

A Sip...



A Torquere Press Short

True Love's First
By A. Graham

When Chas woke, Lord Stephen still snored blissfully beside him. Chas sat up slowly, the covers falling away. The bed looked like royal battles had been fought in it. Lord Stephen's hair looked like those battle campaigns had been unsuccessful. A flagon of wine had upturned across the down comforter, or else someone he couldn't remember had bled to death there. From the smell, he thought it was safe to assume wine.

Late morning sunlight filtered through the stained glass into his bedchamber. He had slept quite late. Well, why not? His father -- healthy, hale, hearty, and whole, not that Chas would wish him any other way, of course -- was ruling the land.

King Charles ruled the land with an iron will and enough soldiers and hag witches to back up that will no matter what any other ruler might desire. Argue with the king and you might sleep for a year and a day, or for a hundred years, or a thousand. Chas had heard of the sleeping kingdoms and that, when the spell ended and they woke, everything within their boundaries faded like dreams. Argue with the king and your kingdom might suddenly cease to exist, or exist only under the sea -- King Charles' soldiers were thorough and his witches inventive. The soldiers used swords. The hags used hatred. Charles used the soldiers and the hags and thus his *peace* lay across the land.

Chas' mother, bless her soul, had churned out several spare heirs before retiring to the cemetery, and no one cared yet if Chas, the oldest of King Charles' sons, was producing his own heirs yet. Thus the trysts -- the dalliances? -- with Lord Stephan. And Frances. And Edward. Oh, yes, Edward.

And he was bored.

He washed in the steaming water someone had brought in. He used the night soil chamber.

He dressed in his favorite leather breeches and jerkin and decided to go hunting. He got as far as the door.

"You're not leaving, are you?" Stephan's voice. A little breathy. Very suggestive. Definitely coming from the trampled and besotted bed.

"I thought a hunt."

"Before breakfast?"

Chas grinned. "Something to stir the royal blood."

"I have just the thing."

Chas finally turned back toward the bed. Stephen knelt there, and he should have looked silly, posing with one hip thrust forward and his rigid cock stretched between his hands as if to demonstrate its prodigious length. Still, with his golden honey skin and straw hair and brown eyes, that chest and the muscle that seemed effortless and deep and his square jaw -- Stephen never looked silly.

The sight was enough to draw Chas back across the room. The taste was enough to engage his interest totally. Stephen's cock tasted salty. "I don't know where this has been, m'lord," Chas

said, withdrawing to speak.

"Nowhere the prince didn't put it, sire." Stephen's voice came in waves, working around what Chas' tongue was doing.

"Perhaps it would be better, then, if you were giving than receiving."

"I'm certain I can do both at once, your highness," Stephen said and toppled them both sideways onto the bed. The sun crept higher in the sky; inside the chamber, Stephen was pliant and quick, severe and playful and nearly double-jointed.

But Chas was still bored.

He woke with the intention of carrying out the idea for a hunt, and ran into Jordan in the hall. One of Chas' father's less annoying heirs, Jordan passed all right for a little brother. Lord Stephen had gone away earlier, off to do whatever it was lords did when not serving their prince. And Chas intended to go for a ride. Quite far. Alone.

"What are you doing, Charles?" Jordan fell into step beside Chas, though he skipped now and again to keep up with the crown prince.

"I am going to ride out into my countryside and, no, you cannot come."

The pout on Jordan's face was instant and insincere. Jordan was more than capable of finding more than enough trouble by himself. "Why can't I come?"

"Well, for one thing, aren't you supposed to be in lessons?" On cue, Chas heard his old tutor's voice echoing down the hallways of the castle. He was calling Jordan, but the voice alone made Chas want to run. He did, his long legs leaving his little brother behind quickly. The pang of guilt he felt dissolved quickly under the pleasure of anticipating a good, long, solitary ride.

Spring had come. The long dark winter was finally behind them and most of the rain had stopped. Once he rode beyond the castle walls, the land spread out in front of him in a glory of rolling green hills, blue sky, and distant grey mountains. The sky was huge and full of bird song and the bright flickers of birds and butterflies. A bucolic, atrocious day. Chas spurred Midnight and rode hard past small streams of crystal clarity, past young maids gardening, past young soldiers training shirtless and post-winter-white in the spring sun. He rode until he reached the wood and stopped hard up against the edge of the primeval vastness.

Midnight snorted and pawed the ground, anxious to run, but Chas reigned him in, threw the reins over a low branch, and slid from his beast's back.

The forest was forbidden. Even for noble-born, to breach the barrier was punishable by flogging.

His father's kingdom only stretched so far, and peace only held so tentatively. But to ride west was to encounter stone mountains and wolves. To ride south was to cross the burning lands. To ride north was to ride into snow.

Chas had ridden in every direction. He had climbed the mist-covered mountains and brought back rare eagle eggs to coddle or cook. He had gone far enough through the burning lands to reach the sea. He'd ridden north once, thinking he might freeze his balls off, and had come back with a bear.

East. East still held mystery.

He swung back onto Midnight's back. Despite Sir Stephan's attentions, he was bored and horny and desperate for something new.

The air from the forest was cold, a little wet, and very old.

Chas moved forward. The sun filtered away almost at once. Here, he rode through a perpetual twilight. Moss hung in sheets from ancient, gnarled evergreens. Fireflies blinked in the gloom, sudden miniature suns that darted out of sight again.

A constant rush of sound filled the forest, the susurrus of wind, a chatter of squirrels and ravens, a slither of things perhaps best left unseen. Midnight's hooves marked the loamy forest floor. He could follow his own path back when he was ready. He'd need to -- the forest was vast, and deep.

The sun moved overhead, sliding west. Three deer, an assortment of rabbits and other rodents, and more ravens and starlings than he could comfortably count later, Chas had grown bored again. No reason for his father to declare these woods off limits. He couldn't imagine why anyone would want to spend time here.

And then he came to the clearing.

The meadow opened around him, huge and glorious, and in the center, the castle grew up, all spindle towers and grey and black quartz stone. It was something beautiful as if from a story, something unlikely and lovely. The castle glowed in the mid-afternoon sun, at least the top towers did. Those towers that rose from under the twisted cover of rose vines and thorns, ancient thorns, long and sharp, and roses -- fat whites and reds. Roses climbed the outside of the castle walls, wove themselves together in an armor he could almost envy. It looked like one of the bespelled, sleeping kingdoms.

"What do you think?" he asked the horse. Midnight pawed the ground and whinnied, and almost seemed to shake his head. Sensible horse. Chas assumed if he could talk, he'd say, "Let's run away now." The horse couldn't talk.

"Let's go in there."

He reached the moat without incident. There seemed to be no one in the area -- no guards, no workers.

"Does this seem strange to you?" he asked the horse, who didn't bother to respond.

He dismounted at the moat, patted Midnight absently, and left his sword hanging from the saddle. Bees hummed sonorous chants to themselves. Sunlight fell heavy on his shoulders. The roses smelled heavenly, like long summer nights and the best sleep ever --

Chas stretched without thinking, head thrown back as he yawned up at the castle spires. Beautiful day, beautiful spot. He should take Midnight down to the stream he could hear running nearby, tie the horse to a tree where it could bathe or wade or graze or whatever suited it, while he kicked back and -- slept.

Chas frowned. He hadn't been sleepy when he arrived, he'd been wide awake, wanting sex or adventure or, preferably, both, in either order. Now --

He yawned again, and this time he opened his eyes at the height of his yawn, arms flung wide, and stared up at the topmost spire of the towering quartz castle.

Where the dragon twined sensuously about the turrets, scaly claws clutching the stone as it eased and drifted lower, watching him, moving without sound.

Chas froze. For an instant, he locked eyes with the thing, all black and gold scales like armor, all piercing fiery eyes and whiplike tail. The dragon froze, staring hard at the crown prince, judging its distance.

The dragon broke the stasis first, and raced down the castle walls.

Chas broke an instant later. He ran back the way he'd come, and whistled piercingly for Midnight.

Find the horse. Find his sword. Never leave your sword, never.

Midnight paced by the river, nostrils wide and searching for scent, eyes wider in fear. He ignored Chas' calls. Chas felt the heat of the dragon behind him, and ran harder. Something brushed his leg, something scaled like dragon flesh. He put on a burst of speed, screamed something incoherent. The sword slithered under his hand. Midnight sidestepped him, then scented the dragon for certain.

The horse reared and screamed.

Chas ran hard. Something else brushed his skin, something like a talon, hard and sharp. This time, he felt the blood start.

The dragon gave a cry, a hissing scream so loud it hurt. Chas lunged away, grabbed the pommel of his sword. Hard, cold steel in his hand. Narrowly avoiding the slashing claws of the dragon, he swung the sword without finesse; he just wanted to kill.

The dragon leapt forward. Chas dragged the sword up, movement in the still, strange place. The blade connected, stuck, and sailed through flesh.

Blood fountained from the dragon's neck -- black blood, putrid and choking. Chas shouted and brought the sword down to finish the job, to separate head and neck. And missed.

Wounded, roaring, alive and terrible, the dragon fled.

Silence returned. No birds sang in the woods. Midnight stood frozen. Even the wind stopped.

The crown prince straightened. He cleaned his sword on the grass. He brushed at his hair. He straightened his clothes. "Must be something in there," he said to Midnight.

The horse snorted and cropped grass.

Inside the castle, it was cold and dank. Sunlight didn't reach through the high mullioned windows, though errant dusty beams lit the air above him. Chas looked down from the sun into the castle itself, at the dust that stretched liberally between candle sconces, thick webbing of strands, at the thick dust upon the flagstones that led him deeper into the keep.

No one had been here in years, that much was certain. Dust lay undisturbed along the floor where he walked. His footprints marked the place, as if making it his.

The throne room was full of skeletons. He understood now where he was. He walked through the castle of his father's enemies. This had been the last kingdom to sink into the guise of peace, unwillingly and unconvincingly.

The kitchen boasted the skeletal serving wenches and cadaverous cooks.

Dragons did not guard the dead. Dragons guarded the living. And dragons guarded treasure. He would find one or the other herein.

The last set of stairs he came to wound up into a tower. A faint rose-colored light slid down the slick, stone stairs toward him, sunlight or roselight, something reflected. Chas ascended and he carried his sword by his side, at the ready. He would not be caught unaware again.

He was caught unaware. The stairs terminated in a single chamber lit by sunlight falling through huge rose- and vine-covered windows. He was in the top of one of the tower rooms he'd seen from the meadow. He stopped, because he'd reached the treasure the dragon had guarded.

The young man was no corpse, no skeleton like the remains he'd found below. He was flesh, and beautiful, with golden hair and apricot down across his cheeks and a flush of sweat across his upper lip where only a few golden hairs grew. Young, but not much younger than Chas' twenty-five years.

The sleeper's deep chest moved slowly under the spell that had befallen him. Strong, long-fingered, capable hands crossed that chest. His full lips, fresh and pink, parted slightly in sleep.

Chas stood still, afraid to breathe. The young man slept on his pallet close to the windows, his body undressed and laid to rest, silks drawn across his hips and loins and legs. His hands rested naturally on his chest. His mouth was almost imperceptibly open, the tip of his tongue at his lip.

Chas caught his breath.

"What sorcery is this?" But it seemed clear enough. His father's witch had performed her magic here, getting what she wanted -- or what King Charles wanted -- at any cost.

Now the prohibitions against the forest made sense. The dragon at the castle gates, the dust along the entry hall, the fallen servants. The castle had fallen and the country had given way to peace grudgingly and slowly, but definitely because there was no one left awake -- or perhaps alive -- to protest.

No one except the young man on the bed.

"You're alive," Chas said, and the man on the bed shifted and stretched, as if near waking, then slid back down into slumber. His eyes closed completely and he sighed. One hand moved on his chest, as if impatient, and he rolled over onto his stomach.

"Sir, I think you tease," Chas said and reached out to stroke the broad, well-muscled back. The prince, if such he was, arched under Chas' hand like a cat fitting itself against the hand that pleased it.

The honey skin was hot, nearly violently alive, as if only the spell held the spirit in check. The young man seemed likely to leap out of his skin. Surely he sensed his confinement.

Chas stroked the back of the neck under the fall of reddish-blond hair, then the shoulders. Tension thrummed under his hands.

My father's work, of course. Charles was a delightful monarch as long as he was never crossed.

Chas kneaded those shoulders, the thick tight muscle around the neck and the golden caps

topping the arms. He ran his hands over biceps and triceps and back to shoulders and across to spine. He kneaded and pressed, stroking hard circles and he leaned closer. His breath stirred the hair on the young man's neck.

"What will wake you, sir? What breaks the enchantment my father's hag cast?" His lips followed his words. He breathed softly against the base of the sleeper's neck, kissed along the spine, moved his own body down the bed so he could stroke hips and lower back, the skin there graced with golden hair, the flesh curving up toward buttock. The sleeper stirred and made a sound like purring. Chas' hands worked the man's skin, his lips moved to the curl of ear beneath the strawberry blond hair. He remembered his tutor telling him the tale of true love's kiss. How a princess had fallen into just such a spell and her prince had awakened her with true love's kiss. A tale for children, he'd thought even at the time, but now...

The sleeping prince shifted, heavy-limbed and warm, and Chas used the movement to urge him over onto his back.

The rise under the silk coverings was fairly obvious.

"And yet you sleep."

He spent a minute simply looking into the beautiful face.

"I know you, my prince, though I've not seen you in many months." Randolph, or something. No, Roland. The young prince's father had refused King Charles' yoke of peace, and there'd been unpleasantness.

So this was what had happened. Chas looked again at the sleeper. He would wake Prince Roland, as surely this was, because King Charles' spell was unnatural and unfair. His hag witch had done this, cursing the country's populace to fall under the rule of a King at turns capricious and wise -- and not their own. Roland had the right to take his country back. He had a right to be freed of endless dreams and passionless sleep.

And he was really quite beautiful.

His lips tasted of the sweetest confections. They parted gently under Chas' lips. His breath was new cut hay. His eyes, opened only to slits, were blue, and they closed again.

"You wake," Chas said. He could hear the accusation and amusement in his own voice.

Roland shook his head imperceptibly.

"Sir, you wake."

No response. Chas kissed him harder this time, lips hard against the other man's. Roland seemed to stifle a laugh, but fell back from the kiss, limbs limp.

Chas grinned. "My quest, then. I shall wake you."

Roland only stirred, and drifted off again, and this time he didn't look to be faking.

"Foul curse," Chas said and pulled the sheets from the bed. They pooled at his feet, a shimmer of silk, and Roland lay exposed, beautiful and hard, the long line of his muscled chest and stomach, golden hair starting at the navel and leading downward like a sunset trail. Chas followed it with eyes, then lips, and pulled back to look at the tight balls, lightly furred, and the proud, long, thick cock.

"I shall," he said, "wake you, my prince." And he sucked the waking prince's cock into his mouth.

He tongued the foreskin, and played it back with his lips, drew the head into his mouth and sucked as he might suck sweet, ripe fruit in summer. His tongue moved up and down the shaft, the length of Prince Roland sliding fully into his mouth, into his throat. The prince's cock was long and thick and strong while Roland, suddenly, writhed as the dragon had upon the sword. He shuddered and curled and straightened as Chas left off with his cock and began to take small bites around the tight, hot balls, along the line of down, around the pale and muscled thighs.

But the prince had not opened his eyes, and Chas did not know if his companion truly still somehow slept. He knelt up onto his knees between the prince's legs, feeling the silky down of the legs pressed close against him. With one hand, he circled the base of the rampant member, and shortened the strokes he made with his mouth, both hand and mouth moving faster up and down Roland's length. With his other hand, he moved down to cup and squeeze Roland's balls, which caused Roland's eyes to flutter. He withdrew his hand for a moment, sucked one finger and returned to sucking the prince's cock while sliding his wet finger deep into the prince's ass.

Blue eyes startled open and Chas wondered briefly if the legend had gotten it wrong. Not a princess, but a prince. Not true love's first kiss, but true love's first fuck?

Roland flooded Chas with hot, thick pleasure, filling Chas' mouth so that he swallowed again and again. When the spasms stopped he looked up and caught Roland's gaze. The young prince looked wary and afraid, glazed and awake, grateful and slightly offended -- and confused.

Chas drew away, withdrew his finger, which caused one last spasm and a brief flutter of Roland's eyes. Roland licked his lips and pulled slightly away from Chas, propping himself against a wall. He seemed at a loss, and though it was a bit late for propriety, Chas offered him back the silks that had fallen off the bed. Roland covered himself, eyeing Chas, who remained sitting on the edge of the pallet.

"This seems -- untoward," Roland said and didn't quite meet Chas' eyes.

"At least unusual," Chas said. "Do you know what has happened here?" He might yet be wrong.

"I had hoped you knew," Roland said and stretched, wincing. "I have slept long?" It was a question of sorts.

"Almost a year, I'd guess," Chas said and then, remembering the traditional wording of spells, "Or more likely a year and a day."

The words, most likely similar to those in the witch's spell, woke panic in Roland's eyes. "She was here. It was... my twenty-first birthday. And my father had a dinner in my honor, venison and fowl, strawberries and sugars -- and then she came. She-- she didn't seem angry?" Confusion crossed his face and he turned his attention fully onto Chas again, pulling his knees against his chest and hugging them as if to make himself the smallest target possible.

Chas rose, angry. "She is my father's hag." He met Roland's confused gaze and said, "I am Prince Charles. My father's kingdom accepted your father's surrender about a year ago," and that explained both the unprecedented peace and Charles' smug expression. The country hadn't surrendered or accepted peace. The country slept, or was dead.

"Not almost a year ago," Roland said. He climbed to his feet, unsteady with his footing for only an instant. "A year and a day." He fumbled for clothes, grabbed breeches and jerkin and boots and a sword, and he ran, his cock bobbing, his naked feet slapping the castle flagstones.

"What is it?"

"Just run," he shouted. "It was near sundown, almost sundown. When she came. *Run.*"

Through the westering windows, Chas saw the light had begun to fade. The west wall with the wide window, all stone and stained glass and late afternoon light, suddenly wavered and dipped, dimmed and shimmered and simply broke apart.

The sense of it rushed in on Chas. His father's hag had cursed Roland a year and a day ago to sleep an enchanted sleep as his kingdom -- the kingdom his now-dead father would have left him -- fell into an uneasy peace under the usurper. And at the end of the year? At the end of the year, when the country was securely in the hands of Chas' father, the kingdom would fade like a dream upon waking. Only there would be no waking.

Chas followed Roland. He could have run faster; the other man was still stumbling awake from his very long sleep. But Roland knew the castle better. They pelted down stained glass-lined corridors, sunlight beaming in at them, diffuse ahead with dust and time to cut through. And brighter behind, where with every step they took more of the castle fell away behind them, sun and wind and bird song unimpeded.

Roland didn't look back. Either he assumed Chas had enough sense to follow and wasn't worth

saving if he didn't, or he didn't intend to get himself killed over the son of his father's murderer.

Run.

Through an echoing, vast hall where beams of light hung thick and heavy with dust and bodies sprawled. They ran through heavy wood doors on the other side of the hall, through the entry into the hall that had already faded to images of wood, like a solid door glimpsed through a lace veil. Chas turned forward and ran, and now the flagstones began to vanish out from under his heels. There was the slightest creeping pull at his flesh as they were sucked away, as if the spell reached for any living being inside the castle. As if it reached for him.

They crossed the drawbridge, Roland just ahead of Chas, and Roland leapt at the last minute, crossing the span of the last four feet. Chas leaped after him, but fell short, sliding back; his heels caught space. His arms flailed for balance. He was going to fall back into the unreality streaking toward them --

Roland caught one flailing arm and dragged him onto the bank of the moat beside him.

They both turned to look back at the castle.

Stone and mortar sparkled in the early sunset and came apart like a sand castle washed away by a wave, or a child's treat destroyed by rain. For a moment, individual stones of the castle walls seemed to stand out by themselves, unsupported, and daylight traced between them, visible as through glass. Then the whole of the impossible creation crashed downward, a spray of rock and shards of glass and dust that rose in clouds and hovered in the still, sleepy air. The princes, watching, began to back away. Roland stopped long enough to pull on breeches, then boots.

And then they backed, swords at the ready. From the fallen castle rocks came a scream of fury. Rocks rose, cast off and away. Violence shook the half-walls that stood. Glass stirred. Rocks spun and fell.

The dragon rose up from the center of the devastation. Black scales, red mouth. The fangs gleamed in the setting sun. The dragon's arrow-shaped head fell back, the red mouth opened. Blood still seeped from Chas' blow to its neck. It screamed fury at the sky. Wings unfolded, claws pulled against the fallen stone to lever it up. It coiled into the sky, long as ever the castle had been, dark grey and black as the stone, and Chas gagged on fear -- this was the castle, the hag's spell to destroy them had set it in motion.

Midnight pranced on the far side of the moat, much too far away. They'd never make it to the horse. Already, the serpent coiled higher into the sky, all muscle, as it rose on membranous wings, coiling and tearing at them with claws and teeth. It rose higher, the better to strike downward, higher to the impressive height of its body above ground. The tail lashed, barbed and wicked. The mouth opened again, and the dragon turned its liquid fury gaze toward them.

Roland grabbed Chas, a clumsy hug that sent the sword flying from Chas' hand, rolled him to the

ground and over, as the flame flashed directly where they had stood and passed over them.

The dragon crested the top of its rise and hung for an instant, watching the princes. A motionless moment passed, and then it flamed downward, fangs and fire and hard-coiled muscle. Something tore past Chas. Something battered him to the ground, but not the tail -- no barbs -- not claws or teeth. The dragon's body had brushed him. He scabbled for the sword Roland had knocked from his hand, tore himself upward, grabbing for trees or structures or Roland himself for all he knew. Instinctively, he moved against Roland, who put his back against Chas'. Together, they raised their swords. The dragon circled, black against the dying sun.

And it didn't drop. Not yet. Huge wings beat the sky. The creature gathered speed.

Creature, Chas thought it. Unreal. Hideous. Malevolent. And the dragon was the hag. And the dragon was the castle, grey-black as the stone. So the dragon was the castle. And the dragon was the kingdom. Kill the dragon, and the kingdom was gone beyond reclamation.

They couldn't *not* fight it.

"What are you doing?" Roland demanded. Chas had lowered his sword.

"Denying my father's magics. That dragon is your kingdom." No time to explain. He grabbed for Roland's sword even as the dragon set itself up for another flurry. "Kill the dragon, kill your kingdom."

Roland's face fell open. Pale golden skin waxed white in the twilight. "Then how--?"

"We deny my father with life."

Roland stared. Flickerings of understanding passed over his face, but he still held his sword, and the dragon now moved faster, preparing to dive toward them, mouth closed, eyes slitted.

"My father cast your kingdom into sleep and death. He rules your country. That dragon is your land. Your castle. Your rule. If you kill it, you kill your kingdom."

Above them, the leathery sound of the dragon was very close. "Deny it," Chas yelled. "Deny death."

They could feel the weight of the thing dropping out of the sky for them. The speed of the dive had sound. Roland didn't pause to look up; he stepped into the circle of Chas's arms.

Chas tightened his grip instantly, and his mouth found Roland's in one first blinding kiss. Roland's lips were chapped, soft underneath, his breath sweet as a new morning despite his year-long sleep. He tightened his own arms around Chas in return and they flinched together, closer still.

The long, hard body of the dragon flashed against them. The speed created a wind that buffeted Chas and sent his hair flying. He didn't look up. He didn't let go of Roland. He just held on, kissing the other man until there was nothing but their mouths. Tongues met and intertwined. Roland laughed when Chas licked the inside of his upper lip. Hands slid down shoulders, along biceps. Hips rocked together and pressed close.

The dragon swooped upward, preparing for another pass. Chas pressed Roland close to him, their mouths together, passion and friendship springing to life, until Roland pulled away.

"We have to fight it." His eyes searched Chas', possibly looking for betrayal.

Chas kissed him one more time, chaste and sweet. "This is fighting it. My father's peace is full of anger and soldiers and death. The hag's magics use hatred and fear and loss."

Roland met Chas' eyes again and swallowed hard. Overhead the dragon banked and shot toward them. Roland pressed against Chas, groin to groin, hip to hip, and pressed his mouth against Prince Chas'.

"Then I deny death," Roland said, and pressed their lips together.

The dragon gave a shriek and dropped fast toward them, wings angled back out of its way, like an arrow tearing down for its target. Chas' tongue found Roland's and joy filled him. In the air, the dragon came apart, only a dark shape against the twilight sky, then only shapes in the night that might once have fit together. And then nothing.

They moved together, Chas found he still held his sword; Roland held Chas. They stared up at the castle.

"I dare you to go in there," Roland said, but Chas could hear the hurt in his voice. Whatever was there or not there, a lot of people had died. Roland's people had died. The castle was returned, but much had been taken.

Chas put a hand on Roland's arm. "It's time for me to claim my kingdom. It has been time since King Charles began to usurp the role of other kings. We will rebuild your kingdom, if you would have my help."

Roland nodded, his red- gold hair catching the very last of the sunlight. Charles suddenly could imagine the way his friend would look upon the throne.

"I will come with you, and the forces of my kingdom are yours to command until you have taken your throne."

Chas nodded and started forward, sword still in hand. Find the horse, find Roland a horse, and --

Roland's hand on his arm stopped him moving forward. "But first--"

Roland's mouth on Chas' was hot and hard. The softness had gone. This was the hardness of a ruler. Roland had been asleep, passive, receiving. Now he demanded. Mouth to mouth, and he broke away and moved his kisses and nips down Chas' jaw, along his throat. He shook an impatient hand to bat away Chas' long, dark hair, kissed his neck, his shoulders, and fumbled for the ties of Chas' shirt. Overhead, the first of the stars began to glow, cold and distant against the sky. Somewhere in the woods, the horse sighed and stamped, impatient to get home to feed and shelter and some kind of normalcy.

Roland dropped lower down Chas' body. He licked along pecs and nipples and the ridges of Roland's hard abdominal muscles. The shirt tore under his impatient hands and Chas tore it the rest of the way off. It tangled around his wrist on the hand that still grasped the sword, which now pointed downward. Chas looked at it for an instant and dropped it. The shirt slithered to the ground in the wake of the sword. Roland's mouth moved lower, a hot, wet line following the outline of Chas' torso, the curves and twists of ribs and abs. He found the indent of navel and tongued it, dipped in and out of it and circled it and pressed further down. The breaches fell under two sets of scrabbling fingers and -- *I'm hobbled if that thing comes back, if that dragon*, Chas thought. But he didn't think it would. And he wasn't going to move.

Roland's tongue slid into the curl of hipbones, sang along the ridges of bone, tangled down into the golden curls at Chas' groin. Around the edges, near and not touching, Roland licked and nipped and sucked, and Chas tilted his hips, almost laughing, wanting to slide his cock into that mouth. *Can you suck like you kiss?*

Kneeling in front of Chas, Roland cupped Chas' buttocks, holding him still, controlling him. Tongue chased further down, finally finding Chas' balls. He lapped at them, licked, sucked just the merest hint of skin, just the tops and then, without warning, pulled Chas' balls into his mouth. Sucking, tonguing, all but gagging on the length as Chas moved and pushed into Roland's throat.

All the force of the dragon built in Chas, tension made his arms buzz. His head felt tight and somehow empty. He stared down the length of his own body to where the prince knelt with Chas deep in his throat. When their eyes met, Chas shuddered and shouted and came. Roland swallowed, and swallowed again, and gently ran his tongue around the shaft, sliding down, tongued the tip very gently, and pulled off completely.

Chas stood for a moment, that empty head thrown back, ears ringing and finally brought his head back down to stare at Roland who knelt, self-satisfied smirk on his face.

In the castle, a torch flared. Lights from brands flickered from the windows. Roland's face filled with wonder. "People are alive in there." His voice was hushed, almost afraid.

"Maybe they only ever slept," Chas said. But he'd seen the dusty, wasted corpses that had fallen, not slept the way the golden prince had.

"Or perhaps you helped me reclaim them." His eyes traveled the castle walls, the lit windows, searching. A figure passed in front of a window, and Roland's face broke into a grin.

"Do we go in? Or do you want to go alone?" A question Chas didn't want to ask. He wanted to stay beside his brave boy.

"Not alone," Roland said. Without looking away from his castle, he felt for Chas's hand and slid his own into it. "And not in. Not yet." He turned to look at Chas. "I will ride with you to your home, and confront your father. I would be equals with my lover."

Chas smiled. It seemed like a dream. "So I am to be king at last."

"I doubt it's an 'at last,' rogue prince. You do not seem to have yearned to rule."

"To my kingdom, then," Chas said. Checking. He knew the hope that kept Roland from going inside yet. The hope that all was not lost. The hope that his parents, the king and queen, still lived. But Chas had seen their bodies, desiccated and dry against the stone of their thrones. And he would as well be equal with his lover when he united their kingdoms.

But no reason not to give Roland some time more to dream. And maybe the magic they created between them could, that could raise castles and fell dragons, would prove Chas wrong.

He turned away from the castle, Roland's hand still in his, and whistled for his horse. They had a long ride in front of them, not only to Chas' kingdom, but to a shared future.

True Love's First

Copyright © 2009 by A. Graham

All rights reserved. No part of this eBook may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews. For information address Torquere Press, Inc., PO Box 2545, Round Rock, TX 78680

Printed in the United States of America.

Torquere Press, Inc.: Sips electronic edition / September 2009

Torquere Press eBooks are published by Torquere Press, Inc., PO Box 2545, Round Rock, TX 78680