



***Rules***  
***By KC Warwick***

“Rules,” Cian said firmly. “We need rules if this is to be a success.” As he spoke, he let his gaze wander out of the window set deep in the stone wall, giving an uninterrupted view of purple and green moorland sweeping up to a rock-strewn ridge. He would like to explore that moorland, and perhaps on this spell of duty he might get the chance. However, he dragged his eyes away from the landscape and

back to his two colleagues, whom he admired with much the same pleasure, tinged with regret for the unobtainable.

Zeke looked up at him from the projectile gun he was dismantling and grinned. "Can't remember the last time I obeyed a rule," he said. "Still, for you I might make an exception." He pushed his long fair hair out of his eyes, leaving an oily streak on his cheek which Cian ached to clean off. He told himself sternly to concentrate as the mercenary continued, "That's probably why I'm stuck here on boredom patrol instead of active service."

"This is active service," Cian told him. "Border guard duty is very important."

"Yeah. Just what you need a demolition team to be doing-- and as if there was anyone within a thousand miles of here who's likely to attack us. After all, that's what treaties are to prevent."

The other occupant of the room seemed unaware of the conversation, though Cian was willing to bet that he would be able to repeat it word for word if asked later. Randall was staring down at the electrical components laid out before him, his brows creased in a slight frown, one hand holding a palm-top computer. He had already modified the surveillance system which protected the house and they had only been there twenty-four hours.

"Demarcation of duties," Cian said firmly. He had worked with these two as a team for the last six months or so and though he liked them both very much-- far too much for his own peace of mind -- he knew that this discussion was necessary if they were to live together in some sort of harmony. As the eldest, though only by a year, it was his

duty to do this. “Randall, you are obviously in charge of security, monitoring possible threats, communications and maintenance of--well, of anything that needs maintaining.” There was no response to this. The dark head remained bent over the circuitry. He pressed on. “Zeke, you’ll be in charge of weaponry, combat, response to any perceived threats, liaison with base. We’ll back you up, obviously, if it comes to a fight.”

“It won’t,” Zeke stated. “I’ve been here before. The place is dead, a complete waste of resources. I don’t know why they bother manning it.”

Cian thought back to his own, private, briefing before they had set off for this tour of duty. *Try to get them to take a rest, the Commander had said. I need them fully operational and they don’t realize how far below par they are. Make sure they eat properly and sleep properly. It’s no use giving them leave, they’ll just fret.* Thanks very much, Commander. I hope I’m equal to it.

“My responsibilities are nutrition, medical, administration and general housekeeping. And anything else that seems to need doing.”

Zeke’s very blue eyes met his. “Anything? You promise?”

He ordered himself not to answer this. “Rule number one. No stripping weapons on the kitchen table.”

Zeke looked indignant. “That’s not fair! What about whatever Randall’s taking to pieces?”

“Rule number two. No dismantling circuitry on the kitchen table.” No response came from the technician who just continued to unscrew wires.

“But it’s nice and warm in here, and it’s a big table. And you’re going to be around most of the time. This will be the centre of the house,” Zeke said.

“It’s also going to be where I cook,” Cian pointed out. “For that I need the table. Which brings me to rule number three.” He swallowed, hoping he could do this without blushing. “Sex.”

Zeke nudged his partner in the ribs. “He’s offering us sex. Let’s grab him now.”

The eyes that snapped up from the circuitry were brown. “Both of us?” Randall sounded interested. He had short dark hair that fell over his face, and a habitually confused expression that Cian knew hid an incisive mind.

“If we’re lucky. What d’you reckon?” Zeke was grinning again.

So much for not blushing. “I am not offering you sex,” he told them determinedly. Something very much like disappointment flickered across the technician’s face, but he made himself ignore this too. He was getting good at ignoring things. “Rule number three. No sex on the kitchen table. Under any circumstances.”

Zeke had the grace to look slightly shame-faced. “It was an emergency,” he explained. “Probably won’t happen again--well, not on the table.”

“It was very uncomfortable,” Randall said with a frown.

“And you were on top,” Zeke reminded. “My back may never recover.”

Cian felt that he was losing control of the conversation. “That’s your own fault,” he told them sternly. “I would prefer it if sex takes place in your bedroom behind a locked door.”

“All three of us?” asked Randall hopefully.

Zeke began to laugh.

“No!” Cian took a deep breath. “I mean that if you and Zeke want to--you know, go and do it in your room. Please.”

Randall was evidently having problems with this. “What falls into the category of ‘you know’? Kissing?”

“Yes,” Cian told him firmly.

“Communicating in an affectionate way?”

“He means cuddling,” Zeke translated. He was putting the gun back together again now, his hands moving quickly and deftly amongst the parts.

“Um-- ” He hadn’t expected to be cross-examined on this. “Within reason, that’s okay.”

“Within reason,” Randall repeated doubtfully.

Cian regarded him with exasperation. The man was twenty-five, why did he have that look of bewildered innocence more appropriate to a sixteen-year-old? Zeke patted Randall on the arm. "We'll have to work on this," Zeke told him, then, glancing at Cian, "Sorry, is this all right? Or do we have to go into the bedroom if I want to touch him? Only if that's the case, you're not going to see much of us."

The blue eyes were dancing and Cian realized he was being teased. "I don't mean to be difficult. It's just that--" he came to a halt. Just that I'm jealous of what you have?

"Just that you think you might jump us if you have to watch too often?" Zeke suggested. "We wouldn't mind, would we, Ran?"

Cian frowned. "You might not, but I would." It was too near the truth to joke about. Time to change the subject. "Rule number four..."

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The alarm started to bleep just as Cian was clearing the table after breakfast some days later. His heart began to thud alarmingly but before he had time to visualize enemy troops swarming across the moors, Zeke was at the window, gun in hand, and Randall was silencing the bleeper and bringing up the exterior on the monitor.

Zeke, flattened against the wall, peered out cautiously and then holstered his gun with a snort. "Can you fix this thing so that it doesn't react to sheep?" he asked dryly.

Randall was studying the monitor. “Might not just be sheep.”

“Okay, tell me when you find something that doesn’t have a woolly coat and go baa. And while you’re at it, find some way of stopping them lying under our window at night, calling to one another across the starlit wastes. It really kills the mood.” He glanced at Cian. “Don’t they keep you awake?”

Cian shook his head and began washing up. “I find them rather soothing.”

“You have a peaceful mind.” Zeke stood up. “I’m going to do some target practice. Possibly involving the sheep.”

Cian glanced at him, decided he was joking and smiled wryly as the door closed. He shifted his glance to the sunlit countryside outside the window. It would be nice to wander off across that smooth green turf, heading for the distant horizon... Randall’s voice from behind him made him jump. “It’s beautiful, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” he agreed, somewhat surprised. He hadn’t thought of Randall as a nature lover.

“We don’t get much time to appreciate our surroundings.”

Randall was standing very close behind him, gazing out over his shoulder, and Cian jumped again as he felt warm hands close on his hips. He tensed, waiting for something else, but Randall seemed deep in thought. *Perhaps he’s forgotten I’m not Zeke*, Cian thought, wondering what to do. Well, as long as it doesn’t go any further than this.

“We could go out for a walk. Zeke can look after the place.”

“A walk?” Cian repeated. He was longing to go but for all sorts of reasons he wasn’t sure if it was wise.

“Reconnaissance,” Randall said, sliding one hand round onto Cian’s ribs.

Cian removed it hastily. “Yes, all right.” That wasn’t what he had intended to say but Randall had flustered him. Maybe on the walk they could have a little chat about Rule Number Five: *You’re not allowed to touch me.*

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It didn’t take them long to reach the rocky outcrop and climb up it. On the other side, green moorland stretched out toward the distant blue line of the sea. When they tried to walk farther, they found that the green was deceptive in that a great deal of it was marshland.

“We need an all-terrain vehicle,” Randall said as they retreated to the rocks and sat down to rest. Here the turf was springy and dry, and Cian stretched out on his back in the sunshine and closed his eyes. He heard the bleep of the radio and Randall said, “It’s too marshy to go farther. We’re in the rocks.”

There was the buzz of static then Zeke’s voice. “Seduced him yet?”

“Just going to.”

The radio beeped off again before Cian could respond to this and he opened his eyes just in time to find his view of the sky obscured as Randall pinned him to the turf and kissed him.

He tried to sit up, tried to protest, but it was a very thorough kiss and left little opportunity for vocal response. Some treacherous part of him didn't want to resist, because being kissed by Randall was something which figured heavily in his favorite dreams, almost as often as being kissed by Zeke... But this kind of thinking was no good at all, he'd decided that long ago.

Randall was a lot stronger than he looked and was able to immobilize him very effectively, but even he had to breathe sometime. When he did, Cian demanded, "What the hell are you doing?" and tried to push Randall off.

Randall didn't budge. "I'm kissing you," he explained. "Don't you like it?"

"Look," Cian began rather desperately, "you can't just kiss me like that! What about Zeke?"

"He isn't here," Randall pointed out.

"I know, and he wouldn't be at all happy if he was!"

He got the bemused frown. "Why not? He likes you."

"Not so much that he'd enjoy seeing his partner kiss me!" He pushed again. "Please let me get up."

"You're enjoying this," Randall stated, letting one hand slide down to Cian's crotch. "You're hard."

Cian yelped and slapped the hand away. There seemed no sense in denying it. "Of course I'm hard! You're very beautiful and I like you--and you're lying on top of me. That doesn't mean that I want this to go any further!"

Randall propped himself up on an elbow and gazed down at him, perplexed. His eyes looked very brown and soft and his hair was falling into them as usual. Cian reached out without thinking and pushed it back. He always found it difficult to stay cross with Randall for long. He wanted very much to pull that dark head down to him and repeat the kiss, but he had sufficient discipline not to. "I don't want to hurt Zeke," he said determinedly. "And this would hurt him, so let me up. It's time to go home."

Randall frowned at him for a moment, then rolled over and came to his feet in one swift move. He reached a hand to pull Cian up. "I like you too, Cian." As if this should change the situation.

Cian gently disengaged his hand. "I know," he said with a sigh. "Just don't do that again, okay?"

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No reference was made to the kiss when they got back to the house, though Cian was sure that Zeke knew what had gone on. Perhaps he had set it up as some kind of a joke; his sense of humor could be somewhat erratic at times. Or maybe it was just Randall being himself, in that innocent unworldly way he had when he was doing totally outrageous things. At that moment he was doing nothing more outrageous than scratching his arm and frowning.

“Did you get bitten?” Cian asked. The other man nodded. “Do you want something to put on it?” Randall nodded again.

Cian fetched the medical kit and sprayed on an anti-inflammatory. “You’ve had your shots, haven’t you?” he asked, thinking about marsh fever and other insect-borne diseases.

“Yes. You can go on fussing though.” He gave Cian a slow, private smile.

“He likes fuss,” Zeke remarked, “and I’ve never been much good at it. Now you have it down to a fine art.” He grinned. “In fact, I wouldn’t mind some fuss myself...”

“I need to get lunch,” Cian told them quickly. He wished Zeke would stop flirting and Randall would stop--whatever it was he was doing. He was beginning to feel confused.

After lunch, he left them on the couch ‘communicating in an affectionate way’ and wrote up the log. He cleaned the kitchen and bathroom, then he sat in his bedroom and brooded. Things would be a lot easier if he didn’t find them both so attractive. Even finding one of them attractive would have been awkward enough, but at least he would have had some sort of respite. As it was, he had to keep a stern hold on his fantasies, and the way they were both behaving did not help him at all. He was going to have to talk to them about it.

He went to bed early and dreamed that Randall was kissing him again while Zeke sat beside them and said, “You’ve got it down to a fine art.” When someone banged on his

door at one o'clock in the morning, he was relieved to wake up.

Zeke was standing there wearing only a pair of boxer shorts and looking worried.

"Randall's ill," he said shortly. "Can you come and look at him?"

Cian pulled on some clothes, grabbed the medical kit and followed Zeke.

Randall was sweating, his skin flushed and hot when Cian laid a hand on his cheek. Randall stared up at him, confusion and pain in his brown eyes. "Cian? I don't feel so good."

"You've got a touch of fever," Cian told him, trying to sound reassuring as he sat down on the bed. "I'm going to take your temperature, okay?" He opened the medical kit, saying over his shoulder to Zeke, "Fetch him some cold water, would you?"

Randall's temperature was far higher than Cian was happy with and he frowned as he looked down at the man on the bed. The arm where he had been bitten was red and swollen and Cian wasn't sure of his ability to cope with this with his meager medical knowledge. Zeke, from behind him, said, "He had all his shots. This can't be marsh fever." He sounded as worried as Cian felt.

"See if you can get him to drink a little," Cian told him, making his mind up. "I'm going to phone the base and talk to a medic." Zeke glanced at him, brow furrowed, evidently worried by this. "I need some advice. This may not be serious but I don't want to take any risks."

Zeke nodded, probably glad to have something to do, and Cian went to the little room where Randall had set up the communications equipment. He got straight through to base and was soon describing Randall's symptoms to a doctor. "Probably just a different strain of marsh fever," he was told, "but in that case, it may not respond to the antidote you have. We'll get someone out there in the next couple of hours to take a look."

When he went back into the bedroom, Zeke was arguing with Randall. "You can't get up, you idiot. You're in no state to--look, here he is. I told you he wouldn't be long." Zeke raised his eyes to Cian's with relief. "He's been fretting for you. Doesn't trust me to look after him."

"You're a useless nurse," Randall told him hoarsely.

"I'm here, Randall," Cian said, sitting down beside the bed and reaching out a hand to take a damp cloth from Zeke.

"I'll look after you, don't worry." He began to bathe Randall's face, speaking over his shoulder to Zeke.

"There's a medic on the way, he'll be here within a couple of hours so keep an ear open, will you? Don't shoot him when he comes in." To Randall he said, "I just need to get you checked out, in case you've been bitten by anything nasty. It's nothing to worry about."

"Okay."

He looked up at Zeke, who hovered anxiously. "Put some clothes on, you'll get cold. Then what about making coffee? It might be a long night."

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Time dragged by and Randall's temperature rose. Cian recorded it on a chart, together with heart rate and blood pressure, but there wasn't much else he could do. After a while Randall stopped making sense when he talked, he kept telling them to get under cover and Zeke said, "He thinks he's in the battle zone. Look, Ran, you're safe. We're all safe, the war's over. Just try and rest."

"You were wrong about him kissing me," Randall told him frowning. "He wouldn't do it and now it's too late. He hates me."

Zeke gave Cian a look, more of a command than a request. "Tell him you don't hate him!"

Startled, Cian spoke soothingly to the sick man. "Of course I don't hate you. I like you very much, Randall, you know that."

"You don't love me."

He hesitated a fraction of a second, feeling Zeke's eyes on him like lasers. "Yes, I do. You know that as well. Now, how about trying to sleep for a while until the medic gets here?"

"You promise you love me?"

"Yes, I promise."

Randall nodded wearily and his eyes closed. Zeke slumped down in his chair. "I hate it when he's ill," he muttered.

“He’s strong and healthy,” Cian comforted, trying to pretend that he hadn’t just sworn that he loved Zeke’s lover. “All he needs is the right medication.”

“And when he’s better, I hope you won’t forget that you just promised that you love him.” His gaze fixed on Cian’s.

Damn. “There are lots of different kinds of love...” Cian began.

“But you know exactly what kind he meant,” Zeke persisted.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to--I was just trying to reassure him.”

Zeke’s eyes looked very blue and very determined. “Look, the more you love him, the better it is for all of us, just as long as I get some too...”

Suddenly Cian was tired of this. “I don’t know what the hell is going on with you two, but now is not the time to discuss it. I don’t need this kind of distraction, I just want him to be well again! And for you to stop whatever this game is!” He glared back at Zeke.

For a moment he thought he’d got a fight on his hands, then Zeke gave a sigh, looking down at his partner. “Sorry. You’re right, let’s get him sorted.” He stood up. “More coffee?”

Cian was relieved that the subject had been dropped, but as Zeke went past his fingers brushed Cian’s cheek, upsetting the fragile equilibrium before it had even had a chance. He opened his mouth to start yelling, and at that moment the

green warning light on the proximity alarm started to flash. "That'll be the doctor. Go and let him in."

The medic was young, good-looking and competent. He introduced himself briefly--'Doctor Alexander Wilson, Alex will do'-- examined Randall and then studied Cian's temperature chart, and gave an approving nod. "This is useful. I need to run some diagnostics and I'll want help setting up." As he bent over his patient, he asked, "Is he your lover?"

What was the matter with everybody tonight? "No," Cian replied shortly.

The brevity of the reply made the doctor glance up at him with a faint smile. "I only asked because people who partner one another often get involved."

"Zeke, the guy who let you in, is his lover." And thank heaven he was making coffee in the kitchen and unable to take part in this conversation.

"Right. Just as long as I know where I am. Hold his arm for me, would you?"

By the time Zeke came back with the coffee, Randall was wired up and the laptop was flicking through its program. The medic accepted his mug with a reassuring smile at Zeke, and told him, "As soon as these tests are finished, I'll give him a shot of something which should bring down his temperature. That's my main priority, then I can move on to diagnosis and treatment."

"Is it likely to be anything serious?" Zeke asked quickly.

“That depends. The sudden onset and severity of the fever are rather worrying, but it might go as suddenly as it came. Out here in the wilds, as I’m sure you understand, we don’t always know what we’re dealing with.” He looked from one to the other of them. “Let’s just take it a step at a time, shall we?”

He’s nice, Cian thought wistfully. Not complicated and unpredictable like Randall, or charming and unconventional like Zeke. This is what I should be looking for, not yearning after what I can’t have.

In a surprisingly short time the computer had run its program and Alex made up a serum for his patient. “Now we wait and see what happens,” he told them, adding wryly, “I suppose it’s no use suggesting that you two get some sleep?”

“No use at all,” Cian confirmed.

There was only one armchair and Zeke insisted that Cian take it, while the doctor sat at the table looking through the data he had collected. Zeke paced the room silently, then after a while came to sit on the arm of Cian’s chair. Without thinking, Cian reached out and took hold of the hand that was hanging limply at Zeke’s side, squeezing it gently. Zeke gave him a wan smile and his other hand, which had been resting on the back of the chair to steady himself, dropped to lie on Cian’s shoulder. The warmth was comforting.

Randall remained asleep, occasionally muttering something unintelligible, but as the sky began to lighten to grey, he gradually fell quiet. Cian dozed fitfully, a knot of hard worry in his stomach preventing him from relaxing. He

knew that Zeke was awake and restless beside him on the chair arm.

They both started when the doctor cleared his throat and said, "His temperature's going down." He glanced at the two in the chair, his eyes resting for a fraction of a second on their linked hands.

Zeke stood up, his whole body tensing again, and Cian kept a wary eye on him while he waited for the verdict. "Well, the fever's subsiding," Alex told them after a minute. "That's good, though it may not be all. I'll stay here for a couple of hours to see how he goes on, then I'll take blood samples from all three of you and get them to the lab."

"All of us?" Zeke queried with surprise.

The medic nodded. "Might be contagious. Now--" he eyed them sternly, "you two need to sleep. I'll wake you if there's any change, or failing that, when I decide to leave. So get horizontal and that's an order!"

Cian's bed was the only other one available but when he suggested that he take the couch, Zeke simply grabbed him by the arm. Once the door was closed behind them, Cian turned on him, ready to argue this out, but Zeke let go of him and folded down onto the bed, his head in his hands. "Shit," Zeke said unsteadily.

As usual, Cian felt compassion get the better of irritation. He sat down beside the other man and slid an arm round his waist. "He'll be okay," he said softly.

“I know.” Zeke’s voice sounded muffled. “I’m such an idiot about him. I ought to be stronger--in fact, I ought to be used to this by now. He goes into danger often enough.”

“Being a soldier doesn’t mean you stop feeling,” Cian pointed out. “As for being strong, I’ve always thought that you’re one of the strongest people I know.”

Zeke raised his head and gave him the ghost of his old grin. “Just shows how easily you can be fooled.”

“You reckon so?” He smothered a yawn. “Come on, we’re supposed to be resting.” He turned back the quilt, pulled off his boots and slid under the cover, waiting for Zeke to join him. He switched off the lamp and turned over on his side, and was not entirely surprised when Zeke inched up behind him, wrapping one arm around Cian to pull him close.

“Zeke--”he began warningly.

“I just want to know you’re there. I like having you around.”

He decided to ignore this. They had enough to worry about as it was, and anyway, he had to confess that the embrace was very pleasant. He could feel Zeke’s chest against his back and the mercenary’s hand rested somewhere over his heart. He was glad they were both fully clothed.

“This was supposed to be a rest for you,” Zeke said from behind him.

“What?” He was drowsy and didn’t understand.

“The commander said we were to make sure you got some rest. Now you’re going to be worrying about Randall the whole time.”

*That cunning bastard*, Cian thought admiringly. Aloud he said, “I’ll be okay.”

“We’re never anything but trouble to you.”

“No, you’re not. Go to sleep.”

Zeke’s arms tightened for a moment then he settled himself more comfortably against Cian’s back and muttered something unintelligible.

Cian was too tired to worry about it; he fell asleep almost instantly and didn’t move until a knock on the door announced the arrival of the doctor. Struggling from sleep, he was aware firstly of Zeke’s arm still round him, and secondly of a quizzical glance from the medic as he came in, but all Alex said was, “Your friend is much better. I think it’s safe to leave him, so if you’ll oblige me with some blood, I’ll be on my way.”

In the other bedroom, Randall was awake and well enough to blink at them groggily. “You scared the shit out of us,” Zeke told him, kneeling down beside Randall and taking his hands. Cian could see them out of the corner of his eye as the doctor extracted blood from his arm.

“You always panic,” said Randall hoarsely.

“Yeah. I do. I’d rather be under enemy fire any day.”

“Good thing Cian was here.”

“We ought to make him a fixture...”

Cian listened with exasperation. Randall was only just returned to consciousness and they were starting again. Alex’s voice in his ear said, “You look tired, Cian. Make sure you get some more sleep.” His fingers on Cian’s arm were warm and gentle, smoothing an adhesive dressing into place.

“When are you coming back?” Cian asked him, trying to sound businesslike rather than pathetic.

“As soon as the lab get the results, probably later today. If you want me before then, just radio through and I’ll be there.” He glanced at Cian and smiled. “You only have to ask.”

That made him feel warm and wanted, though it was probably just the medic’s standard reassurance. Still, it would be nice to think otherwise, to have someone of his own, especially if he couldn’t have--he stopped that train of thought and smiled back.

Zeke’s voice from behind him said, “I’ll show you out, doctor.” He sounded brisk and cool, probably ashamed of his weakness earlier on.

When the door closed behind them, Cian turned back to the bed. Randall looked up at him and stated, “You like him. The doctor, I mean.”

“Yes. Don’t you?”

“I meant, you *like* him, as in ‘you know .’”

“You’re recovering way too quickly,” Cian told him sternly. “Is there anything I can get you? Are you comfortable?”

“Mmm.” Those soft brown eyes looked up into his. “Thanks for looking after me. I’m sorry to be a nuisance.”

“You’re never that.” Randall looked very vulnerable lying there and Cian sternly quashed the wave of tenderness that swept over him. “I’ll be here if you want me. You only have to ask.” It was much later that he realized he’d echoed the words that Alex had used to him.

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Twenty-four hours later they were busy packing while an Army transport waited outside for them. “Is this really necessary?” Zeke grumbled, frowning at Alex as if it were all his fault.

“Yes,” was the patient reply. “The lab can’t identify the virus so you have to go into quarantine until they do. It’s probably just a formality. Look at it as extra leave. At least you’re not ill, so you’ll be able to enjoy it.” Zeke gave a snort, cramming stuff into his bag. “You’ll be able to go into one of the annexes at the isolation hospital since none of you need nursing. It’s really very pleasant.”

He looked at Cian as he said this and Cian found himself wondering how much they would see of Alex while they were there. He was helping Randall to pack, and now he folded the last shirt, placed it in the bag and zipped it up. “Ready,” he announced.

Zeke took the bag out of his hands and told him, “You stay with Ran. I’ll pick up your bag and take it out.”

Cian looked round the place with regret as they made their way outside. He’d been looking forward to some time with his colleagues, and it had seemed like being an easy spell of duty. He doubted that they’d be sent back there even if they were declared clear; their replacements were already in occupation and Zeke had handed over to them. Well, that was life.

However, he began to brighten a little when they reached the isolation hospital, set in woodland well back from the border. Alex was right, it was really very pleasant. His spirits rose still more when, having dealt with the form-filling, they were led along a glass corridor to what looked like a wooden chalet. There was a decontamination unit at the end of the corridor and once inside this, the orderly explained how they would be fed and generally looked after. Then he left them with Alex.

“See, no cooking!” Zeke told him with a grin, which faded rapidly as Alex laid a hand on Cian’s arm.

“I’ll be around the place. If there are no problems you could be out within ten days. Then maybe we could have a drink together.”

Cian opened his mouth to say that he would be delighted, but Zeke got in first. “I’m afraid Cian won’t be able to do that,” he said coldly. “He’s with us.”

Alex looked puzzled and Cian turned on Zeke angrily. “What on earth do you mean?” he demanded, indignation warring with confusion.

“Yes, I’d quite like to know too,” Alex added mildly. “I understood that Cian was--not spoken for. I apologize if I’ve misunderstood.”

“You haven’t misunderstood!” Cian told him, glaring at Zeke.

“Yes, you have,” Zeke stated firmly. “If anyone takes Cian for a drink, it will be us.”

“Look, you idiot --”

Alex stepped between them. In the background, Randall was looking bewildered. “I think perhaps you need to talk this over among yourselves,” the medic said quietly. “The situation seems a little complicated to me, so I’ll back off. However,” he smiled at Cian, “the offer’s still there.” Then he nodded to them and closed the door of the decon unit behind him.

As soon as he had gone, Cian rounded on Zeke. “How dare you interfere in my life? You’ve got no right to ruin the one chance I might have to be happy!”

There was a moment’s silence while Zeke looked at Randall, who said, “We thought we were offering you another way of being happy, with us.”

“Very funny,” Cian said bitterly. “As if either of you would ever leave the other for me!”

There was another silence the Zeke said, sounding serious for once, “That wasn’t quite what we had in mind. It was more like all three of us sharing.”

Cian swallowed, sure that he must have misheard.  
“Sharing?” he repeated.

“Yes. As in a threesome,” Zeke explained helpfully.

“Right.” He took a deep breath. “Are you two completely out of your minds?”

He felt two strong arms wrap round him from behind and Randall’s voice in his ear said, “I thought you promised you loved me?”

He began to panic. “I--how did you know that? You were delirious.”

“You don’t think I’d forget something like that?”

“But--”

Zeke stepped up close, his hands on Cian’s shoulders, pinning him against Randall. “And I’ve wanted you since I first set eyes on you, so what’s the problem?”

“You’ve got one another.” He made himself attack this logically. “What on earth could you want with me?”

“Fantastic sex?” Zeke’s eyes danced.

Randall reached round Cian and slapped Zeke on the butt. “You make it sound as if that’s all we want him for. He won’t go for that.”

“Damn right I won’t,” said Cian, thinking rather wistfully about fantastic sex.

“You see, you’re making him swear and he doesn’t usually do that,” Randall pointed out. “You’re a complete idiot.”

“Okay, you explain then.”

“Well, it’s like making an incendiary bomb. The two parts have to be held together with wire, and you’re the wire.”

Zeke began to laugh. “You’re such a romantic!” he said. “I don’t think I can take this kind of sap!” Neither did Cian.

Randall’s arms tightened a fraction. He began to stroke Cian’s ribs and belly. “We want someone to care for us, Cian, and you’re so good at it.”

“But you care for each other.”

“Intellectually, but not practically,” Randall agreed. “It’s nice being looked after by you.”

“I can do that without being your lover,” Cian told them, not allowing himself to speculate about this. “If all you want is someone to look after you, then just say so.”

“Now you’ve made it sound as if we only want him for what he can do for us. You’re no better than I am at this explaining business.” His arms came round both of them, trapping Cian between the two warm bodies. “Look, you’re a sweet-natured, caring person and we love you, Cian. No one else puts up with our shit the way you do. You’re a good friend and we want you to be more than that.”

“For your own sake as well as ours,” Randall added. “We can’t be sure that anyone else will treat you right. Even Doctor Alexander Wilson may not be all he seems.”

“You might at least have given me the chance to find out,” Cian complained weakly.

“You don’t need him.” Randall’s breath was warm on Cian’s neck, and he shivered involuntarily. “You’ve got us.”

Randall’s hands slid inside his shirt and pressed Cian back against that hard body at the same time as Zeke took Cian’s face between his strong fingers and leaned in for a kiss. For a moment he wanted to fight because he realized how vulnerable he was, held between them like this, then he felt Randall stroking his ribs and Zeke’s tongue pushing into his mouth, and he forgot about escaping. He found that he was holding Zeke tightly, flattened against him because of what Randall was doing, feeling both of them moving against him in response. He spent a fleeting moment of regret for Alex Wilson before giving in to the inevitable.

When Zeke broke the kiss it was to say with a grin, “Shit, I didn’t realize what a turn-on this would be!”

He was quite right and Cian, feeling guilty, said over his shoulder to Randall, “You ought to be resting, not getting all excited like this.” It came out a bit breathless.

“That’s what I love about you,” Zeke told him fondly. “Even on the verge of coming, you still can’t let go of your responsibilities.”

“I am not-- ” Oh, well. Perhaps he was. “But how are we going to make this work?” he asked, feeling confused again. “I mean, the logistics of the thing...” He floundered to a halt.

“Randall’s a scientist, we’ll ask him.”

“I’m a technician, not a biologist,” was the response from Randall, who was clearly not bothered by the problem.

Zeke rocked gently against Cian’s hips. “We’ll work it out,” he comforted. “After all, you can always make us some rules.”

end

## Rules

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Printed in the United States of America.

Torquere Press, Inc.: Sips electronic edition / April 2008

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