he wished they were alone. "Wow," he said when he pulled back.

"We should have practiced ahead of time," he said.

Stephan raised an eyebrow. "I don't think you need any practice, my dear," he managed, his voice deeper than usual.

Patrick blushed at that. "No, I just meant we should've been doing this right along, yes?" he said quietly.

Stephan's breath caught. Was it possible that Patrick liked him? That perhaps he wasn't just helping Stephan make an old lover jealous? "Yes, but you might have reacted badly if I'd kissed you immediately after we ran into each other on the street."

"Might have been worth a try," he said breathily. "I've certainly done worse." He winked at Stephan.

Suddenly Stephan wished they were back in his flat, alone. "I wanted to," he admitted. "As soon as I saw you."

The room they were standing in was nearly empty now as the guests were all almost all outside. "Really?" Patrick asked. "I wanted you to."

Stephan glanced around quickly, then pushed Patrick back into a private alcove. "Patrick," he purred. "You're incredibly sexy, and do you have any idea how much I desire you right now?"

Patrick gasped, eyes widening. "I started to believe you weren't interested at all."

"How could I not be interested? God, you're gorgeous." Stephan couldn't resist kissing Patrick again, though he knew they had to join the other guests.

Patrick whimpered, leaned into Stephan's body as they kissed. He leaned closer, opening to him.

Patrick's instant response fueled Stephan's lust, and he pressed the younger man against the wall as he kissed him passionately. Patrick tightened his grip on Stephan's hair. He kissed back more deeply, coaxing Stephan's tongue forward with his own.

It had been a long time since Stephan had been so aroused by kissing, and he felt like he was twenty-one again as he devoured Patrick's mouth. He pressed fully against the younger man, reticence gone as his need took over.

Patrick moaned, wriggling against Stephan. His long, lean body moved restlessly, and finally he had to break the kiss to gasp for breath. "That was lovely. Are we going to miss your friend's wedding?"

"I suppose we should go," Stephan said ruefully. "But what I really want to do is drag you off and ravish you thoroughly." He ran his fingers along Patrick's jaw.

"You're not exactly inspiring me to be good and hurry you along to where you need to be, you know," he said, pressing a quick kiss to Stephan's lips again.

Stephan groaned. This was going to be the longest few hours of his life. "I suppose you're going to torment me with that incredible body as well."

Patrick giggled. "I've been trying for days and days. Are you saying it's working?"

Stephan's eyes widened. "You, you've been trying? What do you mean?" The thought that the sexy young man had been interested all this time was stunning.

Patrick rolled his eyes. "I've only been bothering you every day, parading around in my tightest trousers. What did you think?"

"I thought you were just being yourself," replied Stephan. "That you couldn't possibly..."

"That I couldn't possibly be interested in a man with a fascinating life, a voice that could melt solid rock, who's gorgeous on top of all that? No, why would I be interested?" he asked.

"I'm twice your age, and you're beautiful," Stephan pointed out, hoping this wasn't actually a dream that he'd wake from soon.

"Hush. What difference does your age make?" His fingers rested lightly on Stephan's shoulder and he gazed into his eyes.

"A lot, to some people," Stephan said. "I couldn't believe you would actually want me. But I wanted you, so badly."

Patrick's fingers trembled as they brushed over Stephan's chin. "Silly Stephan. You could've gotten into my knickers the first night you met me."

That made Stephan moan. "I could have?" he mused. The idea made his cock ache and he pressed against him. "And all this time I tried to be a gentleman..."

"Well, you won't make that mistake again, now will you?" Patrick wriggled. "They probably wouldn't notice if we missed the ceremony," he said.

Stephan panted now. "It would be awfully rude of us, wouldn't it? To be off in the loo doing wonderfully dirty things while they take their vows..."

"Would it? One ceremony is much like another, isn't it? It's the party after that's really important. You'll have the whole ceremony on DVD within a fortnight."

Stephan raised an eyebrow. "So you're saying you would, in fact, like to go do dirty things with me right now?" Now it was all anticipation, and it was delicious.

Patrick bit his lip and nodded slowly. "Is that terrible of me?"

"Terrible," agreed Stephan. His hand slid down Patrick's side. "So bad that you really need to be dealt with."

"Ooh, dealt with sounds lovely. How are you going to deal with me, Stephan?" he asked breathily.

Stephan dropped his voice and purred. "I think you definitely need to be taken in hand, Patrick."

Patrick made a valiant effort to look contrite. "I am fortunate I have someone like you to teach me the error of my ways," he said.

Stephan glanced around. They were alone. "Come on, then, I think we could slip off unnoticed now." He slid his hand into Patrick's.

Patrick held Stephan's hand and followed him. He covered his mouth with the other hand as they snuck off through the building.

"I feel so naughty," Stephan breathed, looking around for a likely room. He hadn't had so much fun in ages.

"You are naughty. Very naughty. What about here?" he asked, stopping at a door and trying the knob.

"Try it," Stephan nodded, anxious to get his hands on Patrick. He felt like a teenager again, sneaking off to have a snog.

Patrick turned the knob and the door opened. He stepped forward into a small changing room. It had a couch and a vanity and not much else. "I think this is the place."

"It's perfect. You're here and that's all I need," Stephan replied, pulling Patrick into his arms. Now that he knew the younger man wanted him, he wasn't about to hold back.

Patrick pushed the door closed. "Lock the door, Stephan."

"Demanding, aren't you?" He locked the door and turned back to Patrick. He slid his hand into the younger man's hair and pulled him into a passionate kiss.

Patrick was unable to answer the accusation. He melted against Stephan, holding onto his shoulders for support. He moaned into the kiss.

Stephan couldn't stop his hands from wandering over Patrick's lithe body. Every inch of him was gorgeous and he wanted to explore him thoroughly. But right now was about hot, urgent need. He slid his hand under the younger man's shirt and teased a nipple with his thumb.

Patrick gasped. He struggled to pull his tie free and started unbuttoning with one hand as they were locked together. He shrugged his shirt and suit coat off one shoulder awkwardly.

Stephan released Patrick so he could get his clothes off. He gazed at the younger man's pale, perfect skin and licked his lips. "Good lord, Patrick. You're beautiful."

Patrick draped his shirt and jacket and tie carefully over the back of the chair, then turned back to Stephan. "I've got lots of freckles and scars."

"And I want to kiss every one of them," Stephan replied, still feasting his eyes. "And you have the most perfect little nipples." He reached out and ran his fingers down Patrick's chest.

Patrick sucked in a sharp breath. "I hope you'll want more than kissing," he said hoarsely. He pressed his hands to Stephan's chest, fingers going to work on the other man's buttons.

Stephan let his hands continue to explore. Patrick's skin was warm and silky and his body was his idea of perfection. "Oh, and what were you thinking of then? A bit of cuddling?" he teased. He enjoyed this more than he could remember.

Patrick tilted his head as if considering. "Yes. Cuddling as well, but I really hoped you'd want to fuck my brains out," he

said, voice sweet in contrast to his words. He got Stephan's shirt unbuttoned and slid his hands beneath the fabric.

Patrick's comment made Stephan's blood boil, and he growled, "I think I can manage that. Do you have what we need?" Suddenly all he could think about was getting inside the lovely boy.

Patrick lowered his gaze, nodding. "I do, actually. Back pocket."

"I love a man who comes prepared," Stephan said, sliding his hand into Patrick's pocket. He groped the younger man's ass briefly before pulling out a condom and small tube of lube.

"When you invited me, I started having daydreams about a trip out to the country, horseback riding into the woods, and having hot sex in some isolated, pastoral setting. Silly, I know."

"Not silly at all," said Stephan, gazing into Patrick's eyes. "I thought I was silly for fantasising about a boy half my age." This was hot, yet also sweet.

Patrick pressed a soft kiss to Stephan's lips as he kicked off his shoes. "And do you know now that you're not at all silly? At least, about that."

"I'm beginning to believe that," Stephan replied. "Though I won't believe it completely until I'm deep inside your gorgeous body," he added, purring. He couldn't stop touching him.

Patrick whimpered. His fingers slid down to tug on the button of Stephan's trousers. "Please," he croaked. "Stephan. Want you."

Patrick's begging made Stephan even hotter for him. "You have me, beautiful. You're going to have my cock in you. Can't wait." He unbuttoned his shirt while he let Patrick unfasten his trousers.

Patrick slid his hands inside Stephan's shorts and pushed them and his trousers down over his hips. "You can say more things like that."

Stephan groaned as his cock was freed, and he went to work on Patrick's trousers. "You like it when I talk dirty?" he purred.

"Yes, though truth be told, you could make reading the dictionary sound sexy." He wriggled out of his own trousers, kicking them off.

Stephan pulled the now-naked boy against him. "Do you want to be told what a dirty little slut you are? About to spread your legs for me in the middle of a wedding party?"

Patrick whimpered, "I can't help myself, you know. It's not my fault you're so sexy, Stephan."

So Patrick liked a little humiliation, too. "You're a kinky little slut, aren't you?" Stephan said, opening the condom without taking his gaze from the younger man's face. "I bet you'd like to be spanked." Patrick just got sexier and sexier.

"Only when I'm naughty," Patrick said. He leaned in and rested his head on Stephan's shoulder, nuzzling into the crook of his neck. "Have I been naughty, Stephan?"

"Oh, definitely," nodded Stephan, letting his hands slide down over Patrick's firm ass and squeeze. "I like you naughty. God, you have a gorgeous body." He rocked his arousal against Patrick.

Patrick pressed against him, breathing hotly against the sensitive skin of Stephan's neck. "Where do you want me? On the couch? Over the back of the couch? Hands and knees?" he murmured, hips swaying slowly from side to side.

Stephan considered. He usually liked sex face to face, but they would have time for that later. This time, it needed to be urgent, desperate. "Over the back of the couch," he groaned finally. "Legs spread, all open to me..."

Patrick panted as he stepped back. He moved slowly, giving Stephan time to look his fill before he bent over the back of the couch, arching his back, and bracing his feet wide.

Stephan was sure he'd never been with a boy this beautiful, even when he was Patrick's age. There was just something about Patrick that enchanted him. He slicked the condom as he stepped behind him, dragging the head of his cock down Patrick's cleft. "Ready for me?"

Patrick moaned, head falling forward. "Yes, oh God yes, please. Need you, Stephan."

That was music to Stephan's ears, and he took a deep shuddering breath and began to enter Patrick. "Oh, Patrick," he moaned, trying to go slowly.

Patrick pressed back, opening as much as possible to the other man. His hands gripped the couch cushions tightly as he whimpered.

At Patrick's reaction, Stephan lost control a bit, thrusting faster than he'd meant to. The younger man was just so sexy he could barely hold back, and it had been a while since he'd had sex.

"Yess, Stephan, don't be gentle, love," he croaked, a hint of Irish accent filtering into his voice.

Stephan thrust faster and deeper. He gripped Patrick's slim hips for leverage and gazed down at him. "I'm inside you, Patrick," he moaned. "Deep inside."

Patrick panted hard, bearing down and gripping alternately. "I feel you, Stephan," he croaked.

"You feel so good," Stephan panted. He thrust harder, changing the angle to please his new lover more. "So beautiful, so tight..."

Patrick bucked back against him. "Ohhh, Stephan, I..." He choked back a sob.

Patrick's responsiveness amazed him, and Stephan felt compelled to drive him insane with pleasure. Stephan pounded into him as he reached down to stroke Patrick's cock. He concentrated on Patrick's need to keep himself from coming too soon.

Patrick's slender body tensed and he arched his back, gasping loudly. "Oh!" he cried out as he started to come, pulsing over Stephan's fist.

Stephan thrust faster, moaning at Patrick's sudden tightness, holding back just a little longer until he was sure he was done. Then he let himself come, crying out Patrick's name.

Patrick slumped forward against the couch, panting still. His skin was slick with sweat and he stretched his arms out in front of him. "I didn't scream, did I? I tried not to," he asked.

"Just a little," Stephan said, running his hands down Patrick's back. "I wouldn't have minded if you'd been louder." He eased out carefully, grinning widely.

Patrick pushed himself up slowly, flexing his shoulders as he stretched out his long neck. He turned slowly and smiled at Stephan, face flushed and eyes glittering. "You want all your friends to know you've been fucking me in a dressing room, do you?" he asked.

Stephan pulled Patrick into his arms, pressing their damp bodies together. "The idea does have its appeal," he mused. "Or maybe I just find it very erotic when you're loud."

Patrick gazed dreamily into Stephan's eyes. "I can be quite loud. I suspect you'll know this well in just a few short days," he murmured, pressing a light kiss to Stephan's lips.

"Does this mean you want to do this again? Repeatedly?" he asked hopefully. It was still so amazing that Patrick wanted him.

Patrick blinked for a moment, looking unsure. "I, yes, I thought..." He licked his lips. "I thought perhaps we might..."

"God, yes, please," Stephan blurted. "I've never liked casual sex, and the way I feel about you, it's not casual." He hoped he hadn't said too much but he was truly smitten by the younger man.

Patrick's smile returned. "I really like you, Stephan. And nothing is really standing in our way, is it?"

Stephan shook his head. "Nothing at all, my beautiful Patrick. I want to spend time with you, in and out of bed." He dared to hope that he wouldn't be alone again.

Patrick leaned in closer and rested his head on Stephan's shoulder with a quiet, contented sigh. "We seem to be quite good at the out part. I'm looking forward to the in part."

Stephan moaned. "You're going to wear me out, aren't you?" he asked as he wrapped his arms around the younger man tightly.

"Pft, you've got an entire reception to recover."

"Mmm, I hope the food is decent," Stephan said, nuzzling at Patrick's neck. "I think I'll need my strength." He couldn't wait to get Patrick home, to his big bed.

"Mm, yeah. I'm starving!" Patrick said, leaning back with a smile.

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About the Author

Inspired by the important things in life—beauty, love, and passion—Jade has spent several years writing erotic fiction. The forbidden nature of homoeroticism is the basis for many megabytes of fiction that have delighted a wide circle of online readers. Please feel free to visit Jade at www.JadeFalconer.com or on MySpace at www.myspace.com/jadefalconer.
