

A Sip...



A Torquere Press Short

A Real Emergency
By K.C. Warwick

Rowan woke up with the late morning sun shining into his eyes and Valiance's body pinning him to the mattress. They had been home from their last mission for a week now, and so far the elf had spent every night in Rowan's bed, which was fine by Rowan. After all, Valiance was his bodyguard.

'Home' in this case was the College of Enchanters, where Rowan was employed as a staff

enchanter, though he wasn't sure for how long. His magic had, up until now, a tendency to go wrong, at least until the last task he had undertaken. That assignment had been a resounding success, because Valiance had stopped being critical and bitchy, and had started -- well, what he was doing now.

The elf's hands stroked the length of Rowan's body, causing him to arch up against the warm, hard muscles holding him down. "Are you awake?" Valiance asked.

"Mmm." Rowan still had problems believing that this was true, that Valiance really did want to be with him, even though he was probably the world's most unreliable enchanter. He suspected that his magical powers were not his main attraction as far as the elf was concerned. Magic was certainly not what appeared to be on Valiance's mind at that moment. Rowan gave a little gasp as Valiance's hand slid downward.

He was quite content to follow Valiance's lead, in this as in most other things, though he was quickly learning how to please. Now he reached up to caress as much of the hard, muscled body as he could reach, rubbing against it to maximize the sensations. Valiance gave a murmur of pleasure and one hand moved in a leisurely way down Rowan's spine to rest warmly on his arse. Strong slender fingers slipped between his cheeks and rested there.

"You know," Valiance murmured, "we could go a little further with this."

Rowan swallowed. "You mean-- ?"

"Yeah. But only if you want to." Valiance's eyes met his, concerned and uncharacteristically hesitant. "I don't want to push you. I can wait. We don't have to do it at all if you don't want to."

Rowan found it hard to equate this thoughtful, solicitous person with the aggressive critic of a few weeks ago. He liked the new version much better. "I want to," he assured Valiance, pulling the elf down into a kiss. "But you do realize that I'm -- um -- well, that I've never--" He paused, blushing.

Valiance's lips curved into a smile. "I know. I'll be careful." He rolled off Rowan and reached into the pile of clothes on the chair. "Somewhere I should have some-- ah, yes. There it is."

Rowan looked at the little bottle, but didn't have much time to worry about what Valiance was going to do with it. The elf was a skilled and considerate lover, which was the more surprising when Rowan remembered how forceful he was out of bed. This was all new territory, but Rowan trusted Valiance, and if Valiance said it was going to be all right, then it would be.

However, it was a bit odd. "This feels rather strange."

"It gets better. You'll see."

"Better? I don't really -- oh!" That was obviously what Valiance meant. How on earth did he manage to do that with his fingers? "Oh!"

Valiance was laughing at him. “You’re such an innocent. I love it.”

The room had suddenly become very warm. Valiance was lying on top of him again and they were both getting breathless, when suddenly there was a thunderous knock on the door.

“What the hell?” Valiance glared over his shoulder with such a scorching glance that Rowan was surprised not to see burn marks on the oak.

“What is it?” Rowan called out.

“The chief enchanter would like to see you, sir,” came from the other side of the door.

“What, now?”

“Yes, sir.”

“But it’s my morning off!” And I’m very busy, he added silently.

“Sorry, sir. He said it was urgent.”

Valiance rolled over onto his back. “Tell him to bugger off!” he snarled in the direction of the unfortunate messenger.

There was a slight pause. Rowan, who had not intended to broadcast his relationship with the elf, closed his eyes momentarily.

“I’m sorry, sir, I can’t do that.”

Valiance looked as if he were about to burst into flames, and Rowan laid a hand on his arm cautiously. “I’ll have to go,” he said in a low voice, and then called to the messenger, “Tell him I’m on my way.”

The elf sat up, muttering to himself, and Rowan tried his best to defuse the situation. “Look, I’m sorry, but he’s my boss. It’s not that I don’t want to stay here with you, but I don’t have any choice.”

Valiance gave him a wry smile. “You were really getting into it, and so was I.”

“There’ll be other times.”

“I certainly hope so.”

It seemed that Valiance had every intention of accompanying him to see the chief enchanter, and Rowan couldn’t think of any reason why he shouldn’t, though Rowan had a feeling that the chief was not going to like it. His boss was a tall, thin man with a perpetually harassed expression,

which deepened when he saw the elf standing with folded arms behind Rowan.

“Ah, Rowan, and -- er -- Valiance, isn’t it? Right. Well, Rowan, I’ve got a little job for you. ”

“It’s his morning off,” Valiance pointed out.

“And it’s almost noon,” the chief countered. He concentrated on Rowan. “You know we’re very short of enchanters at the moment, because of this nasty flu bug that’s doing the rounds, otherwise I wouldn’t ask you.”

“Why not?” Valiance demanded.

“Why not what?”

“Why wouldn’t you ask him? He’s a powerful enchanter.”

The chief looked slightly embarrassed. “He does have a record of -- accidents.”

“He got rid of the rock ogre, didn’t he?” That had been their last assignment.

Rowan thought it was time he intervened. “What do you want me to do?”

The chief turned back to him with relief, casting a nervous glance at the elf as he did so. “There’s a vortex out on the western meadows, just a little one, nothing much to worry about, but if the wind gets up, we could be in trouble. I’m sure that you can deal with it.”

What the chief meant was *I’m sure that even you, pathetic as you are, can deal with it*, Rowan decided. He got in quickly before Valiance could say anything.

“All right. Have we got time for lunch first?”

They set out in the early afternoon sunlight for the hour or so’s ride to the western meadows. Valiance seemed to have recovered his temper, for which Rowan was thankful, though the elf was not given to light chatter at the best of times. Rowan spent the journey trying to decide how best to deal with a vortex. He would have liked to ask the chief’s advice, but had been afraid that would lower him still further in his boss’s estimation. By the time they reached the spot, he had worked out how to do it. All he needed was the calmness and composure to carry out the spell.

The western meadows were exactly that, acres of rolling grassland bounded by low hills on one side and a river on another. Rowan could see immediately what the problem was. There was a village bang in the path of the vortex, about half a mile away. If the wind got up, they would indeed be in trouble.

The vortex was a huge cone-shaped funnel of energy, rotating steadily and moving slowly but

inexorably toward the village. Rowan could see people hovering about on the edge of the fields, probably trying to decide whether to make a run for it or not. Behind the vortex was a wide trail of bare earth where everything had been sucked in to it.

“Let’s get a bit closer,” he suggested to Valiance.

“I’ve seen bigger ones,” the elf commented as they rode down onto the smooth turf and approached the thing cautiously.

“Size isn’t everything.” Rowan was surprised when the elf laughed.

“Do you know what you’re going to do?” Valiance asked, as they came to a halt.

“Yes. I’m just hoping that I can do it.” He was starting to feel nervous already.

“Of course you can. Right, let’s leave the horses here. I’ll tie them to that bush.”

On foot, Rowan felt even more vulnerable. He watched with dismay as the vortex sucked up a careless rabbit and a couple of birds. He must do something. Now.

“Wind’s getting up,” Valiance said. “Do your stuff.”

That was what Valiance had said last time, with the rock ogre. This was not nearly as frightening, and Rowan should be able to cope with it quite well. No one was hassling him, and there was absolutely no reason why he should feel as if he was frozen stiff and totally unable to do magic. He began to panic.

Valiance had been watching him carefully. Now he said with authority, “Come here. Now, that’s better, isn’t it? Take deep breaths.”

Safe in Valiance’s embrace, Rowan was able to do that. Valiance stroked his back soothingly. “Think about the spell. I’ll keep an eye on everything else.”

It was just like last time with the ogre. Once Valiance had taken charge, Rowan found that the magic flowed out of him as easily as breathing. Within minutes, Valiance told him, “It’s gone. You see, you can do it, whatever that grey-bearded old idiot thinks.”

“But only with you here,” Rowan pointed out, keeping his face pressed against Valiance’s shoulder.

“So where’s the problem? I’ll always be here when you need me.”

Rowan’s heart began to thump. That was so romantic, but maybe the elf didn’t mean it that way. He looked up anxiously and Valiance smiled at him in reassurance. His lips met Valiance’s, gentle at first and then less so, and Rowan began to remember what they had been doing when they were interrupted.

“There’s a nice grassy bank right over there in amongst the trees.” Valiance sounded speculative. “You could have a rest, then we could-- ”

Rowan pressed closer to him, loving the feel of the elf’s hard body against his own. “Sounds like a good idea to me.” Except that he didn’t want to let go of Valiance, even for the time it would take them to walk across to the trees. He suspected that the elf felt the same way, because Valiance seemed in no hurry to let go of him, preferring in fact to initiate another kiss. This was their undoing.

“Coo-ee!” A shrill voice hailed them from the slope behind and Rowan straightened up guiltily. He’d had no idea there was anyone near them.

Valiance, who had not let go of him, exclaimed, “What the hell?” and then, “Oh, lord. I don’t believe this.”

Rowan pulled away gently and twisted round to see what was going on. Approaching them was a group of middle-aged ladies, clad in tweeds and sensible shoes, and bearing bunches of flowers. If any of them were shocked by the sight of an elf and an enchanter embracing, then they didn’t show it.

“Westhill Women’s Institute wish to thank you for saving our village!” called out the foremost lady, beaming at them.

“They can thank us best by bugging off and leaving us in peace,” Valiance muttered.

Rowan whispered, “Shh! Don’t upset them!”

“What about them upsetting me?” Valiance hissed.

“Please, don’t embarrass me!”

Valiance snorted, but said no more.

“We’ve prepared a little celebratory tea,” one of the ladies told them. She was wearing a tweed hat with a feather in it, and carried a rolled-up umbrella.

They must have prepared the tea beforehand, surely, Rowan reasoned, unless they were the quickest tea-makers in the world. What would they have done with it if he’d failed to remove the vortex? Of course, in that case it would just have been sucked up with everything else.

“Thank you very much,” he told them politely. “We’d be delighted to join you.”

He carefully avoided looking at the elf as he said this, but he heard Valiance mutter, “Sometimes you’re entirely too sweet-natured for your own good.”

The tea was laid out in the village hall -- dainty sandwiches, sponge cake, and scones with jam and cream. At any other time, Rowan would have enjoyed it, but he was, as usual, tired out after performing the spell, and he was also conscious of the stupendous effort Valiance was making in order to behave properly. Their hostesses chatted away to them both, explaining all about the village and who lived there, what the local cottage industries were, and how they had just started an art class that was proving very popular. Rowan tried to look interested and succeeded in smothering his yawns pretty well. Valiance was polite but terse, his eyes more often than not on Rowan, and at last he put down his tea cup determinedly and said, "I'm sorry, ladies, but I have to get the enchanter home. He's dead on his feet."

Then, of course, they all started clucking round Rowan, offering relaxation advice and flasks of tea for the journey, all of which Valiance refused grimly. The elf went to fetch the horses and Rowan found himself with a solicitous escort of concerned women, sticking close to him in case he suddenly dropped from exhaustion. Amidst the cries of farewell and good advice to "Drink camomile tea -- it always helps," and "Put your feet up when you get home," he was horrified to hear one little old lady whisper in his ear, "And make sure that boyfriend of yours lets you top occasionally. These elves can be very assertive, you know."

"Don't ever make me do that again," Valiance told him, once they were out of earshot. "And not so much as a word to my fellow bodyguards. I'd never live it down." He added, with a curious glance at Rowan, "You've gone really red. Are you feeling all right?"

Rowan told him what the old lady had said, and was rewarded by a burst of unsympathetic laughter. "It's not funny!" he protested indignantly. "At this rate, I'll never even get a chance to be bottom!"

"Don't worry, I'll see that you do," Valiance assured him. "But not tonight. You really do look tired." He smiled at Rowan, all vestiges of bad temper gone. "Bed for you when you get back. You can report to the old man tomorrow."

A good night's sleep made Rowan feel considerably better, especially as he spent it wrapped around Valiance. The elf had duties in the morning so Rowan slept late, ate an enormous lunch, and then reported to the chief. It made a pleasant change not to be hauled over the coals for a disaster. He spent the afternoon filling in paperwork, then joined the elf for supper in the refectory.

"Feeling better?" Valiance studied him carefully.

"Fit for anything." Rowan smiled at him. "And fit for one thing in particular..." He was aware of his fellow enchanters' ears flapping, but at that moment, he couldn't have cared less.

Valiance returned the smile. "I've got a bottle of wine. I'll bring it along to your room, shall I?"

They were halfway down the bottle, cuddling on the couch, when Valiance suggested, "What

about a nice leisurely bath? We could finish this in there.”

“What, together?” Rowan gave him a startled look.

“Why not? There’s plenty of room.”

There was certainly enough room for two, once they had sorted themselves out and decided that Rowan had to be uppermost or he was going to drown. “So that old lady was right,” he teased. “She must have known what she was talking about.” His body fitted against Valiance’s in a very convenient way.

“I really don’t want to think about her now.” The elf eased his knee between Rowan’s thighs, sliding his hands down Rowan’s back until he reached his arse. “Let’s carry on where we left off, shall we?”

“Mmm.” A short while later, he said, “Oh! Oh, yes!” as the elf’s strong, talented fingers explored him.

Greatly daring, he reached down and wrapped his hand around the hard length that was nudging him, and then it was Valiance’s turn to say, “Ah! That’s good! Tighter!”

A lot of water was splashing onto the floor now, and eventually Valiance gasped, “We need to get out -- and then I need to get in.”

“Yes,” Rowan agreed fervently -- and at that moment there was a determined knock on the bedroom door, audible even from the bathroom.

“For crying out loud!” the elf exclaimed angrily. “What is it now?”

“It must be important at this time of night.” Rowan reluctantly unwound himself from the elf, and called out, “What is it?”

“Chief enchanter wants you,” was the reply, bellowed from the other side of the door.

Valiance swore loudly. “Then tell him to--”

Rowan interrupted before Valiance could go any further. “Is it really important?” He knew the answer already.

“Emergency.”

“Damn.” He sat up and shook back his wet hair. “All right. I’m coming.”

“That is exactly what neither of us is likely to do in the near future!” Valiance sounded furious. “What is this -- a conspiracy to make sure we don’t get laid?”

Rowan stepped out of the bath and looked down at Valiance anxiously. "I'm sorry. There's nothing I'd like better than to stay here with you, but I can't."

Valiance emerged from the bath like some great sea creature surfacing from the deep. "Well, I'm coming with you. I'll sort him out, the miserable old git. He probably thinks people have got nothing better to do than answer his summonses."

"No, really, I can manage," Rowan began. He could see no good coming of this.

"You'll let him walk all over you." The elf threw him a towel. "Dry your hair. You'll catch cold."

Rowan suppressed a smile. "Don't be rude to him, please."

"I'll be as rude as I like!" Valiance muttered.

The chief enchanter eyed them nervously when they entered his office some time later. "Ah, Rowan. Sorry to disturb you at this time of night."

Valiance told him, "You'd better have an excellent reason." The elf was probably in no mood to listen to it, excellent or otherwise.

The chief addressed Rowan, resolutely ignoring Valiance. "We have a problem with a dragon."

"A dragon?" Rowan felt his heart sink to the bottom of his stomach and then expire.

"Yes, a message has just come in from Woodgarth, over on the border near the Great Forest. Er, where the elves live."

"Yes, we were aware of that." Valiance sounded sarcastic and impatient.

"I know dragons are tricky, but I've got no one else to send. You did so well with the rock ogre, and with the vortex. I'm sure you can cope with a dragon."

"No, I can't." Rowan's voice sounded faint even in his own ears.

"We can't just leave it--"

"Then why don't you go yourself?" Valiance demanded.

The chief enchanter looked startled. "Oh, I couldn't do that! I have duties here."

"How very convenient!" The elf advanced a few menacing paces toward the desk.

"I really can't do this," Rowan told his boss desperately. "Not a dragon. I wouldn't know how."

“And they are incredibly dangerous at times,” Valiance pointed out. “Especially when they-- ” He came to a sudden halt. “Where did you say this dragon was?”

“Woodgarth. Near the river. It keeps flying over a village, only a matter of time before it attacks.” The chief sighed. “If only so many people were not down with flu. I could send a couple of you then.”

Valiance said, “Don’t worry about it. We’ll do it.”

Both Rowan and the chief stared at him with amazement. “What?” said Rowan.

“We’ll sort the dragon out.” He gave Rowan a reassuring smile. “Trust me. I know what I’m doing.”

“But there’s no way I can deal with a dragon!” Rowan protested. “Even really experienced enchanter have trouble with them!”

“It’ll be all right.” Valiance looked at the chief. “Do we need to leave straight away, or can it wait until morning?”

“Valiance, I can’t do this!”

“Well, straight away would be good.” The enchanter gave Rowan a worried look. “I’m sure you’ll be fine.”

“I will not be fine! I will probably be eaten by a dragon! Have you both taken leave of your senses?”

“I’ll get some kit together,” Valiance told him, “then we’ll be off. The journey’s going to take a couple of days.”

Rowan decided it was time to make a firm stand. “There is no way that I am going anywhere near a dragon. That is absolutely my last word.”

Valiance slid an arm round him. “Now, you know you don’t mean that.”

By the time they reached Woodgarth, Rowan was in a fine state of nerves. “Look, trust me,” the elf told him for the thousandth time. “I know what I’m doing.”

“I cannot face a dragon.” Rowan found himself shivering at the very thought. He had spent two extremely disturbed nights because of the worry, and he was not feeling at his best.

“You won’t have to, if what I surmise is correct.” Valiance sounded confident, but then, he always did.

“What are you going to do, tell it to go away or else? Come on, Valiance! Even you can’t get me through this one!”

“Yes, I can.”

They had been riding steadily up open hillside and now they came to the top and found a valley below them, with a large village clinging to the slopes of the hill below. In the distance was a river and on the other side of that, a dark line of trees. “The Great Forest.” Valiance sounded wistful.

Rowan glanced at him. “You want to go home?”

Valiance shook his head. “I have a job to do.”

As if on cue, there was a roaring sound from above them and a scaly winged shape dived down from the crags. “Shit!” Rowan ducked instinctively.

Valiance watched the dragon with narrowed eyes. *If he says ‘Right, do your stuff,’ Rowan thought, I shall kill him. With my bare hands, if need be.*

What the elf in fact said was, “Stay here,” and urged his horse forward to the slope where the dragon was circling and swooping like a great demented bird. Rowan felt ill just watching it. It looked very big and very fierce. He thought that he ought to go and protect Valiance in some way, but his horse was about as enthusiastic as he was where dragons were concerned, and in any case he couldn’t think what to do.

The dragon roared again and Valiance shouted something in elvish at it. It was probably a swear word, Rowan decided, trying not to tremble too much. The dragon banked round and flapped over the top of them, and Valiance shouted again. Rowan couldn’t have made a sound to save his life, which was something he was going to have to give his mind to pretty soon, if the dragon came any closer.

There was a big rock sticking up out of the ground a little way off, and the dragon, to Rowan’s alarm, landed on this and sat there looking at them with its huge heavy-lidded eyes. Mercifully, it had its mouth closed. Valiance shouted once more and made a shooing gesture with his hand -- maybe he *was* telling it to get lost. Rowan watched with a mixture of disbelief and amazement as the dragon cocked its head on one side, just as if it was listening, and blew a little plume of smoke out of its nostrils. Valiance was addressing it pretty forcefully in elvish now, and the creature certainly seemed to be listening. Rowan couldn’t see for certain, but he thought it was wagging its tail. There was certainly something slapping against the rock on the other side, making little bits of stone bounce down the hillside.

Then Valiance made another gesture and the dragon launched itself suddenly into the air. Rowan drew in a sharp breath and braced himself for an attack, but it flew up into the sky, circled round once, and then set off across the river toward the forest.

Valiance wheeled his horse round, a satisfied smile on his face, and turned toward a patch of woodland a little lower down. “Come on,” he told Rowan over his shoulder.

Rowan, feeling that nothing would surprise him now, followed obediently. In the belt of woodland was a small wooden cabin, surrounded by a picket fence. Here, they dismounted and Valiance tethered the horses before leading the way up the path to the door. Then he groveled around under the doormat, produced a key with which he opened the door, and led the way inside. There was a reasonable-sized room with a fireplace on one wall, and two or three doors off it. Valiance opened one and remarked, “Bedroom. It shouldn’t be damp in this weather.”

Rowan stood in the middle of the room and tried to get his thoughts in order. “Perhaps you wouldn’t mind telling me what’s going on?” he suggested at last.

Valiance had found some kindling wood and was lighting the fire. “What do you want to know?”

“Well, just why the dragon went away, who this cabin belongs to, how you knew where the key was kept, and what we’re doing here.” He was starting to feel cross.

Valiance lit the kindling and reached for a split log. “The dragon is an old family pet. He belongs to my uncle, really, and so does the cabin, but we used to come here for holidays when we were kids so I got to know him quite well. He’s harmless, but he does put the wind up people. Steals food from trash cans and that kind of thing. I thought it was probably him when your boss said it was Woodgarth that was having the trouble.”

Rowan took a deep breath. “It didn’t occur to you to explain any of this to me before we set out?”

“Well, I wasn’t totally sure that it was our dragon until I saw him.”

“So you let me worry myself sick on the journey, rather than give me at least some hope that I might not have to try and put a spell on a dragon?” Rowan was furious by now. “You let me think I was going to have to fight him!”

“I kept telling you not to worry.” Valiance sounded surprised. “I just didn’t want to build your hopes up in case I was wrong.”

“Oh, yes, that was a great help! That really made me feel better!”

Valiance blinked at him. “I’m sorry, I didn’t realize--”

“No, you didn’t realize that I do have a brain, and I am capable of logical thought, just as you are! You’re so high-handed and arrogant! I can’t believe you did that to me! Of all the thoughtless, inconsiderate, insensitive jerks I’ve ever met, you are the worst!” The elf gazed at him, open-mouthed. “And I suppose you thought that, having frightened me half to death and nearly given me a nervous break-down, you could casually take me off to your uncle’s cabin and

have your way with me? Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you! And I hope that couch is comfortable, because that's where you will be spending the night!"

So saying, he stormed into the bedroom and slammed the door behind him.

About an hour later, Valiance knocked on the door and called cautiously, "I've made some supper. Do you want some?"

"No." Rowan had completely lost his appetite and was too upset to think about food.

How could the elf treat him like that? What made him mad was the fact that Valiance hadn't considered him important enough to share his plans with, he had just gone ahead and carried them out without consulting Rowan. It was too much to be borne. He considered starting for home on his own, but he knew he would have problems finding the way without Valiance to help him and the last thing he wanted was an ignominious rescue. He brooded for a bit, then went to see if there was any hot water in the adjoining bathroom. Miraculously, there was, so he locked himself in there and had a long bath, feeling hurt and disappointed. After all, he had to while away the evening somehow.

When he emerged some time later, there was a tasteful cold supper laid out on the table and his saddlebags were beside the bed. Such evidence of Valiance's thoughtfulness almost made him falter, but he told himself sternly not to be taken in by this. He ate the supper, drank a glass of wine, then locked the door and went to bed.

The trouble was, he missed the elf more than he would have thought possible. He missed feeling a solid warm presence beside him, missed being able to wake up in the night and go, "Huh?" and have the elf murmur, "Mmm?" in reply, missed waking up in the morning wrapped round Valiance. It really wasn't fair that, in such a short time, Valiance had gained such a place in his life. He'd managed perfectly well before. Why couldn't he just go back to that?

By the time dawn came, he felt even more grumpy and out of sorts -- and it was all Valiance's fault. He dressed listlessly, resolving that he would tell Valiance that they must start the journey home right away, when there was a knock on the door and the object of his thoughts entered, bearing a tray from which the odor of a cooked breakfast floated.

"Would you like--?" At this point, the elf had to duck to avoid a flying pillow which thudded into the door jamb, and it was greatly to his credit that not a drop was spilt as he did so. Before Rowan could consider his next move, Valiance put down the tray on the table and crossed the room in three swift strides, pinning Rowan against the bedroom wall.

For a moment, Rowan panicked, remembering how much stronger the elf was, then he realized that it was not anger but concern in Valiance's eyes. "Bugger off!" he said with spirit.

"Sweetheart-- "

“And don’t call me ‘sweetheart!’”

The elf was holding him securely but gently. He couldn’t escape, but at least it wasn’t hurting. “How can I apologize to you if you won’t listen?” Valiance asked, reasonably enough.

“I don’t want apologies, I want to go home!” That came out sounding more pathetic than he had intended.

Valiance let his hold transform into an embrace. “I know, baby. I’m sorry. You’re right, I am an inconsiderate jerk, and all those other things you said.” Rowan glanced at him suspiciously, but Valiance looked sincere enough. “I was just trying to protect you, but I got so carried away with the idea that I forgot how you must be feeling.” He added softly, “I really missed you last night. I like having you there, even if it’s just to cuddle. In fact, especially then.”

Rowan had a feeling he was being manipulated, and tried hard to raise some righteous anger. “You never consult me about anything!”

“I promise I will in the future.” Valiance’s hand rubbed Rowan’s spine, making him press closer to the elf. “Your word will be my command.” But he said this with a smile.

Rowan snorted. “I’ll believe that when I see it.”

“Well, any commands at the moment?” His other hand tilted Rowan’s chin up gently. “Is there something you’d particularly like me to do?”

Rowan decided it was time to give in. “Yes.” He was about to explain what it was, but the elf anticipated him, and their lips met as hungrily as if they had been parted for a week rather than a night.

Valiance pushed him up against the wall, his knee nudging Rowan’s legs apart so that they could get the relevant bits in contact. “We could eat breakfast before it gets cold,” Valiance murmured.

Rowan considered this idea and discarded it.

“Or we could go back to bed.”

Yes, that would be much better. In less time than Rowan would have thought possible, they were naked between the sheets and Valiance was resuming where they had left off on every previous occasion. “You haven’t changed your mind?” The elf sounded quite anxious about this. Rowan shook his head. “I’m not being too demanding?”

“No.” It came out as more of a gasp than a word.

“Or inconsiderate?”

He was pretty sure Valiance was teasing him. “Look, if you don’t get a move on and bring this to a satisfactory conclusion, I really will change my mind. I’m sure there are plenty of other people who would oblige.”

“So there may be,” Valiance muttered in his ear, “but they’re not going to get the chance.”

At least they were not likely to be interrupted here, Rowan reflected, which was doubtless why Valiance had chosen the place. Finally, they were going to be able to go the whole way -- and not a moment too soon. There had been far too many interruptions.

At this point, Valiance gave a sudden groan of despair and buried his face in the pillow.

Rowan stared round the room, half expecting to see Valiance’s uncle emerging from the wardrobe, but there appeared to be no reason for the elf’s despair. “What’s the matter?” he demanded.

Valiance groaned again. “I forgot the lube!”

Rowan couldn’t help himself. He started to laugh. Although he admired the elf’s competence and efficiency, it was reassuring to know that he, too, could make mistakes sometimes. “Where is it?” he asked, ignoring Valiance’s glare.

“In your bathroom.”

“Then aren’t you lucky that you’re in bed with an enchanter?” Almost without thinking, he performed the requisite spell and handed the little bottle to Valiance with a flourish.

Valiance blinked at it for a moment, then his face broke into a smile. “You are so wonderful. I don’t deserve you.”

“I couldn’t agree more.” He added, quoting Valiance, “Do your stuff.”

Valiance was skilled and gentle, and determined that they were not going to be interrupted this time. At one point, Rowan asked rather apprehensively, “Are you sure this is going to work?” The logistics of the matter, in terms of relative sizes, seemed rather doubtful to him.

“It always has done in the past. You just need to relax.”

Shortly after this, conversation became limited to “Oh!”, “Oh, yes!”, and “Oh, yes, do that again!” on Rowan’s part, and “Shit, you are so hot!”, “Keep doing that, sweetheart!” and “I’m not going to be able to go much longer,” on Valiance’s.

Then there was a flurry of frenzied activity during which they both became very vocal, without actually using any words at all, then it was all over and they were lying panting and tangled in the sheets.

Valiance heaved himself off Rowan and asked anxiously, “Are you all right? I didn’t hurt you, did I? I got a bit carried away, I’m afraid.”

Rowan gasped out, “I’m fine,” wondering whether all the bits of him were still there or whether some had exploded and vanished into the air. “It was good.” He patted Valiance’s arm reassuringly.

The elf rolled over onto his back and pulled Rowan against him. They were both very sticky and very hot, but Rowan felt that he needed to rest before attempting anything as energetic as a bath.

In the end, they bathed together, and then Valiance cooked brunch, which they ate in the garden.

“I think we need to stay around here for a few days,” Valiance said as he cleared the dishes, “to make sure the dragon doesn’t come back.” Then he glanced warily at Rowan and added, “If you think that’s a good idea, of course.”

“Yes, I do. You realize that this is going to take some explaining to the chief?”

“Do we have to explain?”

“Yes.” Rowan was definite about this. “Otherwise I’m going to end up with a totally unjustified reputation for dealing with dragons, and I’ll get sent on every assignment that involves them. I do *not* want that. I still don’t feel very confident about my ability to deal with non-dragon related problems.”

Valiance gave him an amused look. “You know, you got that bottle of lube pretty quickly, without even a moment’s thought as far as I could see. So you don’t need me to help you through every crisis.”

Yes, Rowan admitted to himself, but that had been different. “That was a real emergency,” he said.

A Real Emergency

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Printed in the United States of America.

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

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