

Dreamspinner Press Presents

NAP-SIZE DREAMS



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“As Day to Night, Hot to Cold, they are the shadow reflection of each other....”

THE world as they knew it consisted of two countries: Sigment, the land of mountain terrain and dark woods, and Lyra, a flat land dominated by fertile fields and orchards. The two countries had been at war as long as anyone could recall, but the last decade had borne a tense neutrality, a prolonged cease-fire, where border guards eyed one another suspiciously and the occasional ignitions of tempers resulted in sparse fighting.

Both countries shared the same rituals of which both would claim they were the sole inventor. Each child was believed to be born with a destiny concerning whom each should marry, and in the eighteenth year, each would travel to the High Temple in each capital, where the Royal Seer would ask them to gaze into the ever-flowing fountain to have the destined mate revealed. It was called the Ritual of the Reflection, as the seers could see the spouse as a shadowy reflection on the face of the young person in the water. In everyday life the event was simply known as the Reflection.

The Royal Family of Lyra looked forward to the crown prince's Reflection. Yran, a young man, much adored by his people, pondered endlessly on the shape of his future mate.

Would it be a woman or a man? For him, as crown prince, it did not matter. He was from birth ceremoniously married to a princess with whom he was expected to father an heir, but that lay years into the future. Who waited now was the mate he only recently had begun to feel. Each Reflection would send out a sensual ripple toward the intended; some only felt it after they had met, but Yran could sense something already and often felt consumed with a strange warm feeling all over his body. He knew it had to be his Reflection's longing for him.

TIMES had been hard in Sigmoid. The people had just survived a harsh winter with much starvation where even the huge rivers had frozen solid, and the animals had been difficult to catch in the deep snow. Now the rivers were melting, the animals were yet again easy to catch, and life was strangely... comfortable, a most foreign concept to the rugged people of Sigmoid.

Crown Prince Flynn would be the country's next ruler, though he could have sworn the thought never occurred to his feather-brained father, who still kept him out of the council's meetings. Thankfully the king's seer, Dydd, and his chief advisors saw the great danger of an inactive crown prince and often held council with him to make sure he knew as much or even more than the king. The men had watched the young man from birth and had soon discovered that he had an unusually keen eye and a sharp brain to match.

“So, Prince Flynn, do you feel nervous of tomorrow?”

Flynn looked up at his father’s seer, confusion easy to read in his blue eyes. “Nervous? No, it’s a ball just like the rest of the parties my silly siblings try to get my mother’s approval for, *every day* of the year....”

Dydd frowned. “No, my Lord, I speak of the holy event in the temple tomorrow. The Ritual of the Reflection. There is not a woman or a man your age alive in the land who will not toss and turn all night, both fearing and rejoicing at the thought of meeting their destiny....” His voice trailed off as he met Flynn’s clear blue gaze and sighed. “A little passion is not unwelcome in a ruler, my Lord,” he tried again. “Not too much, but just enough makes him understand his subjects better.”

He met Flynn’s cool eyes, which resembled the icy rivers a little too well, and was relieved when a smile appeared on Flynn’s face, showing another facet of his personality as he answered.

“I see enough passion in my father, most honored Dydd. I daresay I will meet this Reflection and mate with the same feeling I show everyone. Calmness.”

Flynn looked down at the book he was reading, and Dydd sighed, thinking: *If the Gods are willing, then hear my prayer. Send someone to teach him just a little of the emotions that make the hearts of all men throb.* He did not say it out loud, though. Not that Dydd feared to speak his mind to anyone, but the young man seemed tense lately, and it showed in the frown on his face and the tight muscles in his neck, as if he were caught by a strain he would not own up

to. Dydd found himself wondering how indifferent Flynn really was.

Flynn did not lie, or he did not know he did, since he had absolutely no idea of what he dreamed every night, dreams of romantic conquests or violent passion, dreams that changed every night but had one person in them who always seemed to return. He would dream that he embraced that person and felt himself embraced, but in the morning he forgot everything. A part of his mind constantly tried to remind him of this face, and it made him tense and irritated, as if a part of him had escaped and could not be reined in, no matter how hard he tried.

It was the morning of the Reflection in the land of Lyra, and Yran was brought to the temple to undergo the event as all the young men and women of his birth year. He had insisted that he wait in line with the rest and had enjoyed a couple of hours of chatting with complete strangers when he suddenly looked up and saw the line in front of him gone. Instead he saw Méro, the seer, motion him toward the streaming fountain and point down into the transparent water.

Yran bent his head so the brown hair fell forward, met his own excited face in the reflection of the water, and laughed. His laughter echoed in the temple, making all the young people behind him giggle, and Méro gave him a harsh look. Then the old seer froze, and his wrinkled hand shook, clutching the edge of the marble fountain.

“What is the matter, oh Méro?” Yran said to lighten the mood, but he fell silent as the old man raised his head and pierced him with his dark eyes.

“My Lord,” he mumbled and then stopped. Yran waited, but Méro did not seem to know what to do. In the end he appeared to wake up from a long trance, stared at the prince, and said, “I will give you the name of your Reflection later. Go home, Prince Yran.” He then motioned for the next in line to come forward, and Yran left, feeling cheated and a little mystified.

THE Ritual of the Reflection took place at midnight in Sgment. Flynn stood in front of the flowing fountain in the closed-off temple, waiting for Dydd to stop staring into the water.

“Are we done, my seer?” he finally asked, stepping back when Dydd looked up at him. The old man had gone pale. “Are you ill?” Flynn wanted to know. “There’s an illness going around. It is—”

“My Prince,” Dydd whispered, “all is well with your undeserving servant, but I need to seek guidance in my learned books before I advise you of who is your much-sought spouse.”

Flynn saw him turn and flee, his bountiful habit swaying behind him, and the prince shook his head. “Too much wine,” he mumbled. He leaned in and saw nothing but his own cool eyes staring back at him from the calm water.

“MY dear, dear Lady,” Méro mumbled, trying to stop the queen from sobbing.

“No!” she cried.

The king focused on a point in the ceiling, knowing there was nothing to do when she lost control. “Méro,” he said, “are you telling me that the Reflection of my firstborn son, the holy spouse, the very mate his soul has chosen to melt into, is the crown prince of Sgment?”

Méro heard each word as if in a bad dream. “Yes, my King.”

“Then what are we supposed to do? The Reflection is a holy ritual. Are we expected to let him enjoy carnal pleasures with an enemy of Lyra? To let the crown prince of that dark unholy land live here? To let him spy on us? Or do you suggest we let our Child of Light go to that place? The rugged ice-cold dwellings of the enemy?”

Méro thought it through and then said, “Why do I expect that my master, the wise King of Lyra, knows exactly how to guide me?”

The king smiled a little mockingly at his attempt at placating him and then closed his eyes as his wife emitted another half-clenched scream. “Be quiet, my Queen. Your son will not join body and spirit with this cold creature. I say... let’s ignore the Reflection you saw!”

Méro looked at him, running the newly altered scenario

over in his head. “And if anyone asks of his Reflection? Perhaps the prince himself?”

“Find someone else, someone, a girl or a boy who is pretty enough to gain his attention and stupid enough not to put silly ideas in his head.” He looked at his wife, who cried on despite his words of comfort. “But not too stupid.”

THE Sgmentian king was chasing chambermaids through the halls of the stone palace, and now and then a squeal echoed through the halls when he caught one of them. In the throne room, the queen acted as if she did not hear it. “He cannot get a Lyranian as a mate! And that’s that! Find someone else!”

Dydd looked at the queen, who looked like she had a headache. “What if there are problems when the Reflection is ignored?”

“What problems?” asked the queen. “There have never been any problems before.”

“We have never ignored the Ritual of the Reflection before!”

She closed her eyes and answered him. “If the mountains crumble or the rivers dry up, I’ll revise my decision, but until then, no. If Flynn is not King, I have no other way out than to give the throne to his brother, who is even more silly than my husband! No. Even if this boy were not the crown prince of an enemy land or an ordinary

Lyranian citizen, he would still be a man! And a king on the throne who beds men? I think it would be the end of Sgment!”

Dydd made a face, “Actually, your father—”

“Yes, yes!” the queen snapped. “He bedded men, but not a Reflection. Never a Reflection!” She rose from the throne and looked at him. “Find a girl. Any girl, and make him believe it is her. Giving my son’s lack of interest in things of carnal pleasure, it will not mean anything to him. If I didn’t know better, I would think his father was a monk.”

A YEAR went by, and the exact day of the Ritual of Reflection came and went. Then a strange thing began to happen. Yran complained to his seer one day as they were watching a play at the royal quarters. “Méro, I’m so cold.”

The seer looked at the future king as he sat bundled up in front of him. His lips were blue, and his body was shivering. “My Prince, it is high summer outside, and you are sitting next to a roaring fire!”

“I know, but I cannot get warm. The cold is in my bones and in my flesh!”

Méro looked at him mutely and suspected with growing fear that this was not just a sudden chill or a passing cold. Yran hugged his arms, and his fingers shivered a little. “How long have you felt this?” the seer asked, a little frightened as he saw how the young man had closed his eyes and was

fighting to keep them open. Méro noticed he seemed far away, but that he fought to focus on him. “Prince Yran?”

“I... I felt it first some time ago, very little in the beginning. A chill around my feet, cold fingers when I held the reins sitting on my horse, but I thought then as winter arrived, it felt normal, felt as winter should feel, but now....”

“Now it’s summer,” Méro whispered.

DYDD looked down at the bed where his future king lay sleeping. “Prince Flynn? It has been three days; people are wondering what has become of you.” He heard no answer, just a low moan from the shadows. Dydd looked closer at the bed, peeked into the partial darkness, and saw how beads of sweat kept forming on the young man’s forehead.

“My Prince, you are sick!” He rose and would have called for help, but Flynn grabbed his wrist, and the seer winced as he felt the touch of burning hot skin.

“No! Don’t... don’t tell anyone. I’m not sick. I’ll get up now.” He threw the drenched sheets aside and attempted to sit on the edge of the bed; his blue eyes looked glassy, and Dydd saw sweat instantly start to pour down his face.

“You *are* sick,” Dydd whispered. “How long have you felt like this?”

Flynn let his dry tongue lick over cracked lips and tried to collect his scattered thoughts. “Long. It’s been so long.” He took a pitcher standing next to his bed and shook it. “Empty

again. They keep filling it up, but....” He looked up at Dydd with fever-shining eyes, “I’m sorry, you said?” Then he remembered the question and said, “It started as a burning in the upper left part of my body.” He clasped his burning hand over his naked chest, under which he could feel his heart galloping away. “It was... I remember it exactly, since it was on the day of the first big hunt.”

The day after the Reflection! Oh no. Outwardly Dydd said nothing; he just watched in horror as his formerly so-collected prince slumped back on the bed as if he had forgotten he was in company. “Prince Flynn?” he asked, but he received no answer. Dydd ran to see the queen.

“Prince Flynn is burning up, my Queen. It is like a strange fever has him in its grip. I fear....” He looked into the queen’s face and knew she knew why.

“The Reflection,” she whispered, and he nodded. They were silent for a while, and then the queen spoke. “Of this you tried to warm me, that much I recall.”

“My Queen—” he protested, but she brushed his unspoken words aside.

“No, I know my own guilt, and now I am prepared to listen. What shall we do?”

Dydd paused, but both knew there was only one thing to do. “We will have to obey the Ritual. Prince Flynn must be brought together with his chosen spouse.”

THE king was silent as he met Méro's eyes, and then he bent his head and sighed. "Or else Yran will die?"

The old man looked out into the future. The gray haze drifted away as he asked his vision gift the one question he had not dared ask before: *If nothing is done, what will be the outcome?* He saw the image of a country dressed in black, a single coffin in a cold temple, and the sound of quiet sobbing from the onlookers. Méro pulled out of the chilling dream with a gasp loud enough to catch the king's attention.

He did not need any other answer and just sighed once more, "Will you contact the Royal House of Sgment and see if they have a similar problem?"

Méro sent an armed group of guards to the border with a request for a meeting with the Royal Seer Dydd. They returned three days later with the response, a hastily written letter from the seer's own hand: *I read your request with eagerness, and surely we should meet. I propose the abandoned ruins at our border town of Radd. I will bring two armed guards to ensure a safe journey and will come in peace at the midnight hour three days before the Day of the Lox, the celebration of fertility known to both of our countries.*

Méro immediately began his long journey toward the border town of Radd. The Sgmentian guard let them through without any problems, and they reached the ruins upon the day they had agreed. The guards sat up camp while he wandered around in the ruins, searching the dusty plains that lay between his own bountiful land and the mountains rising in the distance that hid Sgment from view. When the sun was setting behind the highest peak, he saw a

cloud of dust rise on the narrow road that ran next to the ruins and knew the Sigmentian host had arrived.

The meeting took place in his tent as Dydd, dusty and tired, insisted they talked at once. Méro served wine and a hot meal and made sure no guards were near the tent as the conversation unfolded.

“We in Lyra have suffered a problem for a year now, ever since a certain event.”

He saw Dydd’s eyes light up. “Yes, we too have a problem. An illness in the Royal House.”

They stared at each other, and then Méro said, “Crown Prince Yran of Lyra suffers from a condition and has done so ever since we took the decision upon us to ignore the Ritual of the Reflection.”

Dydd took a large slurp of wine. “We share the same problem, twin countries as we are. It happened when we saw your young Lord’s image in our temple water.” It took some nerve for him to finish the sentence, and he was relieved when Méro nodded.

“Indeed. I saw Prince Flynn’s countenance with my very own eyes.” He knew of the Sigmentians’ dislike of male love and watched the older man’s face as he slowly continued. “As I see it, my learned colleague, the two young people will have to live together as spouses for at least a month’s time to ensure that the Ritual of the Reflection is fulfilled.”

He paused, and Dydd paused, too, before he finally nodded and answered. “But—and I say this with every inch of respect for your ways and traditions—we, the

Sigmentians, do not see the joining of flesh between two males as you do, as something normal and worth praising, and I fear our young Prince Flynn will be difficult to convince to partake in such goings-on.”

Méro smiled sadly, hiding his surprise that someone would think of such silly things when two lives were at stake. “If he suffers just one grain of the pain I have seen my own much beloved prince live through, he will do it. If only to bring himself some relief.” He once more paused when he saw Dydd struggle with that concept.

Then Dydd nodded. “But where? Where should the two of them live during that period?”

Méro thought it over and then had an idea. “Do you recall how the last war started? An argument over who owned the island of Kem, since it is situated on the same line as the border between Lyra and Sgment? There is a house there, where they can live undisturbed while they fulfill the Ritual of the Reflection. We will ship out food with trusted guards and tell the public that the princes are recuperating abroad after a serious illness, which will not be far from the truth.”

FLYNN was dreaming one of his forgotten dreams, one that seemed to be haunting him every night despite his illness. He wrestled with someone unseen in the middle of a burning fire and sensed that his body grew hard by the excitement the friction caused. He felt the flames lick at his limbs as the

fleeing stranger finally came near and reached down to give him relief as well. Flynn felt the man freezing where he himself was burning. Flynn's nipples were sore, his stomach spasmed under the searching hand, and even the orifice between his clammed-up cheeks seemed to be on fire.

He closed his hand around what swelled between the stranger's legs and sought to give the relief he was receiving himself, and then he woke with a muffled yell as he came, his mouth pressed down into the sweaty sheets. Flynn opened his eyes, a little confused, but recalled nothing. He only felt an exhaustion worse than before and some wetness on the sheets that he assumed was sweat.

YRAN dreamed he was trying to embrace a warm body that kept wriggling away from him, leaving him cold. "Don't leave me," he sighed in the dream, and finally the stranger came back to him, closing a warm hand around his ice-cold limb, warming it, moving his hand back and forth. Yran reached out blindly and caught what felt like fever-warm flesh. It seemed he heard a moan—or was it his own? He copied the movements the stranger made and soon felt a wave of heat flow up through his chilled body until he yelled out loud and woke up, feeling cold drops on his skin.

"It will be cooler in the border land," Dydd whispered to his

weak master as they transported him down to the ship. “The only cure can be found on the island of Kem.”

The two seers had discussed what to tell the princes and came up with different strategies. Dydd would tell his lord only what Flynn *needed* to know about the arrangement and nothing else. If such an unnatural act had to occur, it was better not to build up the prince’s resentment beforehand.

Méro had no such reservations. He sat on the bedside of his sick liege and held his cold hand, telling him everything from the beginning, of what he saw in the water of the fountain to the long-sought name of his spouse.

“Flynn,” Yran repeated, whispering it out between freezing lips. “But will we get there in time? And will he see me?”

Before Méro could answer him, Yran slipped back into a restless sleep and did not hear the old man whisper, “Hopefully.”

The two princes were carried from their ships, lying on stretchers, and brought into the house overlooking the blue ocean. The guards placed them side by side on the big bed and then closed the door, secretly making the protective signs against a destiny worse than death. The ailment of the ill princes made them confident they would not last long out there, alone on the island. Méro and Dydd shared a last glance and then nodded to each other. Done was done. Now they could only hope it was not too late.

Flynn woke, feeling the sweat ooze down his naked

chest. *Cooler in the border land*, he thought mockingly. Then he felt a strange coolness and sat up. Next to him lay a beautiful dark-haired man, shivering, and as Flynn crept closer, he realized the cool feeling came from him.

“Lucky creature,” he mumbled. He looked at the beautifully shaped lips that were almost blue. *Pity to be burning up myself and see this dream vision freeze to death and do nothing! Perhaps... perhaps he could cool me off?* He let one burning thigh straddle the icy figure on the bed and rested his palms against the cool linen as he pressed his cracked lips against the frozen flesh.

A sigh escaped Flynn’s mouth as he found that the terrible throbbing of blood in his lips seemed to cool. He pressed his lips against the man once more, this time realizing the stranger’s lips were moving, and he felt a tongue, cold and delicious, enter his hot, gaping mouth, causing shock after shock of instant delight to explode there.

Yran sensed the warm taste of something wonderful in his mouth. He swallowed and felt warmth fill his mouth again. He moaned as his lips thawed and his frozen jaw loosened, and he moaned again as he felt burning hands caress his face. “Please don’t stop,” he groaned as the mouth released him. He opened his eyes and stared into the gaze of a stranger. *Prince Flynn*, he thought.

“Don’t be angry,” Yran heard him whisper. “First time in a long time I don’t feel as if I’m burning up.” He let his hands touch Yran’s chest and heard him moan in both pleasure and pain as the frozen flesh slowly thawed out.

“Merciful Gods,” Yran gasped out. “The feeling is back.

No, I'm not angry, and please, don't stop!"

But Flynn pulled back, suddenly conscious of what he was doing. He sat up, feeling the cool spots on his skin where the stranger had touched him become lukewarm. "I'm... I am sorry. I let myself succumb to the torment of my disease. This isn't right." He crawled off the bed to get as far away from this vision as he could, and in doing so felt the first inkling of sweat pearl out on his skin.

He moaned. Oh no, what had been the seer's words? *A month's time of intimate contact.* He closed his eyes. Flynn knew exactly what he meant, though Dydd did not go into detail, and he recalled how stories of men, painted up like women before they offered themselves to soldiers, had made him sneer. Should he turn into such a creature? Better to die a burning death and keep a good name.

"Flynn."

He heard his own name spoken and saw the strange prince on the bed move his head. The movement seemed to give him pain. Flynn thought back and recalled the scattered comments between Dydd and the strange seer on the beach when they thought he was sleeping. He had heard them say, *As Day to Night, Hot to Cold, they are the shadow reflection of each other.*

What was his name again? Some typical Lyranian name. Yran? Flynn wiped his sweaty brow and tried to ignore the warm waves of heat gushing all over his body.

"If you have any kind of mercy, please help me." The Lyranian prince's voice sounded as no more than a whisper.

Flynn saw that he held out his hand—the fingers frozen and blue—and Flynn realized he had no choice but to give in to the plea. He removed the few wet garments that stuck to his sweaty body and crawled back up on the bed, opened the stranger's clothes with shaking hands, and pulled them off his body until Yran lay naked and shivering next to him. Flynn then paused, unsure what to do next, when he remembered the delicious delight it had been to kiss Yran.

He licked Yran's lips open, entered his mouth with his tongue, felt the soothing coolness mingle with his own heat, and swallowed the moan of pleasure as Yran slowly responded. Then Flynn crawled on top of him, pressing his warm body close, feeling his hot fever fall and Yran's chill thaw until it seemed they both reached the same temperature. Flynn released Yran's mouth and heard him groan as he licked his way down Yran's neck, leaving a warm, wet trail on the skin using his eager tongue.

Flynn felt Yran's hand reach down and close around his shaft. He moaned out loud when the pain disappeared and was replaced with a different throbbing as Yran kept running his hand up and down. Flynn's eyes rolled back in his head as he realized he had only felt anything like this in his dreams.

“For the love of the Gods! Continue! Don't stop!” Flynn cried.

Yran led his grip down to his opened legs. “I'm so frozen inside... please,” he begged.

Flynn looked into the dark eyes, and his member grew harder by the second. “Are you sure? I'm burning up. Are

you sure?”

Yran closed his eyes and opened his mouth. “Yes, yes. I want to feel you. The Gods play awful games with us. Enough with the talking, Sigmentian; bring me relief!”

Flynn slid into him, sweat easing the way, and felt Yran’s coolness temper his own burning hotness, just as Yran felt the ice inside him thaw and begin to flow. He realized Flynn was sucking on his nipple, lusty painful sucks, using his teeth to bring pain to the suddenly sensitive spots and then his tongue to soothe the skin. When his lips began sucking again, Yran whimpered under the treatment and dug his nails into Flynn’s back. He felt Flynn ram into him, again and again, and Yran screamed, pulling Flynn closer, arching his back to feel him even more.

“Oh yes!” he moaned as Flynn raised himself up on his elbows and continued penetrating him, each thrust accompanied by a new scream, and soon Flynn answered him with deep groans.

They came together in one explosive spasm, and Flynn fell on top of Yran, weighing him down so that he couldn’t move. After a while Flynn rolled over on his back and pulled Yran with him.

Yran lay exhausted with his head next to Flynn, watching him for the first time with clear eyes. He felt the well-known fluttering in his stomach and knew without a doubt, that unlike the other man they had tried to tell him was his Reflection, this really *was* him. He reached out his hand, caressed Flynn’s cheek, and felt him startle at his touch and then relax.

Flynn opened his blue eyes and stared into Yran's gaze. Realizing what they had just done, he blushed and saw the stranger smile. "Not cold anymore?" Flynn whispered, and he saw the smile grow larger.

"No." Yran sought the warmth of Flynn's embrace as if it were the most natural thing in the world and closed his eyes. Soon he slept, and Flynn lay watching him, pushing his hair away from his face to really study it.

Later Flynn woke up, comfortable and cool. He felt someone holding him tightly and looked down, discovering Yran's strong arms around his chest. He panicked, removed them quickly, crawled out of bed, and watched Yran roll over on the mattress, already asleep again on his stomach. Flynn pulled on his tunic, watching the sleeping figure on the bed to see if he peeked at him, let his eyes wander slowly over Yran's naked body, and forced himself to look away as the events of the previous day colored his face bright red.

Flynn went through the house, which was smaller than his bedroom at home. It consisted of a tiny bedroom, a kitchen, and what had to be a living room with one ancient gilded couch and a wood table. Flynn opened the front door and stepped out into the sunshine. For the first time he enjoyed the warm feeling on his skin as he realized the island had a climate unlike the rest of Sigment, very luscious and fertile. He looked around, discovered he could see the blue ocean in between the trees growing around the house, and then decided to go the other way and see just how big this island was.

Yran had been dreaming about Flynn and was surprised

to find him gone when he woke up. He wandered through the house, not bothering to get dressed, stepped outside, and enjoyed the feeling of the warm sun on his skin. He saw something move between the trees and knew it had to be Flynn.

The forest lake looked cool and inviting. Flynn did not hesitate before he pulled his tunic over his head and threw it down on the grass on the bank. The trees threw cooling shadows on his body as he walked out into the warm water. A voice called out behind him, and he looked up to see Yran standing naked between two trees, smiling, watching him quite openly. Flynn felt his body react most embarrassingly and quickly dove down in the water to hide himself. When he surfaced he heard delighted laughter and the sound of something moving through water. He turned to see Yran swimming toward him.

Yran stopped next to him, spitting out water, and said, “I was taught Sigmentians were afraid of water.”

Flynn shook his head. “Not this Sigmentian. I’m not afraid of anything.”

Yran narrowed his eyes and smiled slyly. “Really? Then why did you run away when I called out your name?” He noticed the blush on Flynn’s face and scooted closer. “Or were you hiding something?”

Flynn moved back, saying, “Careful, Lyranian. I have killed men for a lesser slight.” He saw Yran laugh with a big delighted smile, making a strange warm fluttering move around in his body.

“Then alas, Prince Flynn, you will have to kill me. But to do that, you will have to catch me first!” Yran dove past him, and while doing so, reached out and smacked Flynn’s rear end. Then he plowed across the lake with long strides toward the other bank.

Flynn roared and followed him, catching him by the foot as they reached firm ground. Yran kicked himself free and tried to run, but Flynn knew more about wrestling and in no time had him on the wet soil where he pinned him down on his back. The fight had born something in him Flynn had never felt before; in fact, he felt a little savage, but looking down into Yran’s eyes, he realized he wasn’t afraid.

“So, Flynn, I guess you won the right to kill me.”

Flynn felt his throat close up. Strange, never before had he felt that words eluded him, but now, something warm and fuzzy seemed to cloud his brain as he watched the water pearl down across Yran’s full lips.

He moaned as he lowered himself over Yran, felt Yran’s strong thighs squeeze his waist, and heard him whisper, “Then come, conquering hero. Stake your claim.” Flynn plundered Yran’s mouth with a deep groan, biting his lips apart, and he felt Yran bite back and drill his tongue against his in a wet kiss that made Flynn moan again.

Flynn tried to spread his legs further with his right hand to find the hot crevice between Yran’s buttocks, that place that had brought him so much pleasure yesterday. But Yran grabbed his hand.

“No!”

“No?” Flynn panted and felt as if he had been dealt a blow to the stomach.

Yran reached up and fingered the tiny glass vial hanging on a leather strap around his neck. “Not yet.”

“Yet?” Flynn tried desperately to think of something else than the blood pumping through his hardened shaft. He reached down and took the vial in his hand, stroking the angular edges, and he noticed a thick liquid slowly moving around inside.

“Not until you use this,” Yran whispered, and he took the cap off the vial. “I am all sore after last night. This will make it more comfortable.” He poured a rich amount of thick yellow liquid out in his right palm and then reached out and grabbed Flynn’s throbbing limb with his left.

Flynn emitted a pleasurable groan when Yran’s long fingers ran down his now fully erect shaft. “What?” he panted, but he went silent as the rich, oily liquid slowly and thoroughly was smeared up and down. He sat up on his knees, feeling Yran’s hands control his body with his back-and-forth movement, and his legs spread wide, believing the pleasure he felt would make his head explode and kill him.

Yran stopped rubbing him and said, “And now me.”

Flynn opened his eyes and almost came when he saw Yran lean back on the ground. Yran’s fingers were dripping, coated by the thick liquid, and he slowly inserted one of them into his clenched hole, closing his eyes as he did. His mouth fell open, and Flynn moved forward instinctively but stopped, thinking, *Wait, wait....*

He saw the finger move in and out without a word; Yran added another finger and made a sound as both slowly were used to penetrate the still-rigid muscle. Flynn could not take his eyes off the sight of Yran's long fingers rhythmically moving in and out of the tight hole. He saw how the movements had made Yran hard, too, and that his own dick was oozing milky white liquid that was dripping down to the ground.

Then Yran pulled out both fingers and let a third finger join them to form a thick rod. He whimpered as he forced them into himself quite fast, and Flynn saw them slip inside effortlessly, making Yran fall back on the ground, hand still between his parted legs.

Flynn let out a deep roar. "Enough!" He yanked Yran's hand away. He wanted to mount Yran more than anything, but yet again the Lyranian prince wanted it differently and came to his knees with shining eyes.

"Lie back!" he ordered, and he pushed Flynn down. He straddled Flynn's waist with his legs still oily and smooth from the generous helping of liquid and reached down, met Flynn's eyes, grabbed his hard member, and led it into his slippery hole.

Flynn yelled out a harsh oath as he felt Yran's tight insides close around him and heard him say, "I want to see you come."

Flynn closed his big hands around Yran's hips and slowly moved him closer. Yran arched his back and moaned, still holding his gaze, and started to ride him as if he were upon a feisty horse.

Flynn let go of his hips with one hand and let the palm glide over Yran's chiseled stomach, making the muscles there spasm and retract, and Yran moaned out his pleasure. He let his head fall back as Flynn moved his hips and penetrated him even deeper. "Yes," Flynn whispered as he moved Yran up and then back down toward him.

Yran's dark eyes met Flynn's pale blue. "Yes," he gasped as he fell forward, feeling the entire length of Flynn's shaft hit a spot that made him yell out.

They were so close, face to face, and Flynn quickly whispered, "Shall I stop? Did I hurt you?" but Yran gasped out, "No! Right there... oh yes, continue!"

The rest of his words were swallowed by a deep kiss. Flynn ran his hands up and down his sweaty back, caressing his firm buttocks, and dug his nails in as Yran let go of his mouth and trailed his lips down. He took a hardened nipple in his mouth and started rotating his tongue around it.

Flynn came explosively, and Yran felt it as a hot geyser as Flynn's shaft pumped inside him. Yran lay his head down on Flynn's chest and sighed. He was still painfully hard, but could feel Flynn's release as if it was his own.

"You—you didn't..." Flynn's voice was muffled.

Yran whispered, "Hush, it's okay." He rolled off Flynn and stretched out with his hands over his head. "I'll take care of it myself."

Flynn crawled over him, saying, "No. Let me." Before Yran could protest, Flynn had surprised him *and* himself by

taking Yran's aching member in his hand. It did not take long before Yran came, splattering all over Flynn.

YRAN whistled while walking up to the house, acting as if this were all normal to him. Flynn felt exhausted and timid; all the old reservations coming back to him as he realized most people would find him tainted by what he had just done. He pulled back, kept his distance, and was relieved when Yran had put on clothes the next time he saw him. It seemed he had turned quiet too. In fact, he seemed sad.

Flynn tried to tell himself to ignore him, but after they had eaten, he blurted out, "Tell me if I hurt you?"

Yran looked at him, confused, but then realizing what Flynn meant, he laughed. Flynn noticed he had a little color in his cheeks. "No. If I'm somber, it is because I miss my home. This place is so like it; it brings back memories." He looked down at his fingers, linked among one another.

Flynn felt a sudden irrational jealousy about those memories that brought such a dreamlike stare to Yran's eyes and looked around to change the conversation. "Though it is not far from my country, this place is nothing like it. We only have a short summer to frolic in; the rest of the year we bundle up to stay warm."

Yran smiled at him, "As long as you bundle up together, it doesn't sound so bad."

Their eyes met, and without thinking about it, Flynn

leaned in and pressed his mouth against Yran's. They kissed slowly, sucking tongues and playing flickering games, sending little shocks through Flynn's system. He felt disbelief that anything could be like this.

Yran was first to break the kiss. He leaned his head back and gazed at him, lips swollen, eyes dreamy. "They tried to give me another mate. Tried to tell me another man was my Reflection, but I knew he could not be. Deep down, I knew all the time."

Flynn narrowed his eyes and repeated, "All the time? How long were you together?"

Yran's eyes revealed his sudden anxiety, but it was too late. "Until I became ill." Flynn pulled away, not much, but enough for Yran to notice. "What about you? I heard Méro say they found a girl for you?" He felt he had to defend himself, but before he could find more to say, Flynn left the table and slammed the bedroom door behind him.

Flynn did not know what had happened to him, but the thought of Yran accepting another man in his place felt.... He covered his eyes with his arm when he heard the door open and felt the mattress move as Yran crawled up next to him.

"What angers you, Prince Flynn?"

Flynn mumbled a sound out; he had no idea himself why he suddenly felt so angry.

"What did you do to that woman?" Yran asked again.

Flynn removed his arm and tried in vain to find his

usual calm. “I had little use for what she could offer so I sent her away. I never felt much passion before.” He reached out and caressed Yran’s cheek, and something in Yran’s eyes told him he understood.

“I have done almost everything,” Yran said. “Except—”

Flynn looked at him. “What is that?”

But Yran shook his head. “It does not matter. Just know this: I never felt with anyone as I feel with you.”

It should not have mattered to a prince from Sigment, should not have been enough to make him feel good inside. But it did.

LATER, much later, in the darkest of night, Yran felt Flynn’s mouth close to his ear.

“What is *that*?” he repeated.

They could not see each other, but Yran knew exactly what Flynn meant. “I never had anyone as you had me twice. I never did what you did. I always thought that I would wait until I was with my Reflection, that only he would show me the trust I needed.”

Silence followed for a long time, and then as Yran thought no answer would come and he prepared to go to sleep, he heard Flynn’s voice. “Come to me, Yran.”

Yran crawled closer and let his lips brush against

Flynn's. Flynn lay still, but as Yran moved on top of him, he felt his heart beat faster and faster.

"Flynn," Yran whispered. "We do not have to go any further." In the dark he could see Flynn's eyes glitter strangely and felt Flynn's legs part underneath him.

"Yes, we do, Prince Yran. I want to feel you as you felt me."

Yran moved down slowly, letting his wet tongue lick the inside of Flynn's thigh. Flynn moaned as he felt the mouth search his soft skin and opened as it sought out his tender spot. Yran's tongue slipped out, licking the orifice between his legs, and Flynn felt an irrational panic as the wet slow movement made him melt, made him welcome an intruder swirling around, ravishing him in the most embarrassing way. Then the tip of the tongue started stabbing at the opening, and Flynn felt an overpowering need to spread his legs and let Yran inside. He pressed his hands against the dark head and groaned, "Take me, Yran. I can wait no longer!"

Yran opened the vial of oily liquid and covered his five trembling fingers with its contents. He quickly massaged the slight opening and heard Flynn moan. He pushed one finger inside him little by little, and the gasping sounds Flynn made convinced Yran that he was beginning to enjoy it. Two fingers followed, and Flynn lifted one leg, letting out a quivering moan, and they slipped inside. Yran was caught up in the erotic notion of giving pleasure and waited until his lover stopped making the small panting gasps before he inserted the three fingers. He saw Flynn's muscles spasm as

delight and pain fought each other for control. Yran made a sound in his throat and parted the already opened thighs.

He pulled out his fingers, placed himself between the muscular thighs, and listened to the deep moan as he felt Flynn's narrow opening stretch and allow him access. He stabbed forward with his hips and inserted his member into the opening, looking intensely down into Flynn's clenched-up face. He saw Flynn relax as he slowly felt the pleasure behind the pain, and Yran gasped as he saw Flynn smile, saw him open his mouth and moan, head beginning to turn and toss on the drenched pillow.

Yran whispered, "I want to see you!"

Flynn opened his eyes as his insides trembled around the swollen shaft. "Oh!" Flynn exclaimed, and then he uttered, "Sweet Gods!" as Yran started to move, first slowly and then more steadily, forcing himself up into Flynn. Flynn grabbed Yran's narrow waist and held on, in the end letting a broad hand glide down to one buttock, pressing Yran down into him with every convulsing spasm.

Flynn came with a deafening scream, shooting his essence out to fall upon skin and sheets. Yran was caught in the rhythmic motion of his hips and kept moving, meeting no resistance. Then he heard Flynn sigh, "Come on, come on!" and knew, that though spent, he wanted to feel Yran come inside of him.

Yran almost yelled out as he was gripped by an excessive convulsion and bolted forward, feeling Flynn's muscular thighs tighten about his waist. He continued, though, one stab, then two, and he shivered as he came,

shooting into the moist tunnel.

They lay still. Yran was sprawled on top of Flynn, sweat pouring down his back, their hands slowly finding each other, fingers intertwining. He tried to ease himself off, but his legs did not obey him, so he ended up remaining half over Flynn with his head on his chest, listening to the deep, heavy thump of his heart. He raised his head to check on Flynn, resting his chin on the chest, and found Flynn's eyes looking into his and felt the tug of his hand as the connection between them almost gave him a shock.

Yran was speechless. Flynn released his hand and closed his arms around him. He dragged Yran up, their faces only inches apart. Yran could feel Flynn's breath on his face as he spoke words he could not understand.

"As Day to Night...." Flynn let go of his arm and twirled a brown lock of hair around his finger. Yran did the same, letting the silky grain-colored hair run between his fingers.

"Yes," he answered, remembering the words spoken in Lyra during the Ritual of the Reflection. "Like the shadow reflection of each other."

They stared at each other, and then Flynn said quietly, "This is not over, is it?"

Yran shook his head slightly. He noticed the anguish in Flynn's eyes and wished that he knew the words to make it go away. It turned out he did. "Kiss me," he whispered, and he saw Flynn smile.

FLYNN saw the ship first as he walked out in the warm sun, blinking against the light. He looked down at the flag whipping back and forth in the fresh breeze, recognizing the Sigmoidian colors of grey and black clear as day, just like their royal motto, “Rock and Flint.” He thought back, panicking. This was the fourth week, and they had received provisions three times. Still, it could not be his vessel home, he was not ready to depart from... He looked back at the house where Yran was sleeping. Flynn was frozen on the spot, not knowing if he should wake him, when a voice spoke.

“Take him!” He felt a burning pain on the back of his head and fell backward, and the last thing he remembered was the sight of Dydd’s terrified face looking down at him, whispering, “I’m sorry.”

Yran heard a far cry, like the sounds sailors make when their ship leaves the harbor. He opened his eyes and smiled as he had done every day for a month knowing Flynn was alive and thinking of him. He reached out, expecting to find a warm body to embrace, and moaned in disappointment as his fingers only caught cool sheets. He sat up, blinking against the light streaming in from the uncovered windows.

“Flynn?” he called out, expecting to hear the usual sounds of someone banging his head against the low ceiling, or better yet, smell food cooking in their little kitchen. But no answer came. Yran sat up, long legs dangling over the bed, putting on the grey tunic Flynn had complained needed mending. “Flynn?” He yelled out his name one more time as

he walked out and wondered where he could be this early in the morning.

Méro's voice cut through his thoughts. "Prince Yran!"

He turned and saw the seer in the doorway, watching him, concerned.

"Méro!" Yran answered, and he hugged him happily. "It is a happy day to get unexpected visitors. How long will you remain?"

Méro looked down and then up, "Not long, Prince Yran. In fact, I have come to collect you." He saw Yran's face change from joy to surprise as it dawned on him what Méro was saying.

Yran turned, pointing at the house. "But Flynn—"

"Prince Flynn left as we arrived, Prince Yran. With a keen eye you may still see his ship in the horizon—"

He was interrupted as Yran bolted past him and ran up the small hill to the highest place on the island. The ocean was a very light shade of blue, shimmering under the warm sun. His eyes hurt as he tried to focus in all the glittering water—and then he saw it. A dark vessel heading north, and aboard it... *Flynn*.

"AW...." Flynn came to with a groan and a terrible throbbing in his head. He heard his mother's restrained voice grow shrill as she said, "And the guard took it upon himself to hit

our prince on the head, causing only *the Gods know what* injuries to his skull?”

Dydd mumbled apologies, trying to explain that the guard who had hit Flynn had acted out of fear, as he thought he saw something appear on the enemy shore.

“Well!” the queen continued. “I daresay the enemy would have made a lesser dent in our prince’s head!”

Flynn felt a cool hand caress his cheek and heard her gasp and then say, “And it is done then? This... occurrence is resolved?”

“It is, fair Queen,” Dydd answered quickly. “No sudden illness will claim him now; he will be fit to marry whoever is chosen.”

Flynn heard their footsteps move away as thoughts slowly started to gather into sentences in his head. Only one word made any sense to him. *Yran*.

“HE eats very little,” Yran’s mother complained to his father. “If this continues—” She stopped herself, and her husband, the king, looked up in surprise, unaccustomed to such silence.

“Then what, dear Wife?” he mocked her. “Will he suffer a fate worse than death? I will make him work a day in the kitchen so he might appreciate all he has.” He smiled, a little puzzled that his emotional wife seemed so strangely calm.

“No jest,” she answered. “What ails him is a disease neither you nor your good Méro will ever comprehend. Though I know very little of anything, of *this* I know much. It is the worst pain possible to love someone who you know does not love you back.”

“Dear Wife,” the king protested, but she raised her hand.

“No. We will discuss this later, and you will no doubt soon have me change my mind on the subject, but for now I will go and see your son.”

She nodded to Méro as he entered and left them alone.

The king stared up at Méro. “What is this spell you have woven, my seer? Lyra seems to have turned upside down. My son, who never frowned a day in his life, now seems to have lost the will to live, and my wife—my wife suddenly makes sense!”

THE summer drought hit Sigmoid early, and people kept themselves indoors most of the day. It was only at dawn and after the sun went down that they ventured outside, but Flynn could not sit still all day. He found that his thoughts kept returning to the small house on the island, and so he moved restlessly to avoid thinking of Yran as he was then, thinking on what he thought of him now, as Yran *had* to believe Flynn had left of his own will when in fact he had not.

Flynn had pondered how he could get a message to Lyra. Perhaps he could bribe one of the tradesmen who crossed the border, but... such scandal if the letter were intercepted!

He went down to the stables in the early cool morning and saddled his horse. The guards let him ride out, but he noticed that one of them ran back into the castle, probably to alert his parents. Flynn rode on quickly, hoping to reach the oasis only he knew of before they saw him.

He soon rode into the maze of lush green leaves, tied his horse to a tree, and left it there eating to its heart's delight. Flynn went back to where he could see the road between the trees and heard the quick sound of hooves come closer and stop.

“What’s in there?” a strange voice asked.

“Just shrubbery, surely. We must have lost the prince. Thunder and lightning! Never seen any man ride so fast!”

“Thunder and lightning are exactly what we will see if we return to the castle without him. The queen ordered that we not leave him without watchers, as his mood has been strange ever since he returned from his recuperation.”

Flynn heard the horses continue, now in a much slower pace, and a voice said, “Who can blame him really? If my mother told guards to watch my every waking moment, I would try to escape too!”

Flynn walked down to the lake in the middle of the oasis and felt an ache as he recalled the lake behind the small house. He sat down on a sun-drenched rock and let one

hand slide slowly through the crystal water, remembering a time he was burning up and only Yran's cool skin could bring him any comfort.

He closed his eyes and felt his heart ache once more. His horse whinnied just then, and another horse answered. The guard already, he thought tiredly. Then he heard a surprised voice, "Flynn?"

He looked up and saw a dark-haired man step out from behind a tree. "Yran?"

A dusty horse went behind him down to the water where it started to drink. Flynn did not move, he just saw Yran come closer, stopping next to the rock.

They looked at each other, and Flynn suddenly blurted, "I—I didn't leave willingly! The guard—" Yran sat down next to him and let his hand caress Flynn's face as he heard him continue. "I did not wish to leave you!"

"I crossed the border through your city of Radd."

"Are you mad?" Flynn interrupted. "If any of the guards see you, they will kill you on sight! Have you not heard? War will be declared tomorrow!"

Yran just looked at him with a deep longing in his eyes. "I had to see you. I could not live a new day without touching you."

Flynn leaned into him as he heard the words, let his lips touch Yran's cheek, and then let them find his mouth as Yran placed his hands around his neck, feeling him to make sure he was real, one hand slowly weaving itself into his light

hair.

Flynn slowly sucked on his lips, letting his tongue play with his, and the kiss went deeper as his hands moved inside Yran's dusty travel clothes. He broke the kiss and whispered "Come...." as he heard Yran's moan of disappointment and pulled him down from the rock and into the long green grass.

Their clothes fell away quickly, and Flynn laughed as he kissed Yran's neck and chest and found the little glass vial there. He opened the cap and quickly dripped some of the liquid in his palm, greasing himself up, and then reached out to take some more, when Yran stopped his hand.

"No. I'm aching for you already. Just come to me now." He lay down in the grass, pulled Flynn down on top of him, and parted his legs he felt Flynn slide in.

Flynn tried to be gentle, to ease his way in, but Yran was right, he was ready for him, and Flynn met no resistance; he only felt Yran close around him as he thrust. He heard Yran moan in his ear, moan his name, and Flynn answered, holding still inside him. He whispered Yran's name and panted out what he had wished to say in the small house but never got out, words like *beloved* and *I love you*.

Yran looked into his cool blue gaze, saw the tenderness there, and whispered, "Come back with me," though he knew it was impossible. So he closed his eyes and whispered, "I want to feel you."

Flynn obeyed and started to move again, almost slipping

out of Yran and then filling him up all the way, letting him feel him. Yran arched his back and gasping clung to Flynn's back. Flynn moaned and came in a spasm, taking Yran with him as his last stab forced them both over the edge.

They lay still, momentary deaf to anything but the blood thundering in their ears. Then they heard the birds chirp merrily, a sign that no strangers were lurking near them. Flynn wanted to move, but Yran's arms held him, refusing to let go.

"Yran, my love, it is too dangerous here. We must get you home!" Flynn whispered the words into Yran's ear, but still he did not let go. He kissed Yran's temple and said, "I'll ride with you to the border. We will not say good-bye just yet."

YRAN looked down at the border. "Still only the same two guards sleeping inside the guard house. I think the heat makes them drowsy." He turned and looked at Flynn. "Tomorrow it will be impossible to pass. Who knows how many years before the next cease-fire?"

Flynn smiled, but his eyes were sad. "When we are Kings..." He let his horse touch sides with Yran's, leaned in, and gave him a short soft kiss. Yran looked down, and then he sadly made his horse walk toward the border.

HE did not look back, could not make himself to do so, Yran only sat slumped over as the horse found its own way back to Lyra. He felt foolish, having brought himself in danger, and now could not help to wonder if Flynn found him foolish too.

Yran thought back; Flynn had looked shocked when he saw him, and he did not even get up from the rock. What if... what if he long ago had settled with someone and just did not wish to reveal it? What if his haste to get Yran securely across the border was not concern for his welfare, but.... No. Yran closed his eyes, remembering the words Flynn had spoken so freely. *He loves me*, Yran thought. I must hold on to that thought.

Yran heard a horse behind him and thought, *Ride away; do not stop to greet me. I do not wish anyone to see me cry*. He dried his eyes and looked straight ahead; then he felt someone ride a little too close, and a hand touched his back.

“Do not ride so fast!” he heard Flynn’s voice say. “I daresay I will have problems getting into your capital city without you as my host!”

Yran turned and stared at him, feeling his sad thoughts take flight as Flynn smiled back at him. “Why?” he asked.

Flynn grew serious. “I tried to ride home, but I kept thinking of you. Then I realized that—that the small house on the island felt more like home after a month than my own country ever did. Because you lived in it.”

Yran met his eyes and realized he was too happy to just smile. Quickly he tied the reins to the saddle and jumped

from his horse to Flynn's, causing it to gallop forward a few steps followed closely by the riderless horse. He wrapped his arms tightly around Flynn from behind and buried his face against his broad back, mumbling, "Let's go home."

J. CROW used to read books and complain bitterly that the endings never quite turned out as they should. After reading one particular promising book which ended most disappointingly, a light bulb actually appeared, hovering in the air, and the following thought found its way through the dusty cobweb corners of the brain, "I could write my own! Interests include writing, reading, and attempts to balance a rich fantasy life with the puzzling demands from what some choose to call The Real Life.

J. lives in the middle of nowhere with a dog, a cat who thinks he is a dog, and three other cats with a more stereotypical feline identity. You can contact J. at j.crow-writing@hotmail.com.



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