

*A Sip...*



*A Torquere Press Short*

***Tutelary***

***By Stevie Woods***

***Part One***

Matthias sat on the side of the bed just watching Daniel sleep. The sheet had slid down as far as his stomach and it took all Matthias' willpower not to reach out and caress the honey-colored skin. Daniel always was a rough sleeper, tossing and turning and occasionally kicking Matthias' legs. Matthias didn't care; just being able to sleep beside Daniel had been a blessing for him. Making love with him had been miraculous. Tears pricked at his eyes at the thought that perhaps never again...

“Matt?” Daniel said sleepily, rubbing at his eyes. He glanced at the window seeing it was hardly light yet. “Why are you sitting there?” He smiled, patting the mattress next to him. “It’s much nicer in here with me.”

“I...I need to talk with you and, if I was in there with you, we wouldn’t talk.”

Daniel laughed, “Heck no. Come on we can talk later, there’s a lot better things you can do with that lovely mouth of yours.”

“Danny, please.”

Daniel’s smile faded, as he finally understood that Matt was serious about wanting to talk. “Sure, whatever.” He frowned. “Matt, why do I get the feeling I’m not going to like this?”

Matthias sighed and got to his feet. He walked toward the window, lifted a slat and looked outside. He was trying to delay the inevitable; he didn’t want to say what he had to, but he knew it was a futile exercise and the delay was only making Daniel more anxious, he could feel it.

Turning back, he said bluntly, “I have to leave, Daniel, and...”

“Leave? Why? How long for?” Daniel threw the covers back and swung his legs over the side of the bed so he was sitting facing Matt.

“I am so sorry, Danny,” Matthias said taking a step forward and forcing himself to stop. “I have to leave very soon, and I won’t be coming back.” As he watched the emotions flicker across Daniel’s expressive face, Matthias felt his stomach twist and the ache in his heart felt too great to bear.

“You’re leaving me? God, no! You said you loved me, you said it was *forever*.”

“Oh my love, I meant it, every word I ever said to you. I do love you and I always will. Forever won’t be long enough for how I feel about you.” Matthias was on his knees in front of Daniel before he even realized he had moved.

“Then what’s wrong? What’s this about having to go? Stay here with me, please!”

“I would like nothing more than to be able to stay with you, but I can’t. I have been called home, and I cannot refuse. I have to leave, I have no choice.”

Daniel grabbed hold of Matt’s hands. “Then take me with you, we can manage somehow. I don’t care how, don’t care about work, don’t care about anything, I just need you.” He frowned again. “Called home? What does that mean? I thought you were from a few miles out of town? That’s nothing, I can...”

“No, Danny.” Matthias sighed, extricating himself from Daniel’s grasp, he rose to his feet, took a few steps away before turning his back. “How do I explain this?” he said softly, as if to himself.

“Damn it, Matt! Just tell me. What the hell is going on?”

Matthias laughed but there was no humor in the sound. “Hell has nothing to do with it,” he said just as softly. He turned back to face his lover. “I would love to be able to take you with me, but where I am going you cannot come. It just isn’t possible.”

“Stop telling me half-truths and...and talking in riddles. Just tell me plainly, why do you have to leave, where are you going, and where do you come from that I can’t come with you?” Daniel got to his feet as he spoke, moving slowly but determinedly to where Matthias stood, the last few words spoken so closely to him that Daniel’s breath ghosted across Matt’s face.

Matthias didn’t know what to do. He couldn’t tell Daniel the truth, but he hated the idea of lying. He had never lied before -- he had lied by omission, but the truth was he had hoped they would leave him alone, not call him back, not for a long time anyway. Lord, what *had* he been thinking? *Thinking*? From the moment he had met Daniel all he had ever done was feel. He stared at Daniel, remembering the first time he had ever seen the beautiful young man.

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Matthias was feeling at a really low ebb, wondering what on earth he was supposed to do. How was he supposed to get over the kind of situation he had been forced to face? He was so busy bemoaning his lot; he wasn’t watching where he was going and walked straight into a man coming out of a building. He was moving so fast that both of them had gone down and the other man dropped the armful of folders he’d been carrying.

“Damn!” the stranger said as he scrambled across the sidewalk trying to gather everything together.

Matthias went immediately to his assistance, apologizing profusely as he did so, but it wasn’t until he handed back the pile of papers he had collected that he got a good look at the stranger. In that split second, Matthias’ world was suddenly righted.

“Hello,” he said hesitantly. “My name is Matthias, and I really am sorry. I wasn’t looking where I was walking.”

“You certainly weren’t, and really that...” The strident voice stopped as their eyes met and slowly the stranger smiled. “Well, I guess I could have been a bit more careful myself,” he volunteered. “My name is Daniel, Daniel Felton. I would offer to shake your hand, but this lot would be all over the ground again.”

Matthias laughed. “Let’s pretend we did that already. Pleased to meet you, Daniel. How about I buy you coffee as a proper apology and we can at least get your paperwork looking a little tidier?”

“Thanks, Matthias. I’d like that. There’s a coffee shop on the corner,” he nodded his head in that direction. “Matthias what? And do your friends use your full name, or is it Matt?”

“Matthias Engels. Well, I don’t really have any friends around here. My home is out of town, in the middle of nowhere. Folks back home generally call me Matthias, but I kind of like the way you say Matt, so that’s fine.”

Blushing slightly, Daniel said, “Oh, okay then, Matt it is.”

That was how it began, a simple coffee and later they went out to dinner together, and then again the next night. It soon became very clear that Matthias’ interest in Daniel was reciprocated. Daniel told Matt he thought he was hot and Matthias had thought that was very funny but Daniel hadn’t laughed, instead he had kissed Matthias and any question of exactly *how* Matthias saw Daniel went straight out of the window.

Friends was one thing; this was something else entirely. His spine tingled, his toes curled, and he pulled Daniel as close as it was possible for the two men to be while wearing still clothes and kissed him back until they broke apart gasping for breath.

It was only a matter of weeks before Daniel asked Matthias to move in with him and Matthias was only too happy to oblige. They had been very happy together for almost a year. They were so happy that Matthias pushed to the back of his mind that he was only supposed to be here temporarily, that he would have to return home when they thought he was ready.

He should have known. He had been ready for months; they had been generous and given him extra time but he was too wrapped up in how he felt about Daniel to take that into account. When he was finally called home he begged them to wait.

“Please, a little longer, I need him. I can’t...”

“Now, Matthias, you have had more than enough time to recover fully. I could have recalled you long since but I gave you more time to be certain you would not risk another breakdown. Now, it is time to return. You have duties to fulfill.”

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They were right, of course; he knew it. He just hated to acknowledge it. That thought brought him back to his present quandary. He was staring into the most expressive blue eyes he had ever seen -- eyes full of trust for the man Daniel loved.

And that was the crux of it, of course, Daniel trusted him, and there was no way he could stare into those eyes and lie. He didn’t know how Daniel would take it, but he had to tell him the truth. He realized as that thought passed through his mind, that it would be kinder if he did tell Daniel and his lover believed him. Kinder, but his truth was unbelievable.

“All right, Daniel. I think you better sit down for this.”

Daniel cocked his head on one side but did as he was asked and returned to sit on the edge of the bed. He obviously expected Matt to sit next to him but he sat in the chair by the window instead.

“I have not been entirely truthful with you, not since the day we met.”

“What?” Daniel interjected sharply.

“Please let me try and explain. I know you’ll have questions, but this is hard enough for me as it is. Try and hear me out first, please?”

Daniel nodded, but he didn’t look happy.

“I told you I lived in the middle of nowhere, and I didn’t correct your assumption that I lived just outside of the city. My home is a long, long way away from here. I told you I’d had an accident and needed to recover. That was almost true; I did need to recover, but I had not had an accident. You asked me what I did for work, and I said I had left my previous employment with a good stipend and did not need to work for a while and I wanted to attempt to paint instead.” As he spoke, Matthias’ gaze flicked to the portrait of Daniel on the wall opposite the bed. Daniel had been overwhelmed at the way Matthias saw him when Matthias had presented that to him. “It is true I had no need of money, but I was well aware of my...talents as a painter, it is something I have enjoyed doing for many years.”

Daniel frowned, obviously he wanted to ask questions but he was trying to wait as he had been requested, but Matthias knew it was a struggle. Holding Daniel’s gaze, he took a deep breath.

“I am a Tutelar, Daniel and I have been called home to take up my duties again.”

“A what?” Daniel queried, frowning.

“A Tutelar, perhaps you will know it better as Guardian Angel? I am a Guardian Angel.”

Daniel’s mouth dropped open but he was unable to speak.

“I had taken on too many subjects. Michael always said I chose the ones who required help the most, but those were precisely the ones I felt needed me.” He laughed gently. “Too soft, Michael said I was. He was right of course. I allowed myself to get too close, too involved until I could no longer handle any more emotional pain and I...what it is you say here on Earth? Oh yes, I burned out and then I was of no use to anyone.”

Daniel was by his side, kneeling next to the chair. In a very soft voice, he said, “Matt, you can’t really believe what you’re telling me. I can understand that whatever work you were doing was so stressful that your mind couldn’t accept it and so you have created this ...this fantasy to help you cope. Oh Matt, you need help. I never had any idea you were ill. But it doesn’t mean you have to leave. You know I love you too, don’t you? Were you afraid I wouldn’t understand, that I would turn from you because of this? Oh, Matt.”

Matthias turned to look at him, smiling sadly. “If only I *was* ill, that would be so much easier. I am not crazy, Daniel. Every word I just told you is the truth. I have to

go; I have no choice. I see now the only way you will believe, the only way you will have any peace, is to see for yourself.”

Daniel frowned as Matthias stood up.

“Stay there. It’s perfectly safe. Just watch and you will believe.” Matthias stood so he was in profile to Daniel. He gave his lover a fleeting smile and then he closed his eyes as he concentrated.

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Daniel felt as if he was treading through molasses -- nothing he said seemed to get through to Matt and nothing his lover said made sense. He was really concerned for Matt. He had awoken that morning, feeling happy with a future full of promise with the man he knew was the love of his life. And suddenly everything had spiraled out of control. Matt had showed no signs of illness at all during their time together. In fact he had been so healthy it had been galling. Twice during the last year, Daniel had been ill, nothing major, flu on one occasion and gastroenteritis on the other, but Matthias had not so much as a sniffle. It had never occurred to Daniel that his lover might have a mental condition.

He stood staring at his lover, who even now looked the picture of health. He was a tall man, his body in perfect proportion. He was well built without being in any way overly muscular. His face was perfect, beautiful in fact, although that had never been a word Daniel had associated with a man before he had met Matthias. His eyes were green, a deep rich color that Daniel had never seen on another human being, so deep that Daniel could get lost just looking into them, never more so than when Matthias was driving deep into his body, holding his gaze with eyes full of love. And last, but by no means least, was his hair. It was fair, so light brown as to be almost blond and Matthias wore it long, half-way down his back, tied back during the day, but at night it hung loose about his shoulders and Daniel loved the feel of the silken strands as they slid between his fingers. To Daniel, Matthias was beautiful, perfect, and the idea that there was something wrong with his mind cut Daniel to the core.

Then it happened and even though he saw it clear as day, Daniel could hardly believe it was real. Matthias had turned sideways, glancing at Daniel over one shoulder to give him a swift smile and then he closed his eyes. Instantly the air about him began to shimmer and then Matthias seemed to fold in on himself until his profile looked no thicker than a piece of card and with a flicker even that image was gone.

With a sharp cry of “No!” Daniel leapt forward to where Matthias had been standing but there was no trace that he had ever been there. Daniel whirled on the spot as if somehow he could find his lover but it was as if he had never existed. Yet with a certainty borne of love, Daniel knew he had, so there could be only one explanation as unbelievable as that appeared.

Falling to his knees, Daniel cried, “No, oh please God, no. Don’t take him from me. Matthias! Don’t leave me; take me with you. Oh, please.” His head dropped onto his knees as tears spilled over. He had never thought of himself as an overly emotional man but this situation was just tearing him apart.

“Hush, love. I wouldn’t leave you like that. I only needed you to believe.”

Daniel felt the arms wrap around him and leaned into the beloved heat with a sigh. “Oh, Matthias, I was so afraid. I still don’t understand, not any of this, but whatever is real, whatever is true for you, my only truth is that I love you and I need you. Please, if you have to leave, let me come with you.”

“Oh, my love. That can’t be. Do you not understand that I’m not mortal? For this brief time we have been together I have had substance, but in my true form I am intangible, a spiritual being. Now I must return, I have no choice. I have been called, and I must answer.”

Daniel couldn’t stop the tears sliding down his face and he didn’t care. Matthias knew how he felt and he was not ashamed that he was unable to hide it. “When...when must you go?”

“I begged for just a little longer, to explain that I had to leave and I...I hoped you would let me show you one last time how much I feel for you.”

“God, I don’t want it to be for the last time,” Daniel murmured, his mouth caressing Matt’s neck. “I want to be with you forever.”

“Oh, Daniel!”

Matthias’ eyes were glued to Daniel’s face and suddenly he swooped in and covered Daniel’s mouth with his lips, forcing his tongue inside even as he pressed Daniel back onto the bed. Daniel wrapped his arms around Matthias’s back wanting as much contact as possible; just the feel of Matt’s weight pressing him down, the taste of him, the scent, everything was just perfect. He had to gather it all too him and hold on to the memory.

Daniel broke the kiss gasping for breath, staring dazedly at Matthias, his gaze held by the expression in his lover’s darkly glittering eyes, understanding exactly what Matthias was telling him. As Matthias pressed his full body length against him, Daniel gasped at the sensation of delicious expectation that flowed through him as he felt Matthias’s rock-hard erection jutting into his groin. He wanted to feel that heat deep inside him, taking him, marking him so he would always know exactly who he belonged to.

Matthias leaned forward and kissed him again, hard. Daniel almost cried out at the passion, at Matt’s desperate desire to possess him this one last time. It had occasionally bothered him, Matthias’s proclivity to be too possessive, now he realized it was all part of the love Matthias felt for him and he welcomed it with open arms. He *needed* it.

Daniel held Matt against him, hands sliding up his back to caress his neck and slide through his hair. Pulling back, Matthias caressed Daniel’s chest and he moaned at the sensation as Matthias leaned in murmuring, “Love you,” before sucking and gently biting his nipples, one after the other.

Daniel dropped his head back against the pillows, letting the feelings wash over him. Everything was centered on the sensations Matthias was creating with his lips and tongue on his chest as his hand rubbed circles on Daniel's crotch. Daniel closed his eyes and felt the sweat break out on his upper lip. Matt licked it off and Daniel's eyes flew open. Matthias smiled at him and then slid down his body and settled between his spread legs. Hardly giving Daniel time to react, Matthias swallowed his cock whole.

"Matt!" he yelled as he felt the warm cavern envelop his length, enjoying the feeling as Matthias licked the underside along the thick vein. Then Matt carefully pulled back, letting his teeth gently graze Daniel's cock. Daniel was panting and desperately trying not to thrust into his lover's mouth and Matthias placed a hand on his stomach to keep Daniel still.

Daniel was so close he thought the slightest touch now would make him explode.

"Matt, I'm gonna ...oh, God I can't..."

"Let go for me, love, I want to taste you, want you inside me as much as I want to be inside you." The words sent shivers through Daniel and, holding him firmly as he climaxed powerfully, Matthias swallowed every drop and then licked him clean before moving up to kiss Daniel and let him taste his own essence.

Daniel felt completely boneless and was gasping for control, held safely in his lover's arms as Matthias peppered kisses across his face.

"Matt, love you, love you," Daniel whispered.

"I want you to *know* how I feel about you, to never doubt it," Matthias said.

"Take me, so deep that I won't know where you end and I begin, so I can never forget that I am yours," Daniel said breathlessly.

"Oh, Danny," Matthias murmured.

Daniel rolled over presenting himself. Matthias scrabbled under the pillows for the lube, and Daniel smiled, saying, "Won't need much after last night."

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Matthias' stomach flipped at that casual reminder of how natural it had been for them to make love whenever they wanted, and now this was the last time. He felt the tears prick his eyes again but he resolutely flicked them away. Time to mourn later. Matthias brushed his hand down Daniel's spine, finally cupping his ass. With a little moan he quickly lubed his fingers.

Settling behind Daniel, he placed one hand around his abdomen, seeking out his nipples to tease. Matthias' other hand caressed Daniel's ass for a few seconds before brushing along his cleft and searching out the entrance to his body. He circled the hole before gently thrusting in one finger. As Daniel had said, he was not too tight and

Matthias quickly added a second finger. Daniel arched and moaned at the sensation, pushing his hips back at Matthias, who lubed himself up carefully.

Matthias murmured against Daniel's neck, "Ready?" as he lined himself up.

"Oh yes."

Matthias smiled as he pushed slowly inside, taking one last time what had always been given freely and with love. Feeling Daniel relax and open for him, he slid all the way in until his balls nestled against Daniel's ass. He wrapped his arms under Daniel and lightly gripped the front of his shoulders.

"Hang on, I'm gonna take you for a ride."

"Oh God!"

Matthias pulled out and thrust back in firmly and felt Daniel arch his back more as he locked his elbows for extra support. Daniel knew what to expect and Matthias fully intended to give it him. Pulling out again he slammed back in rocking Daniel forward.

"Matt!" Daniel cried.

Matthias just held on and steadily increased his rhythm until Daniel's arms were shaking with effort, and he was panting and gasping as each time Matthias thrust home he stroked Daniel's prostate.

"Oh God," Daniel breathed over and over and Matthias watched as the sweat dripped from his brow onto his lover's back and slid gracefully down his spine to slip off and fall onto the sheet below them.

Matthias felt his orgasm gather, starting in his toes, climbing up his legs and into his groin, a sensation he never wanted to forget, until with a guttural scream he poured himself into his lover's body.

He felt Daniel sigh beneath him and a feeling of peace washed over his still shaking body as Daniel reached an arm behind him to hold Matthias' weight on his back as he recovered from his climax.

If only Matthias could always be held by the man he loved.

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## *Part Two*

Michael appeared behind Matthias, glancing at the image playing out against the smoky backdrop. "You shouldn't be here," he said softly.

"I know, I'm sorry but I had to see that he was all right."

"It has only been a few days..."

“And look at him,” Matthias interrupted, glancing at Michael over his shoulder.

Michael had indeed seen how badly Daniel was taking the loss of Matthias, hardly sleeping, not eating anything worthwhile, and spending far too many hours with a drink in hand staring at nothing. Michael flicked his wrist and the vision of Daniel abruptly disappeared.

“I’m sorry, Matthias. I should never have allowed this to happen, it is my fault you were granted permission to stay on the human plane as long as you were. I realized I had become too aloof from what was happening down there and I knew I must never let that happen again. I needed to get involved. I took over a portion of your tutelary and I was...distracted by the distress caused by the increasing number of wars taking place down there. It is all too easy to understand how you suffered as greatly as you did; such compassion comes with a price.”

Matthias shook his head. “I understand what you are saying and I cannot argue with your own reactions, but it wouldn’t have mattered if I had been recalled earlier, the moment I bumped into Daniel -- literally as it happens -- it was already too late for me. I was,” he smiled but if anything he looked sad, “smitten I think is a good word. I treasure each day I spent with him and only regret the pain it is giving him now.”

“Still, if I had acted sooner, maybe...” Michael let the sentence trail away, he knew as well as Matthias did that Daniel truly loved him and bringing him home sooner wouldn’t have changed that. Some things were meant to be. He knew this would be hard on Matthias, but letting him look at Daniel would only be harder in the long run. “Matthias, I forbid you to watch Daniel again. You will see him when it is time and until then you must...”

“Don’t tell me to forget him!” Matthias interjected sharply.

“I had no such intention,” Michael replied calmly. “I was going to say, until then you must wait. In the meantime, return to your duties but I admonish you to be more selective with those who you choose to guard. Taking on too many doesn’t only risk your balance, ultimately it diminishes the help you can offer your charges.”

“I know, Michael, I have learned that lesson well.” He turned back to look into the swirling mists where only a moment ago the vision of Daniel had played like a movie. “But I cannot help but worry about him, he is so alone. There is no one he can speak to; he carries his burden in silence.”

Michael thought for a moment before placing a hand on Matthias’ shoulder. “Leave it to me. I will talk with him.”

“What? You would talk to him, really?”

“Why not? He is in need of guidance and who better than me?” Michael smiled, stood back and in a blink he was gone.

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Daniel looked into the swirling golden liquid and wondered why he didn't feel any better. All he felt was numb, except for his teeth, which felt rubbery. That didn't seem right though. But then, neither did what he thought he was seeing. He sat bolt upright as a man suddenly appeared a couple of feet in front of him. If he hadn't seen something similar before, he would've thought he'd finally lost it. Lost it, like he had thought Matthias had lost it before his lover had disappeared right in front of his eyes. Oh God, he wished Matt really had been crazy then at least he could have seen him even if only as a visitor at an insane asylum. And how crazy was that? God, perhaps Matthias never even existed and it was he who was crazy?

Then the vision spoke.

"Daniel? My name is Michael and I suppose you could say I'm a friend of Matthias."

Daniel was suddenly stone cold sober. "Michael? As in *that* Michael? The angel Michael?"

"Well, yes, if you want to get technical I am an Archangel, but I'm here as Matthias' friend rather than his superior."

"Oh. I think I need a drink," Daniel said. Mostly because he didn't doubt what he heard at all. The man -- correction, the *angel* -- before him was so perfect he could only be an angel. Similar thoughts had gone through his mind shortly after Matthias had left: how could he ever have thought anyone as beautiful as Matthias was simply mortal?

"No, I think perhaps you have had enough," Michael suggested. "I'm here to talk to you; it's important. Matthias was worried about you and, as he is forbidden to watch you, I've been keeping an eye on you for a while now, and I have become concerned."

"Concerned about what?" Daniel asked belligerently. It hurt that Matthias couldn't watch him if he wanted, but then he couldn't see Matthias could he?

"Well, that for a start," Michael said, indicating the pistol balanced on the arm of the chair where Daniel sat.

Daniel stared at the gun, his gut twisting as he did so. He'd held the weapon in his hand a few times during the evening, trying to decide if he had the nerve to pull the trigger.

It had been almost three months since Matthias had left and his life had been miserable ever since. Each day it had gotten harder, each day he had felt more and more lost and alone. His sister had been angry with him for what she saw as his mourning a relationship in which a man had walked out on him with no rhyme or reason. Daniel had tried to make excuses but he had never been any good at lying. His sister had always seen through him and knew he was spinning a tale and that only made her angrier and him more defensive. Yet what could he do? He could hardly tell her the truth or he would be the one to end up in an insane asylum.

"I can't go on like this," he told Michael in a low voice. "I am so alone," he whispered. In a world of billions he felt alone.

"You want to see Matthias again some day, don't you?" Michael asked and Daniel nodded immediately. Staring pointedly at the gun, Michael added, "Well, take that route and you won't."

Daniel's eyes widened. "I hadn't thought of..." Daniel paused, frowning thoughtfully. "You must know I'm not exactly a religious person. I told Matt I... I've read more about angels and heaven and stuff since Matthias left than I have in the rest of my life before." He hesitated, eyes darting everywhere for a moment before he steadily met Michael's gaze. "And then again, what about that I love Matt, him being a guy and all? That's not tolerated is it? I mean...hell I don't know what I mean!"

Michael laughed softly. "You have a good heart and a pure soul or Matthias could never have fallen in love with you. And as for the other? Well, that's one of those things that got twisted somewhere along the way. Love is love, what does it matter what gender is involved if the love is true? The love Matthias feels for you is celebrated and he is only waiting until the day when it is time for you to join him."

"That's true? I can be with him after...after I die?" Daniel said with awe. "Then it would indeed be heaven."

"Exactly," Michael smiled. "Get your life back under control, Daniel. Live it to the full. Heaven waits." Michael turned sideways and Daniel knew he was going to leave.

"Michael, one last question?" Michael looked at him, a raised eyebrow as approval. "Don't you guys have wings?" asked Daniel, smiling for the first time since Michael had arrived.

Michael laughed. "Well we can materialize them if we need to, but they really aren't necessary. This way is much better." In the blink of an eye he folded in on himself and disappeared.

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Michael materialized in the center of the glade. It was one of his favorite places and he wasn't surprised to know it was where Matthias chose to go to find peace. He found his old friend sitting with his back against a large weeping willow, its branches shifting in the gentle breeze. The grass was lush underfoot and a variety of scents from the flowers growing everywhere one looked mingled to form a glorious scent.

"Matthias?"

He looked up at the sound of Michael's voice. Matthias didn't see Michael often enough not to wonder why he had taken the trouble to track him down, here of all places. He wanted to ask after Daniel, but he had only tried that once and Michael had told him it was under control and it was better to leave well alone until it was Daniel's time. Michael's words had been kind, but the instruction was clear enough. It was hard, but Matthias accepted that Michael was right.

It had only been four short years since he had last seen Daniel and if he lived to a ripe old age, it would be many years yet before they could be together. To keep seeing him and knowing how long the wait was likely to be was akin to torture.

“You wish something, Michael?”

“I have a new spirit who needs guidance to one day become a Tutelar. I think you will be the ideal person to teach him.”

“Me? But I have never taken another under my wing before,” Matthias replied. He felt nervous and yet heartened by Michael’s trust in him.

“You are ready. Come and meet him.” Michael smiled.

Michael touched him briefly on the shoulder and together they disappeared to re-emerge across the plane in the place of swirling white smoke. As they walked slowly forward, the smoke began to curl away from them collecting into small clouds before dispersing again and filling in the space behind them. A group of beings stood together, Matthias recognizing a couple of Tutelars, the others being humans who had passed. As he neared the group one of the men turned, his gaze sweeping over the area and Matthias gasped.

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When Daniel had opened his eyes and found himself lying in a world of stark white, he was afraid. He couldn’t hear anything and even the ground beneath him felt strange, solid but soft, warm yet somehow cool. He tried to see through the thick fog but it was impossible. Carefully he sat up and, though he felt strange about doing so, as if it was wrong to break the silence, he called out.

“Is anyone there?” The sound echoed hollowly back to his ears and he shivered.

Then suddenly a voice answered, spoken softly and yet the sound seemed to blanket everything. “There is nothing to fear, you are safe here.”

Safe? The last thing Daniel remembered was the other car slamming into his vehicle, trapped between the truck and the cab that had already hit his car from behind. He couldn’t have escaped that without being hurt; he should be in hospital... *Oh God!*

He understood, in a flash he knew. He was dead.

As if his acceptance had been some kind of signal he suddenly found himself in the midst of a group of people, most of them looking confused yet not afraid. He could hear other voices calling and he knew there were other dead folk out there -- wherever ‘there’ was -- who had not yet come to understand they had died.

Abruptly the air shimmered and folded and two beings appeared. Daniel knew what they had to be and he was disappointed that he didn’t recognize either of them. Was it possible that Matthias, or at least Michael, didn’t know he had arrived? He couldn’t help a glance around to see if there were any more new arrivals, but all he could see was the swirling whiteness.

Then he heard a gasp.

In the blink of an eye Matthias was there, the Archangel Michael by his side.

Matthias stared at him as if not believing his eyes. When he spoke his voice was hardly above a whisper, "You're here? So soon. I didn't expect to see you for..." His voice died and with a cry he tightly embraced Daniel, who stood there slack-jawed with shock until Matthias had grabbed him.

That touch was all it took for Daniel to realize it was not a hallucination or a dream; Matthias really was there -- holding him. *Oh God!*

"It really is you, oh Matthias," he breathed.

"I shouldn't be grateful that you died so young, but, forgive me, I'm so happy that you are here with me."

"It was very sudden, but it doesn't matter. I guess I was really only marking time any way. I can touch you and feel you. I never thought this would be possible again." Daniel pulled back to stare into his lover's eyes. "I thought if I ever saw you again I wouldn't be able to touch you. You said your natural form was spirit, not substance."

With a sigh, Matthias brushed a hand down Daniel's cheek and he gratefully leaned into the caress. "That is so, Danny," Matthias said, "but you, too, are spirit now."

"Oh, yeah, of course. And this is all right?" Daniel asked carefully, his glance taking in the watching Michael.

Michael laughed gently. "I told you, Daniel, love is love and every demonstration of it is beautiful to us." Michael drew them away from the watching group until the mist masked them. "I have assigned Matthias to teach you everything you need to know and to guide you into your eventual duties as a Tutelar."

"You mean I'm going to be a Guardian Angel too? Wow!" He stared for a moment at Michael. "And I can spend all my time with Matthias?" Daniel breathed, his eyes glued onto Matthias' beautiful face.

"For eternity, if you wish," Michael replied. "Take him to your favorite place, Matthias," he added, the laughter in his voice fading as he blinked out of their presence.

"Your favorite place?" Daniel asked absently, unable to take his eyes from Matthias.

"It's beautiful, you'll love it." Matthias looked bemused. "To be with me for eternity. Is that what you want?" he asked.

"Time without end seems perfect to me," Daniel said as he leaned in for a kiss.

The End

Tutelary

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