

T.A. CHASE  
FIGHTING  
DRAGONS

Loose Id

# *Fighting Dragons*

*T. A. Chase*



## **Fighting Dragons**

**Copyright © March 2010 by T. A. Chase**

All rights reserved. This copy is intended for the purchaser of this e-book ONLY. No part of this e-book may be reproduced, scanned, or distributed in any printed or electronic form without prior written permission from Loose Id LLC. Please do not participate in or encourage piracy of copyrighted materials in violation of the author's rights. Purchase only authorized editions.

eISBN 978-1-60737-557-9

Editor: Georgia A. Woods

Cover Artist: Anne Cain

Printed in the United States of America

**Loose Id.**

Published by

Loose Id LLC

PO Box 425960

San Francisco CA 94142-5960

[www.loose-id.com](http://www.loose-id.com)

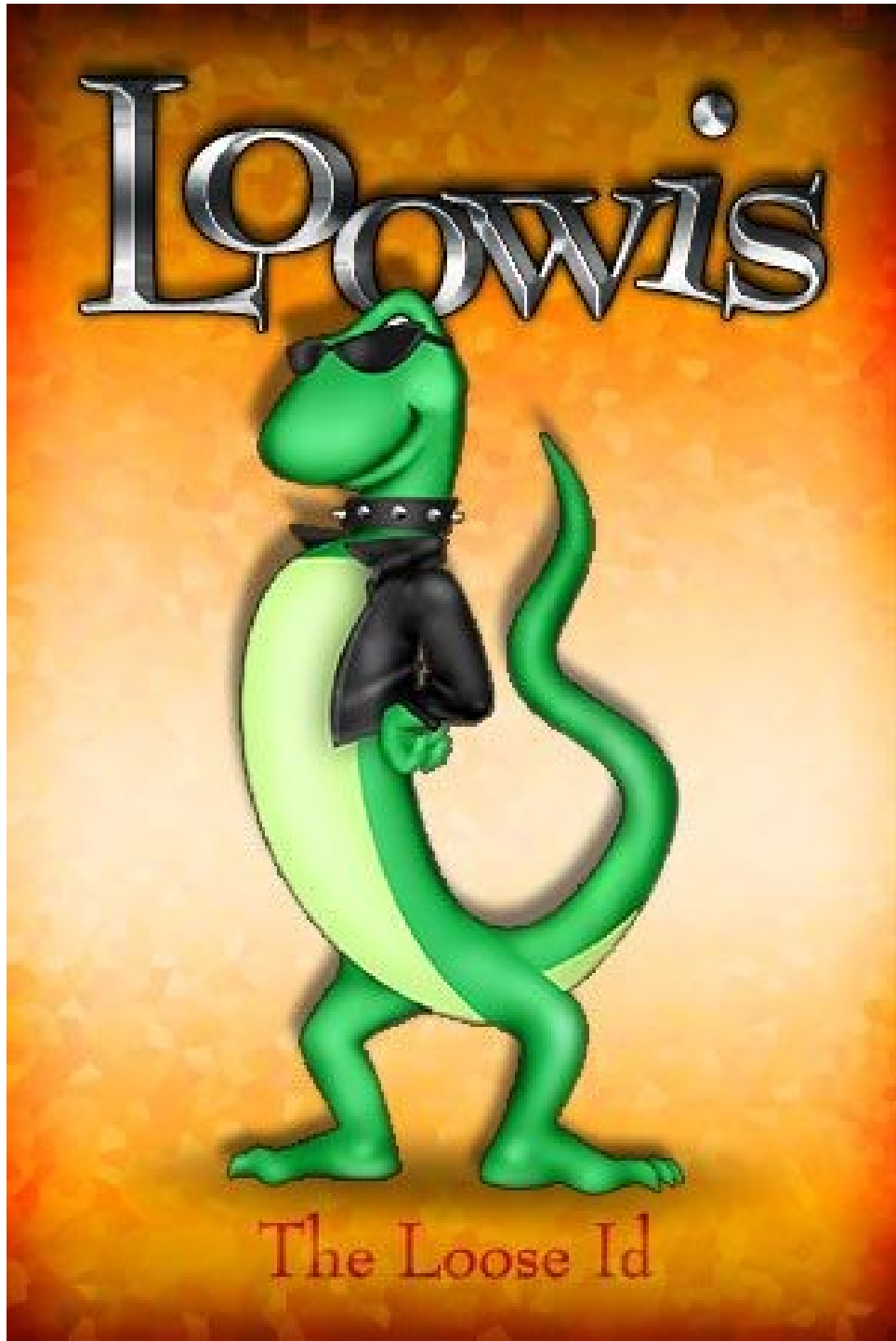
This e-book is a work of fiction. While reference might be made to actual historical events or existing locations, the names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

### **Warning**

This e-book contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language and may be considered offensive to some readers. Loose Id LLC's e-books are for sale to adults ONLY, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

\* \* \*

**DISCLAIMER:** Please do not try any new sexual practice, especially those that might be found in our BDSM/fetish titles without the guidance of an experienced practitioner. Neither Loose Id LLC nor its authors will be responsible for any loss, harm, injury or death resulting from use of the information contained in any of its titles.



<http://www.loose-id.com>

## Chapter One

Soft gasps filled the early morning as cotton sheets brushed over flushed skin. Murmurs turned into low moans and rustling movements sped up. A voice pleaded for release.

“Please, David. I want—”

The words cut off in a sharp cry.

Bailey Stevenson grunted as warm liquid splashed over his hand. Opening his eyes, he stared up at the beige ceiling of his bedroom.

Yes, he was truly pathetic, jerking off by himself instead of going out and finding a warm body to be with. He shoved his clean hand behind him and levered himself off the bed.

It took a minute or two to find his balance before he lurched his way to the bathroom to clean off. After coming, his muscles responded even slower than usual to his requests. He flicked on the light and managed to get the water in the shower turned on without falling over.

Now that would be embarrassing. When he didn't show up at AngleLow Labs, someone would come looking for him, and they'd find him unconscious and naked in his bathroom. If he didn't drown himself first.

Bailey rinsed his hand off and shook his head. He should be out looking for some “no strings attached” sex and fun, but that was the problem. Actually, it presented two problems.

He liked having strings attached to his sex. Oh, not in the kinky “tie me up” way. No, he wanted the sex to mean more than two guys getting their rocks off with each other.

Plus he didn't want just any guy. He wanted a specific tall, gorgeous army captain who blew hot and cold in his actions toward Bailey. Captain David Wellmine probably didn't see him as sexy considering how often the man had to catch Bailey when he tripped, which happened a lot when he was around the captain.

Holding on to the stainless-steel bar he'd installed in his shower, Bailey eased into the tub. The hot water pounded down on his strained muscles, forcing a sharp burst of air from his lungs. His chronic pain flared, and he let out a groan.

He'd have to talk to Kael about getting more of that tonic his friend had made for him. Would asking for it mean that Mordred would come to the lab to deliver it?

Mordred was George St. Albans's lover and an elf who had lived in the Realm of Dreams before the barrier had been compromised. When George returned to the mortal world to stay, Mordred came with him, and the mortal world had gotten a little more beautiful.

With the barrier repaired, dragons stopped showing up, along with other mythological creatures. There were a few holdouts in the more remote areas of the world, but slowly Bailey's unit, the Dragon Slayers, was weeding them out. What would happen to the unit once the creatures were gone? It would only be a matter of time before Bailey was offered a medical discharge since he wasn't even much help sitting behind a desk.

His balance was off more than usual today, but he managed to clean up and get dressed without falling. Having to explain the bruises was getting embarrassing, though for the most part his fellow soldiers didn't ask him anymore. Having gotten ready without calling for help was a major accomplishment for him.

Someone banged on his door as he exited his bedroom.

"Just a second." He yanked the door open just as Maksur raised his hand to knock again.

"You ready to go, Bailey?"

"Yeah, let me grab my keys and wallet."

Bailey snatched them up from the table in the hallway and tucked them into his back pocket. Settling his sunglasses on his face, he shut and locked the door behind him before following Maksur down the hallway to the stairs. Taking his time, he made it down to the ground floor without a mishap, and Maksur flashed him a smile.

"I'm running behind, man. Can't be late again or Captain Wellmine will chew my ass but good." Maksur unlocked his car and slid behind the wheel.

"Tell him I made you late." Bailey fastened his seat belt.

“Nah, man. It's my fault. I didn't hear my alarm clock go off this morning. You would think I'd be used to getting up at the butt crack of dawn.” Maksur scrubbed his hand over his chin.

“Maybe if you didn't stay out so late, you wouldn't have a problem waking up.”

His fellow soldier flashed him a bright smile. “Where's the fun in that? You need to get out more, Stevenson. All work and no play makes for a very dull boy.”

He laughed like Maksur expected, but he wasn't agreeing to hit the town with the man. Maksur trolled the pubs with single-minded determination to get laid every night. He didn't care if he knew his partner's name or not. He simply wanted a warm body, and he wasn't picky about the sex of his partner either. Maksur swung both ways, and while not bragging about it, the lieutenant wasn't the type of guy who was ashamed either.

Entwining his fingers so his hands wouldn't shake, Bailey stared out the car window at the blue Irish sky. Before the bomb that injured him in Iraq, he'd probably have been right beside Maksur, searching for willing bed partners, only his would all be male. Yet the bomb did happen, and Bailey was left picking up the pieces of his life and hoping that someday he found a guy who could overlook the fact that he stumbled when he walked and shook like he was sitting on a washing machine during the agitation cycle.

His fingers traced the face of his watch, and a smile crossed his face. God, Jake would be yelling at him to quit his whining. He'd been injured, but it didn't mean he was dead. He was different, that was all, and he'd have to learn how to live with those changes.

They pulled into the parking lot at AngleLow Laboratories with a few minutes to spare.

“Meet you for lunch, Bailey?” the lieutenant asked as he climbed out of the car.

“Sure.”

Bailey took his time getting out, trying not to rush because that's when he got clumsy. Captain Wellmine wouldn't yell at him if he was a few minutes late. It was the other team members who got chewed out, and Bailey didn't know if he should be honored or embarrassed that Wellmine didn't single him out.

“Hey, Sergeant Stevenson.”

He glanced up and smiled at Monica, Dr. Hugh Price's assistant. “Hello, Monica. How are you today?”

“Wonderful.” She swept up several file folders and grabbed the door leading to the labs before Bailey got there. “You go on ahead.”

“Thanks. Is Dr. Hammerson in yet?”

Monica screwed up her nose while she thought for a second. “Yes, I saw him come in about an hour ago. He should be in Lab Three.”

He nodded his thanks as he walked past her. All of the employees of AngleLow had developed a strategy to help him out without damaging his ego. Bailey appreciated it, but it didn't mean he'd let them see him hurting.

After waiting until Monica disappeared down one of the other corridors, he leaned against the wall for a few minutes, breathing deep and stretching. The cramp dug its claws into Bailey's calf muscle, and he closed his eyes, concentrating on working it out. Easing on his feet, he tested his movement and nodded as the cramp dissolved. He wandered down the corridor to Lab Three and checked to make sure there weren't any warning lights on. Kael tended to get crabby when people interrupted his experiments. No lights, so he knocked.

“Come in,” a voice called from the other side of the door.

Bailey winced as he tripped over the threshold into Kael's lab. Kael and Irene, his lab assistant, glanced up, and he shook his head at Kael's inquisitive look.

“Had a cramp in the hallway. Takes a little time to work out.”

Kael nodded, and understanding lit up his dark brown eyes.

“I was wondering if I could talk to you for a moment?”

Irene grinned as she stripped her lab coat off. “I'll g-go and s-see if Alan has m-made it in t-this m-morning. D-do y-you w-want me to b-bring you some c-coffee, D-dr. H-hammerson?”

“No. I'm fine, Irene. I grabbed a cup on the way in today.” Kael waved his assistant out of the lab.

“Okay. C-call me w-when you n-need m-me.” She walked past Bailey and patted him on the shoulder. “G-good to s-see you again, B-bailey.”

“She doesn't stutter as much as she did when we first met,” he observed after Irene left the room.



Motioning to a chair, Kael laughed. “No, she doesn't. Guess dating Larkin has given her more confidence. When you're not worried about getting hit every time you open your mouth, you're less likely to stutter.”

Bailey understood that theory. The more he worried about tripping or knocking stuff over, the more damage he tended to do. Yet sometimes, if he didn't watch what he was doing, he could be even clumsier.

“What can I help you with?” Kael jotted down a few numbers before giving Bailey his full attention.

“I wondered if you and Hugh needed help with your party. If you make up a list, I can go and get everything for you.”

“You'd be willing to do that?”

He smiled at Kael's relieved expression. “It's no big deal once I know what you want. It won't take too long for me.”

“Thanks, Bailey.” Kael rested his hip against his desk. “This wasn't my idea. Mordred is feeling homesick, so George suggested we throw a party, and St. Patrick's Day is actually a special day in the Realm of Dreams.”

“The Realm must be a marvelous place if Mordred used to call it home. I've never seen anyone quite as beautiful as Mordred.”

“It's a completely different world than ours,” Kael muttered, glancing down at the floor.

Bailey chuckled. “Just looking at the man tells me that. How long have he and George been together?”

“I'm sure it feels like forever for them sometimes.” Kael rolled his eyes and grimaced.

“Most relationships get that way after a while. Of course, I'm no expert. I haven't been in a relationship for years.”

“How are things going between you and Captain Wellmine?”

He shot Kael a surprised look, not realizing anyone noticed how attracted he was to the captain.

“There isn't anything going on between us. We're just colleagues.”

“Uh-huh.” Kael pulled his glasses off and started polishing them. “I might wear glasses, Bailey, but I'm not blind. Neither are Hugh and George, and if both of them noticed something between you two, there has to be something there.”

Ducking his head, Bailey stared down at his feet. “Yeah, well, nothing's happening. I don't think the captain would be interested in someone like me.”

“Someone like you? What's that supposed to mean?” His friend replaced his glasses and sat next to him.

“No guy would find me attractive anymore considering I can't walk without stumbling or tripping over things. I can't even stop my hands from shaking long enough to shave my face. I have Maskur do it every other day, or else I'd probably slit my throat.”

He clenched his hands, but they continued to tremble slightly.

“Plus you're in constant pain,” Kael observed softly. “Even with the tonic I give you.”

Closing his eyes, he nodded, feeling rather pathetic at the moment.

“I think David sees beyond those outward issues. He knows how you got them. They're battle scars, and any man who'd turn his back on a man like you, Bailey, is an idiot.”

“You're a nice person, Kael.” Bailey reached over and patted the slender man's knee. “But not everyone is like you. I've given Captain Wellmine plenty of opportunities, but he's never acted on them. I take that lack as a clear sign.”

He shoved to his feet, teetering for a moment before straightening, appreciative of the fact that Kael didn't try to help him.

“The other thing I wanted to ask you about was the tonic. I'm out.”

Kael pursed his lips and nodded. “I'll get more for you.”

“Thanks. E-mail your list and I'll start getting the stuff tomorrow.”

He made his way to the door and left, heading toward his little office where he ran the supply part of the unit. After shutting his door, he leaned back against it with a low groan. It was still early in the morning, and he was already sore.

St. Patrick's Day was coming up, and the party Hugh was throwing sounded like fun. Maybe he could get Captain Wellmine to go as his date.

Bailey laughed as he pushed away from the door and went to his desk. Wishful thinking because David would never do anything that Bailey might see as an opportunity to start a relationship.

He brought up the order forms he needed to fill out for supplies. There was work to be done, and nothing would come of longing for the captain.

## Chapter Two

A door down the hall shut as Captain David Wellmine entered the corridor. It came from the direction of Sergeant Stevenson's office. David needed to talk to Bailey, but he wasn't in a hurry to do it.

He shoved his hand through his hair and exhaled loudly. The word *temptation* was created to describe Bailey, and David made a career of avoiding temptation as much as he could. It didn't fit in his goals to start a relationship now, especially one with another guy. Not when his father had him on the fast track to become a member of the House of Commons within the next five years.

“Hey, David.”

Glancing up, he saw George standing at the end of the hall, gesturing to him. Rescued from having to talk to Bailey right away, he headed toward George.

“Good morning. There's coffee and food.” George pointed to a small table against the wall holding a steaming pot of coffee, mugs, and a tray of delicious-looking pastries.

“Are these homemade?”

He poured a cup of black coffee. No point in doctoring it with sugar or cream. Picking up a turnover, he stared at it for a moment before biting in.

Taste exploded on his tongue, and he moaned. “Oh my God, this is marvelous.”

George chuckled. “Mordred's discovered he likes to cook and bake.”

“Really?” He shot the man a skeptical look.

“I know. Who would have thought my spoiled rotten lover was domestic?”

“I wouldn't complain about that if I were you.” David dropped into a chair at the conference table.

After getting his own coffee and pastry, George joined him. "I'm not complaining. I'm glad he's found something he enjoys doing. Living here is hard on him."

David nodded. "I bet."

Going from immortal elf with unlimited magic to mortal man with no magic at all had to be a shock, and it didn't matter that Mordred had chosen to become mortal. No one could be prepared for it.

"Mordred's not why I called you in here." George leaned back in his chair and folded his hands on his stomach. "The magical creatures are being contained. Soon there won't be a need for your unit anymore. Have you heard anything from your superiors about what they want to do with you?"

"I haven't heard anything yet, though I assume they'll reassign us to different units, except for..."

"Bailey," George finished his sentence.

Nodding, he stared into his coffee mug. Bailey had been injured by a roadside bomb while serving in Iraq. He'd been lucky not to lose his life or any limbs, but the damage he'd suffered affected his muscles and nerves.

Bailey had been ready for a medical discharge but volunteered to handle supplies and logistics for the Dragon Slayers unit. Now that they were to be disbanded, Bailey would be discharged from the army.

"Bailey isn't going to be happy about that," David murmured.

"I wouldn't worry too much about the young man. Hugh can give him a job here at the lab." George flipped open a folder and pushed it over to him. "There was a sighting of a small dragon out in County Kilkenny. Two witnesses confirmed it."

David let his mind turn to work and not dwell on how much he'd miss seeing Bailey every day.

Thirty minutes later, he and George had hashed out a plan. George went to the phone while David ran the scenario in his head one more time.

"Gather the unit, Bailey, and tell them to meet in Conference Room Two." George paused, listening. "Yes, see if Kael and Hugh can join us. Thanks."

David stood and retrieved another pastry after refilling his mug. The team members wandered in, joking with each other as they sat. Bailey arrived with Kael and Hugh.

As George was about to start the briefing, David's phone rang. He tugged it out of his pocket and grimaced when he saw the number. He held it up and said, "I have to get this."

George waved him out of the room, and he leaned against the wall in the corridor.

"Hello, Father."

"David." His father's familiar cool voice came over the phone. "You haven't called to check in, and I wanted to make sure you're still coming home for your mother's birthday. You know she sets store by those events."

"Yes, sir. I'll be there."

He'd requested a few days off, starting with St. Patrick's Day. He planned to go to Hugh's party before grabbing a flight to London early the next morning.

"Good. There'll be a few people I'd like you to talk to while you're home."

He winced, knowing that at least one of those people would be a beautiful, well-connected woman. His father wanted him married, preferably to a woman who could further his political career.

David shifted, studying his boots. He hadn't worked up the courage to tell his father he was gay. Kind of pathetic considering he could face a rampaging dragon without flinching, but he couldn't stand up to his father.

"Great. I look forward to meeting them." He rolled his eyes.

Not really. He didn't want to meet anyone. All he wanted was to go, wish his mother a happy birthday, and return to Ireland to finish his job.

Laughter sounded behind the conference room door, and he smiled, wishing he could be with them instead of standing in the hallway.

"How are things going with work?"

David rested his head back against the wall. "It's going well, Father. We're getting close to having cleared up all the stragglers."

"Good to hear. Doing this will look good to the voters when you run for a seat in the Commons."

“Father, I have to go. I was in the middle of a briefing when you called.”

David wanted to get off the phone before his father warmed up to his favorite topic. His father's goal had always been for David to take a seat in the House of Commons, where the two of them would work to further his father's very conservative views, and had never asked David what he wanted. For most of his life, David had gone along with whatever his father wished. It was easier than dealing with the disappointment he would encounter from his parents if he told them he wanted to be a career soldier.

“I'm sure being a war hero will really help, Father.” He barely managed to keep the sarcasm out of his voice.

“Don't knock it, son. We can make it work.”

George stuck his head out the door and pointed at David.

“I have to go, Father. I'll call you to let you know when I'll be at the house.”

“Fine, David. I look forward to seeing you again.”

He hung up and fought the urge to chuck the phone up against the wall.

“Captain, are you okay?”

Looking around, he found Bailey standing a few feet from him. The sergeant's dark blue eyes studied him with slight concern.

“I'm fine. Get the supply forms we need filled out and I'll come by to sign them in an hour.”

“Yes, sir.”

The concern disappeared behind a bland smile, and Bailey saluted before turning and making his careful way to his office. David growled low in his throat. Being angry at himself didn't give him any right to be short with Bailey. Opening his mouth to call out an apology, he snapped it shut as the other members filed out of the room. As the captain, he couldn't show he'd made a mistake in front of them. When he went to sign the request forms, he'd apologize then.

Knocking on Bailey's door an hour later, David straightened his shoulders and prepared his apology. It was almost harder to say he was sorry to Bailey than it was to be called on the carpet by his father. Yet Bailey would be far more forgiving than his parents ever would be.

“Come in.”

He pushed open the door and peered around the edge to find Bailey sitting at his desk with a quizzical expression on his slender face. When he saw it was David, he pushed to his feet and saluted.

“At ease, Stevenson. I stopped by to sign those supply requests.”

Bailey sat back in his chair and shoved the forms toward him as David rested one ass cheek on the edge of the desk. “They're filled out and ready. I discussed what was needed with George.”

David picked up a pen and signed his name to the pages without checking them. “I trust you both to know what we need.”

Raised eyebrows informed him that Bailey didn't buy his cheerful attitude. Sighing, he glanced to the side for a second, marshalling his thoughts.

“I want to apologize for being short with you earlier, Stevenson. My phone call annoyed me, but I shouldn't have taken it out on you. You know how to do your job. You don't need me to tell you what to do.”

Bailey typed something into his computer before looking up and meeting David's gaze. “You're right. I know you're my superior officer and I respect that, but I don't appreciate feeling like you're questioning my ability to do my job.”

Shit. The tone of Bailey's voice made David want to hang his head, but he manfully resisted the urge.

“I know and I'm sorry.”

Bailey nodded, a curl of dark blond hair dipping over his forehead. David twined his fingers together to keep from brushing it back. God, everything about Bailey called to him. Before his injury, Bailey probably weighed fifty pounds more than he did now. There were small scars from the bomb marring his face. He figured there were more hidden under Bailey's uniform. The other man's trembling didn't bother him except to give him an excuse to keep a closer eye on Bailey as the man moved around him.

“I'm sorry your caller pissed you off.”

Shrugging, he quirked a smile in Bailey's direction. “I was pissed at myself, not my father.”



“Oh.”

The understanding in Bailey's voice brought a true smile to David's face.

“You have family that sticks their nose in your business?” He settled more comfortably on the desk, dangling his leg off the floor, and rested his hands on his lap, hiding the growing bulge in his groin. It was a natural reaction when he spent time with Bailey.

“My pa died about five years ago from cancer. My mum lives with my oldest sister and her family. I have two other older sisters and one older brother.”

“Ah, so you're the baby.”

Bailey rolled his eyes, and David chuckled.

“Yes, and I get a phone call at least once a day, asking if I'm okay. If I'm eating my vegetables and taking my medicine.” He leaned back in his chair, clasping his hands behind his head. “It would be bad enough if it was just my mum, but all of my siblings call me. At times, I've considered changing my phone number. Then I think about them descending en masse to find out why I wasn't answering my phone and I decide it's better for my sanity to answer.”

Nodding, David wondered if his father would come looking for him if he didn't take the man's phone calls. His father would probably send one of his assistants to his superiors at the War Office to make sure he wasn't dead. Once his parents found out David wasn't dead, he'd receive a very polite e-mail or voice mail berating him in a cool and dispassionate manner about his lack of respect for his family.

“How about you, Captain? Your parents still alive?” Curiosity shone in Bailey's eyes.

“No siblings. Just my parents and me.”

“I'm sorry.”

He shot Bailey a surprised look. “Sorry about what?”

“As much as my family drives me crazy, I know they have my back when I need them. While I was in the hospital, they took turns spending time with me so that I wasn't alone at any point in time while I was healing. They weren't very happy when I volunteered for this mission. They didn't want me that far away from them.”

“They sound like a great group, very caring.”

“For the most part, though the guy who asked me out on my first date probably doesn't think so.” Bailey chuckled at the memory. “They dragged the poor boy into the house, set him down on the couch, and surrounded him. He didn't know what to do. My family asked him what his intentions toward me were and everything overprotective fathers do to their daughters' dates.”

David tilted his head and eyed Bailey. “Did your father know you were gay? How did he take it?”

“Oh, he knew. He wasn't comfortable with it. My mum doesn't really understand it, but she won't ignore my existence.” Bailey paused. “He didn't ignore me either. He just ignored the fact that I was gay. Every time I talked to him, he'd ask me if I was dating any girls and things like that. Pa was stubborn like that, and I didn't like it, but I learned to deal with it. Mum wouldn't let him throw me out or disown me either.”

“Your mum sounds like a strong woman.”

Bailey reached for a frame on his desk and handed it to David. The people in the photo had their arms wrapped around each other and their smiles were full of love as they stared at the person taking the picture. The oldest woman had Bailey's bright smile and gorgeous eyes. The men and women were a mixture of sizes and shapes, but they all had the same dark blue eyes. So they had to be Bailey's siblings and parents.

“She had to be. Dad worked the docks all his life and, at times, found a better life at the bottom of a bottle, but no one's life is perfect, right? Mum made the best of it for the rest of us, and she's the one woman I'll love all my life.”

Would David's mother ever oppose her husband for her child? David didn't think so. Mother was a proper English lady, pretty and standing behind her husband through everything. David had never relied on his mother to back him in any issue if he went up against his father.

Bailey's desk phone rang, and David motioned for the sergeant to answer it.

“Stevenson.” A bright grin creased Bailey's face, and he said, “Hello, Mum.”

David stood, taking the phone call as his cue to leave. He waved a hand, letting Bailey know he didn't have to stand, and sketched a salute before he left.

He needed to go and check the weapons with his lieutenants to make sure they didn't need replacements. Those were harder to get out of the army than food or clothes. Also, he wanted to train with his team members to see where they needed a little more practice.

A low chuckle came from behind Bailey's door, and David smiled as he walked toward the back storage rooms.

## Chapter Three

Hugh pushed open his door, waving Kael in first. Kael brushed a kiss over Hugh's lips as he walked past. A smile broke over Hugh's face. Kael had grown confident over the year they'd been together, and Hugh hoped his love had a little to do with it. Shutting the door behind him, he admitted he liked the man Kael was becoming. A man who spoke his mind and didn't cringe when Hugh disagreed with him.

He set his briefcase on the table in the hallway before heading into the living room. Kael must have continued on to their bedroom to change. He wandered to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator, then pulled out the spaghetti sauce he'd made the night before.

“When are George and Mordred supposed to get here?” he called down the hall.

“In an hour. Mordred said he'd bring dessert.” Kael strolled into the kitchen, reaching under the counter for a large pot. “I'll get the pasta started.”

Hugh grunted as he cut up the bread and spread some garlic butter over it before he slid it into the oven. “Mordred's been baking like a fiend. How is it that George hasn't gained any weight?”

Kael shrugged. “I think he's started a workout regimen with David and some of the other guys. George isn't going to tell Mordred to stop cooking and stuff. First, it insures that he doesn't have to do it, and second, it makes Mordred happy. George worries that Mordred regrets giving up his magic and immortality for him.”

“George has nothing to worry about. Mordred might have been spoiled and self-centered, but there has always been one person he loved more than himself, and that is George.” He gathered the plates and silverware to set the table.

Kael took them from him. “I got this. Why don't you take a shower and change?”

He kissed his love and went to clean up. By the time he came back from the bathroom, George and Mordred had arrived and dinner was ready. Hugh hugged George before getting a

hard, quick kiss from Mordred. He rolled his eyes at the elf, who laughed and sauntered over to Kael, throwing his arm around Kael's slender shoulders.

“You should have seen the kiss he laid on Kael. Hot enough to melt the silverware,” George joked.

“I'm sure. You know, if I didn't trust Kael and know that you'd never give up George, I would probably get jealous.” Hugh winked at Mordred while waving to them to sit.

Kael helped him get the food on the table, and they discussed their days while they ate.

“Oh, by the way, Bailey said if we send him a list, he'll pick up all the stuff we need for our party.” Kael sat back in his chair, resting the glass of water he held on his stomach.

“That was nice of him. Why would he want to do that?” Mordred stood, starting to clear the table.

George joined him while Hugh got the Dutch apple pie from the oven, where it was keeping warm.

“I think he likes to feel useful. He might not be able to help set a lot of things up, but he can at least make sure we have everything we need to make the party a good one.”

“Oh wow,” Hugh groaned around a forkful of pie. “Mordred, this is pure magic.”

The elf blushed and ducked his head, fidgeting with his plate. “Thanks. First time I tried this recipe.”

“You can make this any time you want.”

George and Kael agreed enthusiastically.

“Are Bailey and David coming together to the party?” Mordred eyed Kael with interest.

Kael shook his head. “No. I mean, we all know Bailey and David are attracted to each other, but Bailey doesn't see it. He thinks David wouldn't be interested in him because of his injuries.”

Mordred looked aghast, and George snorted. Hugh gathered the empty pie plates and refilled everyone's coffee mugs. He moved to the living room, where the others joined him. Mordred and George shared the large armchair to the left of the couch where Hugh and Kael snuggled close.

“David is a soldier. He understands injuries and wounds from battle. Why would he turn away from Bailey?” Hugh shook his head and wrapped his arm around Kael's shoulder, tucking his lover closer to him.

“I know, and that's what I told him, but he's given David a lot of chances to make a move on him and David never has.” Kael rested his head on Hugh's chest.

George trailed his hand over Mordred's arm, entwining their fingers. “There might be personal reasons why David doesn't take Bailey up on his offer. Have any of you considered the fact that he might not be gay?”

Three pairs of eyes pinned him with shock gleaming in them.

“What?” He shifted, almost causing Mordred to spill his coffee.

“Love, I thought your gaydar had gotten better over the centuries.” Mordred sucked the liquid from his thumb.

“Gaydar?”

Hugh shot a smile over at Kael before looking back at George. “It's a term that means having the ability to tell or sense whether someone is gay or not.”

“Where did you learn that?” George eyed Mordred.

The elf shrugged and wrinkled his nose. “I must have learned it from TV. I watch a lot of it while you're off at work.”

“All those cooking shows are paying off, though,” Kael teased.

“True.” Mordred leaned over to set his mug down and twisted around to look at George. “You were the one to point out that David seemed interested in Bailey.”

“So I did. Does that mean I have gaydar?” George's sarcastic tone caused Hugh and Kael to laugh.

“Stop it.” Mordred punched George's chest before turning to face them again. “I think they would make a great couple. Maybe they just need a push or two to make them realize how much they like each other.”

The speculative look on Mordred's face made Hugh uneasy.

“Don't get any ideas, Mordred. They're adults and can figure out their relationship on their own. They don't need any help from us.”

Kael didn't speak up, so Hugh had a feeling that his partner felt the same way Mordred did. Mordred fluttered his eyelashes at Hugh with a "butter wouldn't melt" expression on his face.

"I know better than to trust you when you give me that look. Just remember that this isn't the Realm of Dreams. Things can go wrong and not have any kind of quick fix."

He snatched up a notebook and pen from the table next to the couch, then handed it to Kael. "Let's make our list of supplies and everything, so Bailey can pick it up for us."

Like any elf, Mordred loved a party, and the discussion took his mind off Bailey and David, which is what Hugh intended.

\* \* \*

Seamus was waiting for Mordred and George when they returned home. Mordred nodded at the dark elf as he headed toward the kitchen first, depositing the leftover apple pie in the refrigerator.

George greeted Seamus. "What are you doing here? You know what will happen if Gaia finds out you're visiting us."

"I'm not in her good graces at the moment anyway." Seamus sat on the windowsill and folded his arms.

"Not in her good graces? To be honest, she's never liked the Unseelie anyway. Gaia would have preferred you all stayed in the mortal realm." Mordred curled up on the couch, leaning against the arm and studying Seamus.

"That's true," George agreed. "What could you have done to piss her off even more?"

"I repaid a debt to a mortal who saved my life years ago. I helped him find his long-lost love."

Mordred frowned. "Was it because the person you did something for is a mortal? Or is it because you probably didn't ask her permission to do it?"

"I don't need to ask her permission for anything." Seamus's chin took on a stubborn angle. "She's angry because I gave a dead man a second chance at life and love."

"Really?" Mordred straightened. "I didn't know you could do that."

"The Unseelie have spells that haven't been shared with anyone else. I am capable of doing more than even Gaia knows."

A surge of jealousy rolled through Mordred before he remembered that he had no magic whatsoever anymore. What Seamus was or wasn't capable of didn't matter.

"Do you have a love spell?"

"Mordred," George warned.

Mordred wiggled, uncomfortable with George's knowing look resting on him. "What?"

"You aren't going to ask Seamus to cast a love spell on Bailey and David."

"I'm not?"

"Bailey and David?" Seamus narrowed his eyes. "Aren't they part of that army unit you work with, George?"

"Yes, but they don't need any help." George cast a quelling glance at Mordred.

"I think Seamus should decide for himself if he wants to help." Mordred folded his arms over his chest and sniffed.

"Tell me what you're thinking, Mordred. I'll make up my mind about helping you." Seamus settled on the sill, motioning Mordred to explain what he was looking for from Seamus.

Mordred jumped into trying to convince the dark elf to help him. George kept his mouth shut, but after being with him for centuries, Mordred knew his lover didn't approve of his plan. While he didn't want George mad at him, Mordred didn't see the harm in helping Bailey and David. He liked Bailey, and his heart hurt each time he saw how the young man struggled to live a normal life. As far as Mordred was concerned, Bailey deserved happiness, and the elf had a gut feeling that David was Bailey's destiny.

Seamus stared out of the window for a few minutes, tugging on his bottom lip while Mordred tapped his foot on the floor.

Goddess, why was he taking so long to decide? Casting a love spell wasn't that difficult. Mordred could do it in his sleep. Okay, he used to be able to do it back when he had magic and was Gaia's favorite. A little jolt of self-pity hit him at the same time as George reached out, grabbed him, and pulled him onto his lap.

Mordred gave himself a mental shake. *No more feeling sorry for myself. I chose to be with George. No one forced me.*

"What's taking so long?" he muttered to George.



“Casting any kind of spell in the mortal realm has consequences, love. You never noticed them because you usually worked within the Realm of Dreams.” George held him close. “Seamus has to decide whether messing with Bailey and David's lives is worth the risk.”

“They belong together. You told me that yourself, and if *you* noticed, it must be true.” Mordred shrugged, smoothing his hand over George's arm. “I just think they need a little help.”

George's sharply exhaled breath ruffled Mordred's hair.

“I'll do it.” Seamus turned and met Mordred's gaze. “Just because I cast the spell doesn't mean they'll live happily ever after.”

“They need a push, that's all. Once they've been together, I think all the barriers they've thrown up will fall down.” He rubbed his hands together in glee.

“St. Patrick's Day is a day from now. Can you arrange for them to be together at midnight the morning of St. Patrick's Day?”

Mordred nodded. “Of course. I'll think of something.”

“Good. I'm going to prepare the spell. At midnight, I'll cast it, but neither man can know about it, and the spell itself will only last until twelve that night. Irish magic is strongest on St. Patrick's Day but diminishes quickly.”

“Why do it, Seamus?” George sent his friend a worried glance.

The dark elf turned to look out the window. “Everyone should get their chance at love.”

“Who knew the Unseelie could be hopeless romantics?” Mordred quipped as he jumped to his feet and embraced Seamus.

Their friend blushed but accepted Mordred's touch for a moment. Easing away, he said, “I'll see you at midnight in a day.”

“We'll have them together for you. Oh, and can you let Hester know that I need more tonic for Bailey?”

“Yes.” Seamus gave George a small nod and disappeared. Mordred stared at the spot where Seamus had stood.

“Do you miss it?”

George's soft question made Mordred whirl to face his lover. “Miss what?”

“The Realm. The magic. Our friends.” George's vague gesture seemed to encompass everything he couldn't say.

Lying to George never occurred to Mordred. His lover knew him better than he knew himself at times. He wrapped his arms around George's waist, resting his head on George's broad chest. The familiar scent of pine and man filled his nose as he breathed. It was comforting to him when he was homesick.

“In quiet moments when I feel down, I wonder what our friends are doing, but it isn't very often. The thing I loved most about the Realm is beside me every day.” He smiled up at George and fluttered his lashes.

George laughed and shook his head. “You are a flirt, my love.”

“You love me in spite of that.” He cupped George's face with his hands and kissed him. “That's why I want Bailey and David to have their shot at love.”

“I understand, but I'm not sure messing with the natural process of things will help them. David might have good reasons for not encouraging Bailey.”

Mordred waved a hand, dismissing George's worry. “Whatever it is, it's not more important than love.”

“So you believe. Just be careful, messing with people's lives. That's all I'm saying.” George pinched his ass before wandering toward the back of the flat. “How about we take a shower?”

Was George right? Should he stay out of Bailey's life? He shook his head. No, he had been right about him and George, plus he'd encouraged Kael and Hugh. Look how well that turned out. He was a natural matchmaker. If there wasn't already a chubby winged entity flying around, he'd change his name to Cupid.

“Last one in has to scrub the other one's back,” he called as he raced into the bathroom, flinging clothes everywhere as he went.

## Chapter Four

Murmuring voices came from inside the conference room. The clock crept toward midnight, and Bailey yawned. He wasn't sure how he got conned into helping decorate for the party, but he'd been hanging crepe paper since six o'clock.

“Do you need any help?”

He jerked at the sound of David's voice and lost his balance on the ladder.

“Oh shit!”

His arms flailing, Bailey's weight shifted and he could feel himself falling. Great, he was going to knock himself out in front of David. Good way to prove he wasn't completely incompetent.

“Gotcha.”

A pair of muscled arms caught him and held him upright until he got his feet under him again. Turning, he met David's eyes and grinned.

“Thanks.”

“You're welcome, but is climbing a ladder a good thing for you to be doing?”

Dropping his gaze, he stepped away and shrugged. “I do all right, most of the time. As long as people don't startle me.”

“Well, I guess you just told me, huh?” David chuckled.

Damn. He'd just given his captain a verbal slap. That was never a good thing to do if he didn't want to get in trouble for being insubordinate or if he wanted the man to ask him out.

“Sorry, sir.”

David slipped a finger under Bailey's chin and lifted it. Bailey caught his breath when David's warm brown eyes met his. Christ, the man was gorgeous. Tall and built like a Greek god. He winced inside at the cliché, but it was true. Maybe not a Greek god. Maybe more like a

Roman soldier. A warrior sure of his body and strength but willing to show a little softness. At least, he did when he was around Bailey, and Bailey appreciated that.

“Don't be sorry, Bailey. I deserve it. You are perfectly capable of climbing ladders and doing other things without asking anyone's permission.” David's eyes shifted to the side, and he confessed, “I just worry about you.”

Bailey swallowed hard, debating whether he should ask what he really wanted to know or not. Before he drummed up the courage, Mordred peeked around the doorframe and grinned.

“Oh, good. You're together, and it's midnight.”

“Yeah, did you need us for something?” David took a step away, letting his hand drop to his side.

Bailey missed his touch. Mordred shook his head.

“No. I don't need you. Just trying to figure out where everyone is.”

The elf waved and disappeared back into the other room. Bailey frowned and kept his eyes looking at the spot where Mordred had been. The easy intimacy between him and David was broken, and Bailey wasn't sure how to get it back.

As he turned back to speak to David, a bright light filled the room, blinding him. A bell rang loudly, driving him to cover his ears. Bailey had no idea how long the event lasted. The ringing dissipated, leaving behind a dull echo in his head. Blinking tears from his eyes, he glanced at David.

“What the hell was that?”

David shrugged and wiped the tears off his cheeks. “I have no idea. Maybe some kind of power surge.”

“Hmmm...”

Bailey's mind was no longer on what happened a few seconds ago. His gaze focused on David's mouth, and he moved closer, reaching out to grasp David's shoulders.

“Bailey?”

He shook his head. No words, because he didn't want to talk himself out of doing this. He rose up on his toes and brushed his lips over David's. Oh, soft and enticing. David rested his

hands on Bailey's hips but didn't push him away. Taking that as permission, he pressed their mouths harder together, licking along the seam of David's lips, asking for entrance.

Slipping his hands over David's shoulders to cup the back of his head, Bailey molded his body to David's. As their groins rubbed against each other, David gasped, and Bailey took that as an invitation. He slipped his tongue inside David's moist mouth and stroked it along the line of the man's teeth. David dueled Bailey's tongue with his own, enticing Bailey to take the kiss deeper.

David smoothed his hands down from Bailey's hips to grasp his ass in a firm grip. Bailey moaned, relishing the strength in David's fingers. Damn, he really wanted to feel those hands trailing over his body, pumping his cock, and fondling his balls.

“Oomph!”

Air burst from his lungs as David slammed Bailey back against the wall. Pain lanced through him, but he ignored it. It wasn't any worse than he'd felt before, and he didn't want to stop David. For a moment, David put an inch or two between them but rested his forehead against Bailey's.

“What are we doing?” David's words were harsh and laced with desire.

He shook his head slightly. “I don't know, but I don't want to stop.”

“Neither do I.”

*Take this opportunity to learn about each other and find out if you could love each other.* An odd voice echoed in Bailey's head, and by the widening of David's eyes, he realized David must have heard it as well.

*I am not important now. Enjoy each other.*

A thud filled the room as Bailey dropped his head back and allowed David more access to his throat. David licked lines down to the small triangle of skin at the base of his neck where his pulse danced nervously. Bailey pressed his hands tighter to David's scalp, encouraging the man to stay.

David scraped his teeth over that soft piece of skin, and Bailey shivered. Switching to Bailey's earlobe, David took a little nibble before he whispered, “Put your hands above your head.”

“But I want to touch you,” Bailey protested.

“You can later. Right now, I want to taste you.”

Bailey shuddered at what those words could mean. He pried his fingers from David's head and placed his hands at the nape of his neck, twining his fingers together to ensure he kept them where David told him to. David strolled over to shut and lock the door. Blushing, Bailey realized he'd gotten so caught up in David's kiss, he didn't even think about the door being open or anyone being able to see them.

“What are you doing?” He stared at David in surprise when the man dropped to his knees in front of him.

“I told you I want to taste you.” David winked at him as he reached for Bailey's belt buckle.

“Oh okay. I don't have anything with me.” He'd stopped carrying rubbers when he realized no man was going to suck him off again.

“Doesn't matter. We're both negative.” David grinned. “I get to look at everyone's medical folders.”

He chuckled. “That's right. I forgot you're the captain.”

“Not at the moment. Right now, I'm the guy who's going to blow you.”

Wow. Who knew the captain had such a dirty streak to him?

“Suck away.”

Like he was going to say no. It had been too long since anyone else had touched him in a personal way. The doctors tended to make him feel more like a mannequin or a lab rat.

“I plan on making you feel good, Bailey. Trust me.”

Dropping his hand, he ran it through David's short-cut dark hair and smiled. “I do, more than you know.”

David turned his head and nuzzled against Bailey's palm for a moment before tapping him on the hip. “Get that hand up.”

“Yes, sir.” He chuckled when David rolled his eyes, but Bailey put his hand back with the other one.

Jingling sounded as David undid Bailey's belt and unzipped his pants. Bailey fought the need to hide. The scars that marred his body weren't hideous or anything, but he couldn't help being embarrassed by them. They covered his left side from shoulder to knee in a crisscross web of faded white lines.

Months with a therapist while he was healing taught him not to be ashamed of his scars. They were simply outward symbols of his courage and willingness to give his life for his country. He wasn't sure about that, but he'd learned to accept his scars. At least, when it was just him who saw them. Allowing David to see them was proving to be harder than he thought.

David tugged Bailey's pants and underwear down to his knees, baring his groin to David's gaze.

“Beautiful.”

The barely spoken word reached Bailey's ears, and he stared in surprise at the man kneeling before him. Was David looking at the scars marching like drunken ants along his left hip, or was he studying Bailey's cock? That question was answered by David leaning forward and licking from the base of Bailey's shaft to the tip.

“Holy shit.” Bailey's head bounced off the wall as he dropped it back and managed to whisper, not shout his thoughts.

A friendly chuckle rose from the vicinity of his cock. He spread his legs as far as he could, though he was hampered by his pants.

“Mmm...”

Callous fingers skated over his balls as David took him all the way down until he hit the back of David's throat. Sensation surrounded him. Fondling his balls and stroking over the soft skin right behind them, David revved up Bailey's heartbeat.

Pain needled Bailey's arms, and he realized cramps weren't far behind if he didn't move them.

“David,” he murmured. “I have to put my arms down.”

David pulled off his cock with a pop and nodded. “Go ahead. Just rest your hands on my shoulders or head.”

“Thank you.”

“Do whatever you need to keep out of pain, Bailey. I don't know what will bother you or not, so you have to make sure to tell me.”

He nodded, but David had already turned back to his cock. Letting his hands drop, he ran them over the dark curls covering David's head. The soft strands clung to his fingers, and he swore David sighed as Bailey caressed him.

He leaned his head back, closing his eyes and allowing David to suck him like a lollipop. God, the way the man used his tongue to lick and swirl around Bailey's shaft. When the crown of his cock hit the back of David's throat, he moaned and flexed his hips. David didn't gag. He simply started moving, easing off as Bailey thrust.

David slid his hands around Bailey's hips to grasp his ass, supporting him. Bailey's legs shook while he pumped in and out of David's hot mouth. He jerked when David rubbed his fingertips over Bailey's puckered opening.

“Oh.”

His panting filled the room, and his chest grew tight along with his balls. Pressure built, and he tapped on David's head, warning his lover that he was about to come. David didn't inch away. He sucked harder, demanding more from Bailey, and Bailey gave in, flooding David's throat with his cum.

Shaking, he whimpered as the suction continued, draining every drop from him. His knees buckled just as David moved away. He slid down the wall, limp cock hanging out and a goofy grin on his face. The other man leaned next to him, hand stroking his face, trying to ease his shudders.

“Are you okay?”

David's soft question drew his attention, and he rolled his head to the side to smile at David.

“I'm fine. You short-circuited my brain cells. I've never had my knees collapse after a blowjob.”

The darkened room made it difficult for Bailey to tell whether David blushed or not. He reached out and caressed the front of David's jeans.

“Do you need me to help you?”



David shook his head. “No. I’ve wanted you for so long that I came when you filled my mouth.”

“I guess we should go get cleaned up then.” He shoved himself to his feet. “And face the music.”

At that moment, a pounding sounded on the door.

“Hey, you two, are you coming out here any time soon or should we just shove a key under the door? You can lock up when you’re done,” Hugh called through the door.

## Chapter Five

“Hugh, leave them alone.” Kael's hissed statement came through the door as well.

David chuckled and stood, shoving Bailey's hands out of the way so he could put his clothes back in order. “I don't think we were as discreet as we thought.”

“Does that bother you?” Bailey ducked his head, looking up through his lashes.

Pausing, he thought about it. Any worry he had seemed to have disappeared or was shoved so far in the back of his mind that he couldn't work up any energy to act on it. It was like their joint climax had eased his nerves.

“No, it doesn't. I bet all of them have slunk off with their significant other for a little fun in the corner.” He winked and Bailey blushed.

Once he was sure they were both put back together, he unlocked the door and yanked it open just as Hugh raised his hand to knock again.

“We were making sure you had all the decorations you needed.” He tugged Bailey behind him.

“And do we?” Kael asked, innocence shining in his eyes.

“Of course we do. I got everything on the list.” Bailey sounded a little put out that anyone would question his supply ability.

They laughed, and David encircled Bailey's shoulder, leading him from the room toward the bathroom. He grimaced while he cleaned up, and Bailey leaned against the sink, watching him.

“I haven't come in my pants since I was a teenager,” he informed Bailey.

“Really?”

“Yes, really. You can feel proud of yourself for that.”

David followed Bailey out into the corridor where the others stood waiting for them. Mordred gave him a bright smile with a wink. George rolled his eyes but didn't comment on what might have gone on between David and Bailey. Lieutenant Maksur grinned at Bailey.

“You catching a ride home with me, Stevenson?”

“Umm...” Bailey paused.

“I'll be taking Bailey home, Maksur.” David pushed the surge of jealousy down, feeling foolish.

“Certainly, sir.”

He eyed the soldier, but nothing in Maksur's facial expression said the other man was being impudent. While he didn't mind the others knowing what was going on between him and Bailey, he wouldn't tolerate anyone talking about them.

“You have a safe trip home, and we'll see you all for lunch.” George nodded to all of them and dragged Mordred out of the labs with him.

“But I wanted to ask them,” Mordred protested.

“No questions. I think you've done enough already.”

“You do?” Mordred shot them an excited glance.

“Yes.”

David met Bailey's questioning gaze and shrugged. He had no idea what Mordred was talking about, but then he usually didn't. George's lover was an intriguing mix of selfishness and caring. Besides being breathtakingly gorgeous, Mordred often seemed to believe the world revolved around him, or at least that he should be the center of George's world. Of course, George was so in love with Mordred, it seemed no one else existed for the other man.

Envy was never an emotion David liked to admit he felt, but there were moments when he saw Mordred and George, or Kael and Hugh, and he envied them their relationships. Bailey nudged him with his elbow, and he blinked, refocusing on Bailey. The grooves on the sides of Bailey's mouth deepened, and David realized his lover was starting to feel some pain.

“Let's head out.”

The injury he had suffered a few months ago from a dragon twinged, and he limped toward the door.

“Your leg bothering you?”

Bailey slipped his arm around David's waist, sharing each other's strength as they made their way to David's car.

“Now every time it rains, my knee acts up. The doctors said there was nothing they could do about it.”

Bailey's understanding laugh soothed him. “I totally understand that. My body aches every time I get up in the morning or even just throughout the day. That roadside bomb screwed me up.”

They both winced and then laughed when they hit the cool air outside the lab. David didn't complain about Bailey's arm around his waist. He liked having the other man tucked close to him. After stopping at the passenger side of the car, he leaned against it and pulled Bailey tighter to him, spreading his legs slightly to fit their hips together.

Bailey let his head drop back, giving David access to his throat. Without thinking about what consequences might arise from his actions, David sucked up a dark mark on Bailey's neck, drawing a shuddering sigh from him.

“Hey, you two, stop that. This isn't a make-out spot,” Hugh yelled at them from the other side of the parking lot.

David brushed a kiss over Bailey's lips while he flipped Hugh off. “Let's get out of here.”

“Good idea. I'm not sure I'm ready to provide entertainment for my fellow soldiers.” Bailey chuckled. He waved to the others as he stepped back away from David.

He unlocked the door for Bailey before heading over to his side of the vehicle. As he slipped behind the wheel, he thought of something. He waited until Bailey was buckled in and the car started.

“Umm...am I taking you to your flat, or am I taking you home with me?”

Hands tucked under his legs, Bailey stared out the windshield. “I guess it depends on what you want.”

At the moment, what he wanted was to take Bailey to his flat and keep the man in bed for at least a week or so while he acted out every sexual fantasy he'd ever had. Then he'd probably

come up with some new ones just to ensure Bailey didn't leave. That might be overkill and a bit more serious than Bailey was looking for, so David casually shrugged.

“I'd like you to come back to my flat with me. We'll grab some shut-eye and spend the day together.” Reaching over, he stroked his hand over Bailey's shoulder. “You will be my date for the party tonight?”

Bailey leaned into David's touch and nodded. “I'd like that.”

“Great.” David couldn't resist giving Bailey a quick kiss before settling into his seat and buckling up.

The ride to David's flat was achieved in comfortable silence. It amazed David that he didn't feel the need to talk. Usually he would babble, needing to fill the empty air with inane small talk. Maybe it had to do with all the dinner parties he'd attended over his lifetime. The ones he hated but that his father forced him to attend. He'd been trained to carry a conversation all by himself if need be.

Bailey didn't seem inclined to talk. He rested his head on the back of the seat and closed his eyes. Out of the corner of his eye, David caught Bailey massaging his thigh.

“Maybe we should go back to your place.”

“Why's that?” Bailey tensed like he thought David had changed his mind.

“Do you have any of Kael's tonic with you?” He kept his question casual. Taking care of Bailey was quickly becoming an obsession, as was holding the man in his arms, but he didn't think Bailey would appreciate being treated like an invalid.

“Yes, I do actually.” Bailey gestured to the backpack sitting on David's backseat. “I take that bag everywhere with me. It's got my meds in it because I never know when I might need something stronger than aspirin.”

How had he missed the backpack? Must have been more wrapped up in Bailey than he thought.

“Okay. I just didn't want you to hurt if you didn't have to. I mean, we can crash at your place just as easily as mine.” He glanced around. “Though I think we're closer to my flat than yours by now.”

“I'm good, David. I'll tell you if I need anything.” Bailey laid his hand on David's thigh and squeezed slightly. “I'm just tired, and the position I was standing in stretched my muscles more than usual.”

“Hopefully we'll be getting even more exercise later on.” David leered.

“I'm certainly willing to give it a try.” Bailey blushed but winked at him.

Covering Bailey's hand with his own, David drove the rest of the way to his building. After parking, he escorted Bailey up to his flat. He unlocked the door and waved Bailey in.

They stood together in the small entranceway, and David looked around, trying to see his place through Bailey's eyes. Bland and boring crossed his mind. God, his decorating skills were bare minimum at best, but he had been living there for over a year now, so he should have had at least a picture or two on the wall. There weren't even framed photos sitting on the end tables or anything.

The red T-shirt and black sweats he'd worn that morning while working out were draped over the back of one of his chairs, and his blue and yellow tennis shoes huddled at the end of the couch where he'd toed them off when he'd gotten back from his run. Those were the only splashes of color in the vanilla room.

Bailey set his backpack on the kitchen table and gestured toward the back of the flat. “Are you going to give me the rest of the tour?”

“Tour?”

“Yeah. I've seen your kitchen and your living room. So where's the bathroom and, more importantly, the bedroom?”

The grin Bailey gave him was rather flirtatious, even though David could see that Bailey was tired.

“Come on. Grab your bag and follow me. To be honest, I'm ready to collapse. Got up at 0500 this morning to work out and haven't stopped since.” He held out his hand, and happiness soared in him when Bailey grasped it without hesitation.

They wandered down the hall toward his bedroom. He pushed open the door and stepped back, allowing Bailey to go in first. Here more of his personality broke the surface. His furniture was the normal bland rental stuff, but his comforter was deep blue and burgundy, an explosion of eye-pleasing color. Small items covered his dresser. Little pieces of his day gathered there until

he decided to neaten the place up. Receipts, bullet casings, even a small dragon scale rested among the clutter.

“Do you want some clothes to sleep in?”

He hated wearing clothes to bed and only did so when he slept at his parents' house. Never knew when the servants would wander in to clean up, and giving them a show wasn't in his plans.

Bailey shook his head. “When I was recovering, the fabric would rub against my wounds and irritate the scars. I finally just started sleeping naked. Not like there's anyone to complain or notice what I wear to bed.”

“I'm glad to hear that.”

“What? That I sleep naked or that there isn't anyone sharing my bed?”

David shot a look at Bailey. “Both. I don't like wearing anything to bed either, but I didn't want to make you uncomfortable if you did.”

Bailey eyed him, and he grinned.

“I figured you weren't sharing your bed with anyone, simply because you don't strike me as the type of guy who would keep several guys on a string.”

“No revolving door in my bedroom.” Bailey grimaced. “Of course, once I got injured, my bed got really lonely and my right hand had a lot more work than usual.”

The sadness in Bailey's voice drew David, and he embraced Bailey, enfolding him close and resting his chin on the top of Bailey's head. “All those men who would turn away from you because of your injuries are idiots. The scars are badges of courage for someone who sacrificed himself for others.”

“Thanks, and it's sweet that you actually mean it, but most guys just don't want to deal with a man who trembles all the time and tends to trip over his own feet.” Bailey wrapped his arms around David's waist, burying his nose in the triangle at the base of David's throat.

“I'll just have to kiss your bruises.”

Nuzzling against Bailey's stubble-covered cheek, David breathed in Bailey's scent. The man smelled like sweat and sex. He trailed soft kisses over Bailey's face to his lips, where he pressed a hard, quick kiss. Bailey sighed and sank deeper into David's arms.

“Let's get ready for bed, baby,” he whispered in Bailey's ear.

“Okay.”

He kept an eye on Bailey while they stripped, ready to provide support if Bailey lost his balance. There was no need to treat the man like he was broken in any way. He had a completely selfish reason to make sure Bailey didn't hurt himself. He planned on fucking Bailey at some point during what was left of the night, and maybe he'd find a way to enjoy Bailey's mouth around his cock while they hung out the next day.

Bailey removed his watch, setting it on the dresser with David's. David went in the bathroom, digging out a fresh toothbrush and some toothpaste for Bailey.

“Here you go.”

He folded back the comforter and sheets while Bailey washed up. David motioned to the bed when Bailey returned to the bedroom.

“Climb in. I'll brush my teeth and be back in a few.”

David spit in the sink and set his toothbrush next to the one Bailey had used. He ran his fingers over the handle. How long had it been since there was another toothbrush sitting on his bathroom counter? God, not since he was a fresh-faced freshman, not yet having joined the army against his father's wishes. He'd met another young university student, and they'd shared a single bedroom flat close to campus.

It hadn't lasted long, but for a while he'd been happy. His father left him alone, deciding that university would look good on his resume for Parliament. He'd had limited contact with his mother, and he could be a college kid, doing crazy things without worrying about how his father would react.

Then he joined the army and his boyfriend left him because the military was a government conspiracy to take over peoples' rights. They parted with angry words, but it didn't compare to how his father reacted. No. He shook his head. He wouldn't let any thoughts of his father ruin this time with Bailey. For one day, he would live for himself and not worry about his family.

As he left the bathroom, he turned the light off and slipped under the cover. Once he settled, Bailey slid close, flinging an arm over his stomach and laying his head on David's chest. He smoothed his hand over Bailey's back, learning the bumps of the man's spine and teasing along his crease.



Bailey rocked against him, his cock filling slowly, but David wasn't trying to turn Bailey on. He wanted Bailey to relax and fall asleep.

“David,” Bailey murmured.

“Hush.”

He lightened his touch, easing Bailey. David listened to Bailey's soft breathing for several minutes before he followed Bailey into slumber.

## Chapter Six

Warmth surrounded Bailey and he rubbed against it, finding something hard that matched his own erection.

“Mmm,” he hummed as he rocked.

“Morning, baby.”

His eyes popped open, and he stared out into a room that wasn't his.

“You okay, Bailey?”

Turning his head slightly, he met David's sleepy gaze and managed to nod. Holy shit! It really happened. He lay in David's bed, wrapped in the man's arms. It was David's cock he rubbed against while it seemed to almost snuggle in his crease. David caressed Bailey's chest with his hands and pressed his groin tighter to him.

“Yeah. I'm fine,” he whispered, letting his eyes drift shut and his head drop back to lie on David's shoulder.

They undulated together, and David's prick slid between Bailey's ass cheeks. The precum leaking from David helped ease the friction. Soon their panting filled the room, and Bailey moaned as David pushed his hand down to fist Bailey's cock.

“Please,” he pleaded.

“Are you sure?” David stilled for a moment.

“Yes. I want you inside me.”

“Thank God.”

Bailey hid his smile as David moved away to rummage around the drawer of the nightstand.

“Here we go,” David crowed, holding up a tube of lube. “We don't need the rubbers, do we?”

“No. We're both negative, so it's cool.”

He started to roll onto his back, but David stopped him, resuming the spooning position they had awakened in. Pushing a pillow under his head, he shivered as David squirted cool lube down his crack.

“Sorry. I probably should have warned you.” David kissed his shoulder.

“It's okay. Just been a while.” He hated admitting that.

“I'll be gentle.”

Bailey reached back and smacked David on the hip. “Asshole.”

David chuckled but didn't reply. Bailey arched his back, pressing back into David's touch as the man rubbed the lube over Bailey's hole and eased the tip of his finger inside, slowly stretching the muscles.

“Oh.” He tensed slightly at the intrusion before relaxing and accepting David farther inside.

First one, then another, and Bailey lost track of time as he rocked back and forth, fucking himself on David's fingers. He'd missed this feeling. The sensation of someone else's hands on his body, not for medical reasons but purely to build desire and need. David's fingers left him.

“No.” He couldn't help the protest.

“It's all right, baby. Do you think you're ready enough?”

The flared head of David's cock bumped his opening, and Bailey nodded. Air burst out of him as David pushed in, not stopping until he buried himself as deep as he could go in Bailey's channel.

Bailey bit his lip and breathed. As much as he loved the feeling of being filled, he couldn't ignore the hint of pain from the act. David murmured in his ear. He couldn't make out the words over the rushing in his head, but the brush of David's lips against his skin soothed and settled him. Soon his breathing evened out and his cock took a renewed interest in David's hand wrapped around it.

He shoved back with his hips, letting David know he was ready. David squeezed Bailey's cock and inched back to get enough room to move. Bailey whimpered at the slow withdrawal of

David's shaft. With just David's crown inside him, Bailey held his breath, anticipating the slam of their bodies together. Surprise rocked through him as David slid back in a gentle motion.

“We aren't in any rush,” David whispered, his rhythm strong but not hurried.

“Okay.”

Resting his cheek on the pillow, Bailey closed his eyes, absorbing the warmth and fullness surrounding him and inside him. He pulled his top leg up, closer to his chest, and David adjusted his reach, slipping his hand under Bailey's thigh to encircle Bailey's cock.

Time ground to a halt as they engaged in their own private dance. Their movements meshed, ensuring no clashes or awkward moments. Bailey kept his eyes closed, preferring to experience their lovemaking with his other senses.

The hair on David's chest rasped over Bailey's back, scratching sensitive skin marred by scars. Bailey didn't move away from that irritation. It meant he was alive in a very fundamental way, and it allowed him to remember he'd survived.

Sweat beaded on his forehead, and as the pace started to build, David's sweat dropped and mingled with his. Bailey licked his lips and moaned softly.

“So tight.” David groaned and shoved deeper into Bailey.

“Mmm...” Bailey's brain-to-tongue connection seemed broken, because he couldn't speak any coherent words.

They rocked harder and faster, David pumping Bailey's cock in time with his own thrusts. Tingling spread over Bailey's nerves, supplanting any other thought or care in his mind. He fisted his hands in the sheets and ducked his head, chest heaving with each grunt.

His balls drew tighter to his body, and his cock swelled even more in David's hands.

“David.”

“It's all right. I've got you, Bailey.” David sped up, rammed into Bailey's ass and froze. “Come on my cock.”

Lights exploded under Bailey's eyelids, and he grunted, spilling his cum over David's hand and the sheets in front of him. “Ah!”

David slammed into him once and a second time. Liquid heat flooded Bailey's ass, making his muscles clench and massage David's shaft, wanting everything the man had to give him.

He didn't know how much time had passed, but he found he didn't care. He liked being drawn tight to David's chest and wrapped in an almost crushing embrace. David nuzzled the sweat-drenched curls at the nape of his neck. Bailey ran his hands over David's where they rested on Bailey's stomach.

“We should probably clean up,” David suggested once their breathing calmed down.

Bailey nodded, the ability to speak still absent from his talents. Soft moans skated into the air as David inched out of Bailey and cum trickled onto Bailey's thighs.

“Let's go grab a shower before we think about breakfast.”

Bailey watched David climb out of bed and come over to his side, where he offered Bailey his hand. For an instant, embarrassment colored his cheeks, and then Bailey thought about it. His legs were sore and weak. He still hadn't recovered from his own climax, and he doubted he'd be able to balance on his own for a little while.

“I don't care.”

David's quietly uttered statement caused Bailey to smile.

“You might not, but I find that I have pride issues at the oddest times.” Bailey took David's hand, letting the man help him get out of bed. “And that was one of them.”

“We all need help from time to time, Bailey. Remember how you took care of me while my leg healed.”

Arm in arm, they wandered from David's bedroom to the bathroom. While David started the shower, Bailey leaned against the counter and studied the man in front of him. David was well-formed, built like a warrior. Thick thighs, narrow waist, and broad shoulders spoke of strength and power. There were a few scars scattered across David's body, the worst being one high on his right shoulder. The puckered entry wound called for Bailey's touch. He reached out and traced the ragged edges.

“Got that one in Afghanistan a couple years ago.” David glanced over his shoulder at Bailey. “My unit got pinned down by some mujahideen, and I got hit before we could be extracted. It was a bitch to rehabilitate, but I was lucky that it didn't hit anything major while going in and the surgeon who took it out had good hands.”

“We'll drink a toast to all medics. I was lucky that there was one with our unit when we hit that bomb. He made sure I didn't bleed to death. I have a lot of issues from shrapnel damage, but it didn't kill me. He kept me stable until they could evac me out of there.”

Bailey said a silent prayer for the medic who had saved his life. He didn't know the man's name or where he was, but Bailey thanked him every day for saving his life.

“I've always thought medics were miracle workers. The shit they have to deal with under so much pressure.” David stared at the bottom of the shower for a second.

Steam rose from the water, and Bailey decided they had had enough depressing talk for the morning. He splashed water at David.

“I think the water's ready.”

David caught him around the waist and lifted him into the shower. Bailey laughed but didn't struggle, not wanting to risk serious injury by slipping on the tiles. David kept his arms around Bailey until he settled. Letting go, he stepped back and smiled.

“What do you like for breakfast?”

“What do you have in your refrigerator?”

The frown on David's face told Bailey all he needed to know.

“How about we stop by my flat so I can change my clothes, and I'll treat you to breakfast at this great little restaurant just a couple blocks from me.”

“It's a deal.”

They washed quickly, and David lent Bailey a clean shirt to wear. Bailey took a fast drink of his tonic before they headed out the door.

## Chapter Seven

The rest of the group had already arrived at the pub when David and Bailey showed up for lunch. David saw Mordred elbow George when the elf spotted them together. George glared at his lover but didn't say anything.

"It's about time you two got here," Kael admonished them while scooting his chair closer to Hugh's. "We've already ordered."

"No big deal." David pulled out a chair for Bailey and waited until the man sat before he took a seat next to him. "Where are the others?"

"Aside from Maksur, the rest are at the lab finishing up last-minute things for the party tonight and for the mission we have next week." George pushed a Guinness in David's direction.

"Do I really want to know what Maksur is doing?" He shook his head when Bailey offered him a menu.

"I'm not entirely sure, but when he called me, he didn't sound like he was thinking clearly." George shrugged.

"It sounded like he'd already started celebrating St. Patrick's Day and was well on his way to being unconscious before noon." Mordred rolled his eyes. "Silly man is going to miss the party."

Bailey tensed and David looked at him.

"Maybe on our way to the party we should stop by my building. I'd like to check and make sure he's at least breathing." Bailey gave him an apologetic glance.

"I didn't realize he lived in the same building as you." David nodded. "Probably a good idea. Maksur certainly does love having a good time."

"He just doesn't know when to quit." Bailey shrugged. "It only hurts him, and in the end, we have to let him do what he wants until he either hurts himself or his job."

David agreed to a certain extent with Bailey's statement, but he vowed to keep a closer eye on his lieutenant. Too many lives hung on the decisions made by Maksur to risk the man losing focus on his job.

The waiter came and took their order. David rested his arm on the back of Bailey's chair, brushing his fingers along the nape of Bailey's neck. Bailey shivered, and goose bumps rose on his arms. David smiled when the younger man leaned closer to him.

“Did you guys sleep well last night?”

Mordred's question brought a blush to Bailey's cheeks, but David winked at the elf.

“Of course we did. As well as you and George did, I'm sure.”

“Really? Because George and I didn't get much sleep. We were too busy testing the springs in our mattress.”

George sputtered and slapped his hand over Mordred's mouth. “No one needs to know that, Mordred.”

The blond elf shook George's hand off his face and frowned. “Since when do you care whether people know if we have sex or not? Has becoming mortal turned you into a prude?”

“Remember what I did to you last night and I think you'd have your answer there, but I don't think they want to know about our love life.” George nodded to the others sitting at the table.

“Oh, I don't know. I'm finding this entire conversation very interesting.” Hugh folded his arms and leaned back in his chair, smirking.

“Don't you start. I seem to remember being in your apartment and hearing you praise God in a very loud voice, and I know for a fact there wasn't a church service going on.” George eyed his friend with raised eyebrows. “And something about harder and faster.”

Kael's face turned beet red, and Hugh shook his head, laughing, while he flipped George off.

“Stop it. Kael and Bailey are going to keel over from embarrassment if you keep it up.” David stroked Bailey's arm, trying to ease his lover's tension.

Hugh tapped Kael's chin. “Sorry, love. You know how we are.”



“Mmm...” Mordred's eyes turned dreamy. “Oh, I think we need to go spend a weekend together again.”

David's eyes widened. “Whoa. That's a little too much information, Mordred.”

“Why?” The elf seemed truly puzzled. “We'd be more than happy to have you and Bailey join us next time.”

Bailey's mouth opened and closed like a fish, shock evident in his face. Hugh braced himself against Kael, trying not to fall over since he was laughing so hard. Kael looked like he wanted to crawl under his chair. George rolled his eyes and kissed Mordred.

“Definitely TMI, Mordred.” David put his finger under Bailey's chin and closed his mouth.

“People just aren't as flexible here.” Mordred pouted.

“Flexibility is not your problem,” George commented. “Let's change the topic.”

Mordred sat back in his chair and glared at his lover. The others turned the conversation to slightly safer topics until the food arrived.

David didn't normally hang out with the people he worked with. His father had taught him not to foster friendships in the workplace because it would be harder to do what needed to be done if you actually liked the person you were doing it to. As he listened to George regaling the others with a story about Mordred learning to use the stove, David vowed to spend more time outside of work with them. Bailey bumped him with an elbow, and the bright smile on Bailey's face hit David low in the groin.

He leaned close to Bailey and whispered, “Good thing I'm sitting down.”

When Bailey shot him a questioning glance, he took the man's hand and pressed it to his erection, straining against his zipper.

“Oh.”

Bailey's mouth formed a perfect O, and David's mind supplied the image of Bailey on his knees in front of him, taking David's prick as he thrust it in. That didn't help his growing problem. Bailey encouraged the stiffening by stroking his fingertips just hard enough for David to feel them the length of his shaft.

“You're not helping.” His words rumbled low in his throat.

Bailey kept his face blandly innocent. “Was I supposed to be helping?”

Grunting, David removed Bailey's hand from between his legs and stood. Everyone looked at him except for Mordred, who eyed his crotch with interest. The elf caught his gaze and licked his lips. David's cheeks warmed. Damn, now he was blushing like a virgin.

"I'll be back."

After letting the bathroom door close behind him, he braced his hands on the sink and took a deep breath. He dropped his chin to his chest and stared at the lump in the front of his pants with disgust.

"Shit."

It was like he was a teenager again, raging with hormones and ready to explode every chance he got. He'd always been attracted to Bailey, but his body had never reacted quite so quickly to the man's presence. It was like some switch got hit last night and his ability to restrain himself got shut off.

The door thumped shut. Looking up, he spied Bailey leaning against the door, arms folded, and frowning. "Are you okay? You took off rather suddenly."

Whirling around, he pointed at his cock. "I couldn't sit there anymore, wanting you so badly and knowing I can't have you until we're alone again."

"Well, we're alone now." Bailey pushed away from the door and strolled toward him, blue eyes shining with need.

"We can't do anything here. Anyone can walk in and see us." God, his protest sounded weak. His body thought it was an excellent suggestion.

"I locked the door. No one will walk in on us. I can't guarantee that the guys won't know what we've been doing though. I think I heard Mordred clap his hands when I followed you."

David cringed at the thought of his friends knowing that Bailey and he were getting busy in the bathroom. He would never hear the end of it.

Bailey knelt slowly, taking his time and gripping David's hips for support as he went to the floor in front of him. All the air in David's lungs rushed out in a moan as Bailey pressed his mouth to the ridge under David's jeans and breathed. Hot, moist air invaded and surrounded his cock.

Reaching with a trembling hand, he caressed Bailey's cheek. "God, you're beautiful."

Tilting his head, Bailey gave a little shake of his head. "Guys aren't beautiful."

"Really? Because I think you're beautiful, and it's my opinion that matters."

"Yes, sir." Bailey snapped a quick salute before fumbling with David's belt.

David didn't offer to help Bailey, figuring the man would want to do it on his own. He trailed his fingers over Bailey's face, ears, neck, and shoulders, keeping his touch as light as possible. Bailey shivered several times but didn't stop his determined opening of David's jeans.

His cock sprang happily from his jeans when Bailey shoved them and his underwear down far enough to free it. Bailey hummed in appreciation before rubbing his cheek along the length of David's shaft.

"Ah." David let his head drop back, and he closed his eyes, needing Bailey's mouth on him like he needed his next breath.

"Bloody..." He swallowed the rest of his shout as Bailey drew him all the way in until the head of his dick hit the back of Bailey's throat. No point in announcing to everyone in the pub what they were doing.

His knuckles turned white as he gripped the edge of the counter behind him, needing something to hang on to as Bailey began sucking him. Hot and moist, Bailey's mouth felt almost as perfect as his ass did to David. His hips twitched with the urge to move, but he wasn't sure Bailey was ready.

"Bailey?"

Bailey nodded slightly in response to his unasked question. David removed one of his hands from the counter and slid it around the back of Bailey's head, holding him still while he eased out until only the tip of his prick rested on Bailey's tongue.

"I want you to touch yourself," he ordered Bailey. Being selfish wasn't in David's nature, though with his hands full, he couldn't do anything to get his lover off.

Rocking back and forth, Bailey spread his thighs a little wider, and David heard the clink of Bailey's belt as the younger man undid his pants. Bailey's eyes rolled as he took himself in hand.

"You ready?"

A muffled moan emerged from Bailey's throat. David took that to mean he was and started moving. Slow push and pull, sinking a little farther each time between Bailey's lips. David stared down at the joyous expression on Bailey's face. He could see the flash of Bailey's hand as he jerked himself off while David fucked his mouth.

Those dark blue eyes tangled with his, and he couldn't look away. Bailey's left hand gripped David's thigh, leaving marks that were sure to bruise by tomorrow. The suction grew harder and their breathing sped up until the bathroom filled with pants and the scent of sex overwhelmed him. David's balls tightened, and his entire body froze as he shot down Bailey's throat. Bailey jerked before pulling off David's cock with a sudden move, even though David wasn't finished coming. David groaned as cum painted Bailey's cheeks, chin, and lips. Ropy white streams landed on the floor between David's feet as Bailey climaxed with short tugs of his hand.

Stepping to the side and pulling Bailey to his feet with one motion, David set to licking Bailey's face clean. The salty bitterness of his own cum mixed with the musky flavor of Bailey's skin exploded on David's tongue, making his limp cock twitch like it was taking an interest in a second round. Bailey kept his hands away from David but lifted his face up, offering every inch for David to touch.

Once every drop was gone, David rested their foreheads together and panted, his heart racing like a steeplechaser taking a jump at the Grand National. Bailey's breath puffed over his lips, and he pressed their mouths together. After the passion and fierceness of their coming, their soft kiss spoke of caring and tenderness. David held Bailey until his leg muscles proclaimed they were ready to move.

Easing away from Bailey, he met the other man's gaze with a smile. "I'm never going to be able to visit this bathroom again without seeing you on your knees."

Bailey blushed but didn't say anything. They cleaned up, even wiping up the floor, before heading back out to the table. Only George sat there, a broad grin on his face.

"Where'd the others go?" David wasn't going to let George comment on their absence.

"They got tired of waiting, so they paid and are on their way to the lab. We all have some work to do before the party tonight. No rest for the wicked." George waved away the money David tried to put on the table. "I got it."

“Thanks, man.” He slapped George on the shoulder as they wound their way through the tables to the entrance of the pub.

“Least I can do. You and Bailey are providing Mordred with a distraction, and I thank you. Even if you aren't happy about that.” George glanced up ahead where Bailey rested against the streetlight and chatted on his phone. Pulling David to a stop, he nodded toward Bailey. “I hope you know what you're doing, Wellmine.”

David bit back his automatic response. Hell no, he didn't know what he was doing. This feverish need for Bailey seemed to have appeared out of nowhere. It wasn't that David hadn't been attracted to Bailey before, but he'd always had enough self-control not to do anything about it. He didn't want to break the man's heart.

He kicked a rock and shrugged. “I don't think I do know what I'm doing, St. Albans, and at certain moments, when my head clears, I worry about that. Then he smiles at me and every nerve in my body lights up. Any doubt I might have disappears, and all I can think about is how perfect he is for me.”

George's eyebrows shot up, and the man nodded. “I guess I understand that. It's the same way I felt when Mordred was chasing after me. Every thought in my head screamed that what he wanted of me was wrong, but my heart and body didn't care. All they knew was he was perfect for me in every way. Like the gods built Mordred with me in mind.”

Relief shot through David. Thank God, someone understood how he felt, even though he was pretty sure that once George had entered a relationship with the pretty elf, he didn't have any doubts about it. David had huge doubts about what was happening between the two of them, yet he couldn't bring himself to walk away.

“Just go with the flow for now. That's the best advice I can give you. It'll work itself out in the end.” There was a knowing gleam in George's eyes. “After the first flush of sex wears off, you can get it all straight in your mind, and I think you'll be surprised by what you find when you do.”

Bailey hung up and tucked the phone in his ever-present backpack. Their eyes met, and David's heart literally skipped a beat. He rubbed the center of his chest as he moved closer to Bailey.

“I’ll see you gentlemen at the lab.” George bowed to Bailey before poking David in the ribs. “Do try to make it to the party tonight.”

“We’ll be there.”

David took Bailey’s hand as his lover waved good-bye to George. They strolled down the street to where David’s car was parked. After climbing in, he waited until he had pulled out into traffic to ask.

“Want to stop by Maksur’s place and check on him?”

“Yes. He’s on leave for the rest of the week, so I’m not worried about him screwing up at work. We’ve become good friends since we were reassigned and I just want to make sure he’s okay.”

The hesitant glance Bailey gave him touched him. There was no way he’d say no to Bailey looking in on his friend.

“No problem. You can grab some clothes from your place while we’re there. We’ll probably stay late at the party and you can crash at my place tonight.”

“Okay.”

David smiled and settled in to drive over to Bailey’s flat, satisfied for the moment, though desire simmered under the surface of his skin. There would be more time to play later.

## Chapter Eight

Giggling, Bailey watched Mordred try to teach Lieutenant Castle, one of Bailey's fellow Dragon slayers, how to dance. Castle didn't have any rhythm, and frustration furrowed Mordred's brow. George chatted with Tom, Hugh's older brother, who had come to the party with Monica.

Bailey jumped when two strong arms encircled his waist. Taking a deep breath, he identified the owner of the arms as David. He pressed his hips back against David's groin and wiggled them. David dropped one hand down to Bailey's stomach, holding him there when he rubbed his cock along Bailey's crease.

A soft whimper escaped his throat, and he wished there weren't four layers of clothes between them. He wanted to feel David's entire erection between his ass cheeks. Moist air puffed over his ear.

“Having fun?”

Thank God they were in a corner, hidden by a life-size cutout of St. Patrick. Also, Bailey was happy that the saint was facing away from them, or he'd start feeling guilty about all the thoughts he was having.

“Ah, yes.”

He gasped when David slipped his hand even farther down to cup Bailey's balls.

“Good. I'd hate to think you weren't enjoying yourself.”

David scraped his teeth over Bailey's jugular, eliciting a full-body shudder from him.

“Hey, you two. Quit hiding in the corner.” Kael raced up to them and grabbed Bailey's hand.

Bailey looked over his shoulder at David as Kael dragged him away. David winked and tucked his thumbs in his jeans, allowing his hands to frame the hard-on he sported. Bailey licked his lips, and he swore he saw the bulge grow bigger.

Kael handed him a mug full of Guinness and nodded toward David. "How are things going between you? I mean, it looks like things are hot and heavy. He can't keep his hands off you."

Taking a large gulp of the stout, Bailey used swallowing to figure out what to say. Kael had quickly become a close friend of his, but Bailey wasn't sure he wanted to talk about his relationship with David. Too many chances of saying the wrong thing and jinxing it.

"Come on." Kael bumped Bailey's shoulder with his.

"What kind of man would I be if I kissed and told?"

Rolling his eyes, Kael took a sip of his glass of punch before answering, "A man who didn't want his friends to die from curiosity."

Bailey laughed. "You're kidding, right? I don't ask you about your sex life with Hugh."

"I don't really want to know what's going on between the two of you in bed." Kael turned beet red. "God, no. It's hard enough to keep Mordred from badgering me into telling him; I don't have the energy to hear your exploits as well. I was just wondering about the overall direction you were going in."

Looking over, Bailey saw David chatting with Hugh. David glanced over his shoulder like he felt Bailey's gaze. When their eyes met, Bailey's mouth went dry. Now knowing how good making love to the man could be, Bailey wasn't sure he'd be able to walk away if all David was looking for was a fling.

"Bailey?"

He blinked and looked back at Kael, who stared at him with understanding eyes.

"I don't know where we're headed in the long run, Kael. What if it's just a fling he's looking for because he knows that the unit won't be together much longer?" Bailey studied the dark ale in his glass. "Does it make me pathetic that I'll take whatever he gives me for as long as he wants? I'll deal with the fallout when he walks away."

"But what happens if he doesn't walk away?" Kael laid a hand on Bailey's shoulder. "Will you be so busy watching him leave, you won't notice when he stays?"

"Don't you think I should be protecting my heart?"



Kael gestured over at Hugh. "I'm the last guy to tell you to turn away from any chance at love. If I had stayed stuck in the past, I would never have gotten Hugh in my life. Wouldn't you prefer to at least enjoy every moment you have with him?"

Sighing, Bailey rubbed his palm on his thigh. "I should, shouldn't I? This is the first time I've stopped to think about what's been going on between us. I mean, it was like we were hit by a lightning bolt or something while we were here decorating last night, and all of a sudden we can't keep our hands off each other. Strangest thing I've ever had happen."

"No long faces tonight. It's supposed to be a party."

Mordred grabbed their hands and dragged them out on the makeshift dance floor. Bailey stayed in one spot while the elf and Kael danced around him. He hadn't been a great dancer before his injuries. Now he had to be careful, so he tended not to dance at all. A slow song came over the speakers, and his friends all paired off.

David swept him into his arms. He wrapped his arms around David's shoulders, stroking the nape of David's neck. Resting his head on David's chest, Bailey closed his eyes and allowed his lover to lead. The music drifted into the background as he listened to the beating of David's heart. David slid his thigh between Bailey's legs, pressing those thick muscles to Bailey's balls and letting the rhythm of the music rub him against them.

A low moan filled his ear, and he eased back a few inches to look up at David. Desire burned in David's gaze, and Bailey's pulse sped up in response. He dropped his head back, silently offering access. Bailey jerked as David sucked on the sensitive spot behind his ear.

David trailed kisses up over Bailey's jaw to his lips, and the world faded away as David made love to his mouth. He sucked on David's tongue as it stroked his. David slid his hands down to grasp his ass and rocked their bodies together.

"David..."

"Why don't we head back to my place?" David whispered in his ear, and he nodded.

Their hands entwined, he looked around to see if he could find Kael. Instead Mordred caught his eye and smiled. He gestured to the door, and the elf nodded.

"Let's go."

They bolted to the door, not wanting to be stopped by any of their friends. It seemed like no one paid any attention to them. They didn't run out to the car, but they moved as fast as they could, stopping every few feet to kiss and grope each other.

Bailey adjusted himself, trying to find more room in his jeans for his erection, glad that his shirt hung down low enough to cover the bulge. Precum leaked from his prick, and a wet spot appeared on his jeans. Sitting in David's car, he shifted, uncomfortable and needing. God, he couldn't wait to get to a bed and ride David's cock.

David didn't speed, but he drove as fast as he could without getting in an accident. Bailey rubbed his hand against his own hard-on and moaned.

"None of that until we get home." David hit his hand lightly.

"Are we almost there?"

"Yeah. Just a few more minutes."

Bailey sat on his hands to keep from touching himself, or David for that matter.

David found a place to park, and they headed inside, keeping space between them so they weren't tempted to do something that could get them arrested or would be frowned upon by David's neighbors.

As soon as they were locked behind the door, David pinned Bailey against the door and kissed him with fierce determination. Bailey opened to him without protest or hesitation. Every atom in his body wanted David and needed him with painful insistence.

Hands fumbled with buttons and belts. Bailey's head hit the door with a thud as David latched onto one of his nipples and flicked it with his tongue.

"Fuck."

He pushed the shirt from David's shoulders, and his lover shrugged, letting it fall to the floor with a soft whoosh. Within minutes, they were naked and rubbing together, cocks leaving wet trails over their stomachs. Bailey arched up as David gripped his ass and ran the fingertips of one hand over his hole. His muscles clenched as David breached his opening with just the tip of his finger.

"I think we need the bed," David murmured, his lips brushing over Bailey's chest.

"Good idea."

David bent and put his shoulder into Bailey's stomach, lifting Bailey to carry him into the bedroom. Bailey laughed but didn't argue. It was probably the fastest way to get to the room. He ran his hands down David's back to pinch his lover's flexing ass muscles.

“Keep it up and I might drop you.” David jumped slightly each time Bailey squeezed.

“I trust you won't. You can stay focused while people try to distract you.” Bailey caressed the small of David's back and slid his fingers down David's crease to tease his hole.

Moaning, David slapped Bailey's ass and returned the favor by pressing two of his fingers into Bailey's pucker ring. Bailey hissed at the burning sensation, but relaxed and did his best to push back. David stumbled and wrapped both arms around Bailey's legs.

“We shouldn't be doing that, or else we're going to hurt ourselves.”

His feet connected with the bedroom door, and he shoved, opening the door so David didn't have to let go of him. David bent until Bailey's feet touched the floor, but instead of waiting for Bailey to get his balance, David pushed him over onto the mattress.

Bouncing slightly, Bailey laughed. “What the hell?”

“You're just going to end up there anyway. No point in wasting a step.” David grinned before crawling on the bed to join him.

He smiled as David straddled him with hands on either side of his head and knees hugging Bailey's hips. Running his hands up David's arms, he tested the muscles and skin, savoring the strength evident in every flex. He trailed his fingers down David's spine, feeling each bump on the way down until he got to the soft spot at the small of David's back.

David shivered as he caressed the sensitive area. Ducking down, David kissed him while rooting under the pillow. He pulled back to eye the man.

“What are you doing?”

“Looking for the lube.” David jerked the slick out and held it up.

Bailey ordered, “Give me some of that.”

He rubbed his fingers together as David squirted the slick stuff on him. After rolling over, he supported himself on one hand while reaching around to play with his hole. A low groan greeted his actions, and Bailey glanced over his shoulder to find David staring, wide-eyed, at what Bailey was doing.

“That's about the bloody hottest thing I've ever seen,” David whispered as Bailey pushed his fingers by his tight ring of muscle and into his channel.

“You've never seen anyone play with his own ass before?” Bailey panted through the slight burn and started rocking slowly.

“Well, yeah, I have, but for some reason, watching you do it is way hotter than those other guys.”

Bailey didn't want to think about any other men David might have dated before him. He knew it was silly because there was no way David was a virgin, but there he had it. Love didn't always make sense.

David's touch caused Bailey to jump, and a shudder shot all over his body as David pressed two of his own fingers in to join Bailey's. Three fingers stretched and relaxed his opening. Soon he whimpered when David's knuckle bumped his gland.

“Oh wow.”

“Right there, huh?” David chuckled and nailed Bailey's prostate again on the next thrust in.

“Yeah.” Bailey grunted and arched his back, loving the feel of David working him like that.

“I want in, baby. Are you ready?”

He nodded. “Please, David. I want...”

Bailey didn't finish the sentence as David removed his fingers and replaced them with his cock in one quick shove.

“Shit.”

Dropping his forehead to rest on his arms, Bailey breathed deep for a moment, absorbing the intense fullness David's action caused. David smoothed his hands over Bailey's shoulders and back, trying to relax him. The need to move reemerged in Bailey, and he clenched his inner channel.

David moaned and, taking Bailey's movement as agreement, pulled almost all the way out and eased back in. As much as there had been urgency before, there wasn't any now. It was like David and Bailey had found that perfect place where they could be together without worry or the

world intruding on them. David helped Bailey straighten, which settled him back onto David's lap and drove David farther into Bailey.

Resting his head on David's shoulder, Bailey licked along David's jawline, savoring the scrape of David's five o'clock shadow over his tongue. David plucked at Bailey's nipples with one hand while sliding the other down over Bailey's stomach to fist his prick.

"You're so tight," David whispered in Bailey's ear. "I love the way you feel around me."

Bailey lost the ability to speak when David squeezed and pumped, producing a quiver that ran the entire length of Bailey's body. He moved, caught between David's hand and cock.

"That's it. Fuck my hand. I want you to come all over it." David bit his shoulder.

He jerked and tightened, milking David like his lover milked him. He needed David to claim him in the most primitive way, filling his ass with his cum and marking him with love bites. David scraped a nail over Bailey's nipple, playing with the piece of flesh until it was red and aching

What started out as slow and gentle turned into a pounding as David reamed his ass. Bailey braced his hands on the headboard and shoved his ass back, took everything David gave him and begged for more. David gripped one of Bailey's hips with his hand and Bailey knew there would be bruises there the next day, but it didn't matter to him. Neither did the fact that the pain he lived with would be worse after such a vigorous fucking. None of it mattered. All that mattered was coming and making sure David came along with him.

Electric shock ripped through him each time David hit his gland, building the pressure and pleasure until Bailey thought he would explode. His cock seemed to swell even more, and lights lit up behind his eyelids as he spilled his cum all over David's hand and the sheets in front of him.

"Shit."

David's teeth dug into the muscle connecting Bailey's neck and shoulder while the man flooded Bailey's passage with hot liquid. They swayed together as the tremors and occasional jerks eased off, and then David's limp cock slid from Bailey's ass. Bailey moaned at the loss as David lowered him slowly to the sheets.

"Damn," he mumbled.

"What?" David paused in the middle of climbing out of bed.

“I'm in the wet spot.”

A chuckle filled the air. “I'll get a clean sheet, and we'll change the bed before we go to sleep. I don't want you to have to sleep in the wet spot. You might not want to come back.”

He rolled to his side and watched David stroll out of the room. Did he mean it? Did David want him to come back? Was it more than just a fling? Questions shot around Bailey's mind like a pinball. Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath. No point trying to predict the future. All that would do was drive him crazy. His frantic thoughts were interrupted by a wide yawn.

This day had been the most exercise Bailey had in a long time, even though it wasn't the physical stuff he was used to from being in the army. His right thigh muscle cramped, and he shot up in bed, rubbing it with the heels of his hands and swearing.

“What's wrong?” David raced into the room, carrying a sheet and a washcloth.

“Got a cramp.” Bailey gritted his teeth while trying to loosen the muscle.

David dropped the items on the mattress next to Bailey and helped massage Bailey's leg. The additional heat and strength from David's hands unwound the cramp. Sighing, Bailey fell back against the pillows and wiped his sweat-covered brow.

“Thanks.”

“Does that happen often?” David gestured for him to get out of bed.

Bailey slid off and leaned against the dresser while David changed the bedding. He caught the cloth David tossed at him and cleaned off. He flipped it toward the laundry basket when David motioned him back.

He slipped under the blankets and entwined his arms and legs around David's body, soaking in his warmth and musky scent.

“It only happens when I overuse my muscles. Of course, I never know what could be considered overuse. Some days, it doesn't take more than a walk from one office to another at the lab. Other days, I can walk two miles without even a twinge.”

David ran his hand over Bailey's side. “Did you take that tonic Kael gets for you?”

“I only take it in the morning. I'm afraid if I use it more often, I could get addicted to it.” Bailey rubbed his cheek over the hair on David's chest.

“I don't think Kael would give you something that you'd get addicted to. Why not ask Mordred what's in it? Why don't you ask Mordred for it since he's the one who gets it?”

Bailey shrugged. “Not sure. Mordred makes me a little nervous, in addition to feeling like a complete and utter klutz.”

Laughing, David agreed, “He is a little unnerving. It's just how unbelievably beautiful he is.”

“It's no wonder George fell in love with him.” Bailey traced a circle around David's belly button.

“Listening to George, it wasn't love at first sight though.” David shifted and grabbed Bailey's hand. “That tickles.”

Bailey nuzzled David's neck and kissed him quick before wiggling to find the perfect spot for him next to David. “You're letting me see all your secrets. You might want to be careful. Next I'll be stealing your heart.”

Shit. He hadn't meant to say that. David didn't say anything, and Bailey wondered if the man was going to ignore what he had said. He let the silence settle over them, and soon all the messing around they had done that day caught up to him and he slipped into sleep.

Yet before he succumbed fully to slumber, he heard David murmur, “I think you already stole my heart, Bailey. I think I might love you.”

Bailey smiled and hoped David would remember he said that in the morning.

\* \* \*

“Do you think it worked, George?”

George looked up to see Mordred standing in the doorway of their bedroom, a worried expression on his face. “Did what work, love?”

Mordred frowned at him, not happy with his ignorance. “Seamus's love spell.”

“Ah. Well, considering they couldn't keep their hands off each other, I'd say it was a roaring success.” He gestured for Mordred to come and join him in bed.

The elf sat cross-legged on the covers, fiddling with the ends of his long hair. “That doesn't mean anything. Lust is all that is. We all knew they were attracted to each other, but do they love each other?”

“I guess we'll have to wait until tomorrow and see. If they're still as into each other as they were today, then I would say Seamus's spell was a hit.” George tugged on a lock of Mordred's hair. “Why are you worried about this now? You were the one who thought it was a good idea.”

Mordred flung his hair over his shoulder to get it out of George's reach. “I know, and before, I wouldn't have cared if it worked or not. It would have been great fun. Bailey and David are my friends, and I don't want either of them hurt.”

George snagged Mordred around the waist and dragged the elf up against him. “It's too late now, Mordred. We'll deal with the fallout tomorrow.”

“That doesn't sound very promising.” Mordred pouted.

“I'm simply saying that no matter what happens, we'll deal with it. Who knows? Maybe nothing will happen during the night and they'll be madly in love when they wake up tomorrow.”

His love shrugged, and George got the feeling Mordred didn't believe him. He knew the easiest way to distract Mordred, and he kissed him. Mordred opened to him like a flower to the sun. He eased him down to the mattress, touching him everywhere he could reach.

Whatever happened between Bailey and David would happen. George and Mordred would be there to deal with the aftermath, good or bad, but there wasn't any point brooding about it when there were so many other entertaining ways to spend the night.



## Chapter Nine

David rolled over, flinging his arm out to hit his alarm clock as ringing drew him from his sleep. Instead of hard plastic, he slapped what felt like someone's face.

“Shit. If you wanted me to answer your phone, you could've nudged me.”

He shot up and looked to his right. Bailey lay beside David, rubbing his nose and eyeing him with a disgruntled look.

“What are you doing?”

His mind drew a blank about what events could have led up to Bailey being in his bed.

“I'm answering your phone.” Bailey reached for the receiver.

“No!” David lunged, practically bouncing Bailey out of the bed in his haste to get the phone before Bailey.

“Fine.”

Bailey struggled out from under the blankets and stood, holding on to the bedpost until he got his balance. David watched Bailey make his unsteady way to the bathroom. He'd forgotten about the receiver in his hand.

“David. Are you there?”

Startled, he stared at his phone. Fuck, it was his father. Had he heard Bailey?

“David Joseph Wellmine, if you're there, talk to me.” Impatient coldness rang in his father's voice.

“I'm here,” he said after placing the receiver to his ear.

“It's about time. When will your flight be landing at Heathrow?”

He slumped back against the headboard, rubbing his temples with his free hand, and tried to think. “About four thirty.”

His father exhaled loudly. "You're cutting it very close for drinks before dinner. I'll make sure the car is waiting."

"Father, you know I despise cocktail hour." He plucked at the blanket covering him to the waist.

"Your feelings on the matter don't concern me. Mingling and making small talk is something you must learn how to do. It's the best way to charm people into voting for you."

"What if I don't want them voting for me?" he mumbled.

Bailey came into the room just as David's father demanded, "What did you say?"

David's mouth went dry as Bailey stood before him in all his naked glory. There were red marks and bruises decorating Bailey's skin.

"Holy fuck," David whispered as memories from yesterday crashed into his dazed brain.

The younger man glared at him, and he could hear his father's voice in the background.

"I'll call you when I land, Father."

He didn't say good-bye or wait for his father to reply. He slammed the phone down and put his head in his hands.

"What happened yesterday?"

His plaintive voice must have touched a soft spot in Bailey because he joined David in bed. Leaning back in almost the same position as David, Bailey chuckled.

"Do you really need me to explain?"

"No." David shook his head. "I know what happened, but how and why did it happen?"

Bailey shrugged while twisting his trembling hands together. "Maybe you couldn't resist me anymore."

He shifted until he could look Bailey in the face. Reaching out, he clasped Bailey's hands in his, chafing them to ease the chill from Bailey's skin.

"As considerable as your charms are, honey, I think something else might have been in play."

The sly and secretive looks Mordred sent their way every time the elf was in their vicinity crossed his mind.

"Mordred." He groaned.

“What does Mordred have to do with it? Why does it matter how it happened?” Bailey intently stared at their entwined hands. “Do you regret what we did?”

Bailey cringed and smiled. “Now I'm starting to sound slightly needy.”

David examined his feelings for Bailey and what occurred yesterday. Did he regret the giant leap they had taken in their relationship? Exhaling softly, he lifted Bailey's hands and brushed a kiss over Bailey's knuckles.

“No, I don't think so.”

Bailey tried to jerk his hands free. “You don't think so? What the hell does that mean? Do you love me or not?”

Love? Bloody hell. When had love come into play?

“Jesus.”

Bailey managed to get away from David and climbed out of bed.

“Bailey, wait.” David reached out, not wanting Bailey to trip and hurt himself because he was in a hurry to get away.

“No. I'm not waiting anymore, David. I thought we'd made progress yesterday. You see, even if Mordred cast some spell or something like that, it didn't matter to me. All it did was hide my insecurities enough for me to make love to you and offer you my heart.” Bailey dressed, propping himself up against David's dresser when his body threatened to tip over.

“Bailey.” David stopped.

What could he say? He had been attracted to Bailey since they first met and slowly fell in love with the sergeant as he watched Bailey struggle to live a normal life with his disabilities.

Having lived so much of his life under his father's thumb, even in the military, David would have gone the rest of their time together pretending to be friends. He'd prided himself on having courage to face even the scariest of monsters, yet he couldn't face his own father.

The sound of his flat door opening caught his attention, and he dove from the bed, racing down the hall to get to the door before Bailey left. He slid to a stop.

“I do care about you,” he blurted out.

Bailey snorted. “You care about me? Tell me this, David, what are you afraid of? Why is it so difficult for you to say it out loud?”

“My father would flip.” David clenched his hands and placed them behind him at parade rest.

“Your father?” Bailey eyed him like he were some strange bug he'd found at the bottom of his bathtub. “How old are you?”

“What do you mean?”

Voices came from the corridor, and he realized that Bailey still had the door open.

“Could you shut the door? I really don't think my neighbors want to see me naked.”

“If they had any kind of taste, they would.” Bailey shut and leaned back against it, arms crossed in front of him.

Blushing, David gestured toward the living room. “Why don't you sit down while I go grab some pants? We should talk about this.”

Pushing Bailey into agreeing didn't seem like the best way to get the man to listen to him, so David waited, hoping that Bailey would give him a chance to explain. With a weary nod, Bailey shoved away from the door and made his way to the living room. David sprinted back to his bedroom and snatched up a pair of sweatpants he'd put on the chair to pack before he left.

He careened into the other room and managed to land sprawled at Bailey's feet. The young man raised an eyebrow at his undignified entrance.

“Usually I'm the one flailing around like a landed fish.”

God, could he be more awkward? He sat next to Bailey on the couch and drew a deep breath, calming his nerves.

“How old are you, David? You're a captain in the Royal Army. You command seven soldiers in an elite unit. Explain to me why you can't say you love me.”

Bailey wasn't going to cut him any slack. David understood and respected him for that.

“I've never been able to stand up to my father.”

“Did he abuse you?”

He shook his head. “No, he never hit me with his fists, but my father's disappointment can be voiced in verbal blows that cut like a knife. He's very cold and distant. Both of my parents are like that and always have been.”

“Do they know you're gay?” Bailey studied him.

David bit his lip before shrugging. “Not that I know of. I've never told them. Decided that since I was stationed far enough away, they would never find out. You see, my father wants me to become an MP. He wants me to run for a seat in the House of Commons, to follow in his footsteps.”

“Your father has a seat in Parliament?” Bailey rolled his eyes. “Don't tell me. He's a Conservative.”

He nodded and rubbed his palms over his thighs. “Yes, but he's ultraconservative. Very traditional family values type guy and all his cronies are the same way.”

Bailey pursed his lips. “So if his only son came out of the closet, he'd be embarrassed. Would he disown you?”

“I doubt it, simply because a proper father wouldn't disown his child for being gay. A proper father would love his child no matter what.” David grimaced at his feet. “And my father is a very proper man. He would act like he didn't care in public because one must keep up appearances of a perfect family. But Father would never speak to me again or welcome me into his home.”

Silence filled the room while Bailey digested what David told him. David thought about his mother. What was she like before she married his father? Had she ever been happy, or had his father crushed it out of her?

He jerked when Bailey stood. He glanced up to see Bailey looking at him, understanding, sympathy, and determination in his expression.

“I can understand why you never said anything. I dealt with having certain aspects of my life ignored after I came out, but I didn't allow it to keep me from finding men and falling in love. You need to deal with this, David, or you're going to be alone the rest of your life.” Bailey started walking toward the door. “It'll be hard to find a man who's willing to live a lie or be your dirty little secret anymore.”

Bailey was right.

“If you find the courage to tell your parents about yourself, you know where to find me when you get back. If you're too afraid of what your father might say, then I'll see you at work next week.”

David didn't move, not for several minutes after the door shut behind Bailey. After standing, he wandered down the hall to fall face-first on his bed. Unfortunately, he fell into the pillow Bailey had used the night before. He breathed deep, trying to burn Bailey's scent in his head because he might not have a chance to be close to Bailey again.

Rolling over, he caught a glimpse at the clock and swore. He had thirty minutes to get ready before he headed to the airport. Thank God he'd packed everything a couple of days ago. He headed to the bathroom to clean up.

Twenty minutes later as he finished dressing, he searched for his watch among the items on his dresser. He had just about given up when he spotted it under some receipts. David snatched it up and snapped it on. He yanked up his bag and stalked out of his flat.

It wasn't until the plane was taking off that he realized the watch he wore wasn't his. The face was scratched, and the metal band was dented. He took it off and turned it over. Engraved into the back was: *To Bailey/time flies by/grab the seconds when you can/Jake*.

Shit, he had Bailey's watch. Who the hell was Jake? Was he Bailey's brother? Jealousy surged through David, and he clenched his hands to keep from yanking out his phone and dialing Bailey. He had no right to demand answers from Bailey when he wasn't sure what he wanted to do about their relationship.

They certainly couldn't go back to being just friends, not after spending most of yesterday shagging each other like bunnies.

“Love.”

Straightening, he spared a glance for the man sitting next to him. “What?”

“You were looking at that watch like it was going to tell you the meaning of life.”

The man's accent was so thick, David had to concentrate to figure out what he was saying.

“Oh, I just realized it wasn't my watch. It's a friend's. I must have picked it up by mistake.” He fastened it around his wrist again.

“Ah. Close friend, to be leaving his watch lying around where you could accidentally pick it up.”

“I guess.” He settled into his seat, hoping the man would get the hint that he didn't want to talk.

“You guess?” The man tapped David on the arm. “I think he's more than a friend. I think you need to tell him how you feel before you lose him. Once he's gone, you'll find out just how much you loved him.”

David shifted, uneasy about the conversation. “I don't know what you're talking about.”

The man had intense, dark green eyes, so dark they were almost black. His stare bore into David's, and it was like he read David's mind. A slight grin tipped the man's lips.

“St. Patrick's Day is a day of powerful magic. Not many people know that anymore. At one time, great spells could be worked on that day that would affect a person for his entire life.”

Jerking up, David grabbed the man's arm and glared at him. “What do you know about spells?”

“I've cast a few over the centuries.” He winked at David. “Mordred can tell you about that.”

“Damn, you're one of them.” David slumped into the seat. “Does that mean everything I felt for Bailey yesterday was caused by the spell? Was any of it real?”

“One of them? I suppose I am. My name is Seamus.” Seamus held out his hand for David to shake.

David's polite upbringing forced him to shake the elf's hand, but resentment boiled inside his gut. “I can't say I'm pleased to meet you.”

Seamus didn't appear very upset by that statement. “I hear that a lot. You asked me whether what you felt for Bailey yesterday was real.”

He nodded, not sure if he wanted to hear the answer.

“Yes, it was real. The common misconception about love spells is that they can make two strangers fall in love with each other.” Seamus shook his head at what must be a silly idea.

“You mean it can't?”

“There are varying degrees of love spells, based on the power of the one casting it, but for the most part, it is only a dark spell that can take over control of a person's actions and inclinations.” Seamus frowned. “Even though I am an Unseelie, I don't use dark magic. It's too easy to lose your soul to it.”

David had no idea what an Unseelie was and didn't care. “So you're saying?”

“If you weren't already attracted to Bailey and him to you, the spell I cast wouldn't have worked. All it did is lower the barriers stopping the two of you from acting on your feelings. It stopped Bailey from worrying about what you thought of his injuries, and it stopped you from thinking about your father.”

Embarrassment flooded David, and he ducked his head, pinning his gaze on his boots.

Seamus tsk-tsked softly and slipped his finger under David's chin, lifting his face until their eyes met again. “We all want our father's approval, but there comes a time when we must decide if his approval is worth losing ourselves.”

“I don't know what you're talking about,” he lied.

“You don't have to lie to me. Your father wants you to follow in his footsteps, and most of your life, you've let him call the shots. Probably the only time you ever stood up to him was when you joined the military. Am I right so far?”

David nodded, remembering the argument he and his father had about that. Though he admitted he was the only one who yelled. His father just got colder and more cutting in his remarks.

“And he has punished you in subtle ways since then, I bet. You are a good son, David, but you have to grow up and realize that he isn't going to give you his approval. It doesn't matter if you do what he wants. If you go on to marry some woman you don't love and get elected to a seat in the House that you don't want, he still will find something to put you down for.” Seamus cradled David's face, ignoring the disapproving looks from some of the passengers. “You have found more acceptance from that ragtag group of people in Ireland than you have from people who are supposed to love you. They don't care if you're a member of society or a homeless bum on the street. They've seen you at your worst, and they still care about you. One of them even loves you, though you've come close to breaking his heart.”

Closing his eyes, he breathed in deep, and somehow he could smell Bailey. He jerked away from Seamus and glanced around the plane, looking for him.

“He's not here, but I wanted you to remember what you felt when you were with him yesterday. I might have cast the spell, but believe me, you were already in love with Bailey. Now you have two choices, and I can't help you with them.”

“What are they?”



Why was David asking? He knew what the choices were. It was simply a matter of having the courage to face his father and tell him he wanted nothing to do with his plans for David's future.

“You can go home, kiss your mother's cheek, and wish her a happy birthday while knowing that you'll never be able to be what she and your father want. Or you get off the plane, call your superior officers, and tell them you want to be reassigned. Don't go back to Ireland if you don't mean to stay. Bailey's heart will break, but he'll get over you eventually. It would be rubbing salt into a wound if he had to see you every day, knowing you chose your father over him.”

He rubbed his fingers over the face of the watch and nodded. “That's the answer to the meaning of life?”

Seamus's low laugh hit David in the gut. “Love is the answer to everything, David. We just need to know which questions to ask at times.”

Before he could say anything else, Seamus leaned forward and brushed a kiss over his lips. Between two blinks, Seamus disappeared and the seat next to David was empty. David might not know what an Unseelie was, but he had a feeling Seamus was related to Mordred. George's lover was to blame for tearing David's world apart, and when he got back to Ireland, he was going to chew the man out.

Exhaling softly, he settled back in his seat. He would go to the house in London and give his mother her birthday present before he talked to his father. Both Seamus and Bailey were right. It was time David grew up and accepted the fact that he would never earn his father's love. Hell, he didn't know if the man even liked him, but it no longer mattered. Bailey loved him, and that was enough for David.

## Chapter Eleven

Bailey stared down at his hands, clasped together and hanging between his knees.

“Oh, Bailey, I'm so sorry.” Mordred flung his arms around Bailey and hugged him tight. “George and Seamus warned me that meddling wasn't the wise thing to do, but I thought I knew better.”

There was such remorse in Mordred's voice that Bailey couldn't be mad at the man. He doubted Mordred did anything with malicious intent. Hugging Mordred back, he rested his head on Mordred's shoulder.

“I know you didn't mean for it to turn out this way,” he murmured. “You're a hopeless romantic who believes that two people who love each other will be together forever.”

Mordred chuckled in Bailey's ear. “I do, and George is proof of that. I lusted after him from the first moment I saw him in Gaia's court. I determined he would be mine, and I courted him quite fiercely.”

“That's true, Bailey.”

He pulled away from Mordred to see George leaning against the wall between the kitchen and living room. The big man's expression held exasperated love for the elf sitting next to Bailey.

“Once he made up his mind, Mordred was relentless in his pursuit.” George joined them on the couch, sandwiching Bailey between him and Mordred.

He relaxed into the open warmth of the couple. Going to Kael and Hugh had never crossed Bailey's mind when he left David's flat. For some reason he knew George and Mordred would soothe his hurt feelings, and they had. Mordred dragged him into their flat the moment the elf had opened the door to see him standing there.

“I just knew what I wanted, and I also understood I had to break down a few walls before George would accept me.” Mordred reached over Bailey to trail a finger over George's cheekbone.

“Accept you?” Bailey shifted to glance at George. “What was there to accept about Mordred?”

“I wasn't gay when I was a mortal, Bailey. Oh, I'm sure there were gay men during the era I lived, but it wasn't accepted and I thought it was inspired by the Devil.” George chuckled. “But I couldn't resist him, and I learned something while he chased me.”

“What did you learn?”

“Eventually I figured out that it didn't matter that Mordred was male. What mattered was how my heart skipped a beat when he was near and how I got hard every time I heard his voice.” George winked and Mordred blushed.

Bailey never thought the shameless elf could blush.

“I forgot to worry what others would think about me if I chose to be with him. Of course, in the Realm of Dreams, it was different. Love and sex are a fluid concept with the creatures that live there.”

“Are you trying to tell me something?”

“Yes.” Mordred shook his head. “What George is trying to tell you, in a very roundabout way, is that David has to figure out which is more important: his father's opinion or your love.”

“Was I right to give him that ultimatum?” Fear that David would choose his father racked Bailey's heart.

George and Mordred stared at each other for a second before both nodded.

“Yes, you were. David is a fine soldier and a good man, but he spent too much of his life coasting and allowing his father to choose his path for him. A true man chooses his own way, and it's time David did that.” George wrapped his arms around Bailey and Mordred, drawing both of them close to him.

Bailey winced as his body protested, and Mordred jumped to his feet.

“Wait. Seamus dropped off more of your tonic. I'll get you some.” Mordred raced off down the hall.

“He meant well,” George murmured.

“I know, and I'm not mad at him. He's just so happy with you that he thinks everyone should have someone to love.” Bailey let the heat radiating from George ease his tense muscles.

“It doesn't help that he believes he brought Kael and Hugh together. Mordred thinks of himself as a matchmaker.” George raised his voice.

“Hey now, I did get those two together,” Mordred protested as he came back into the room holding a small clay bottle. He handed it to Bailey before climbing on the couch and snuggling close again.

Working the cork out, Bailey marveled at the ease with which Mordred and George welcomed him into their home and arms. He took a small sip of the tonic and tapped the cork back in. George took it from him and set it on the coffee table. Closing his eyes, Bailey absorbed the caring in the couple's touches as they caressed his arms and face.

“What if he decides I'm not worth it?” He spoke aloud his deepest fear.

“Hush,” Mordred shushed him. “Worry about that when it happens. Rest now.”

Bailey slipped into slumber, confident that George and Mordred wouldn't allow anything to hurt him.

\* \* \*

George returned to the living room, where he found Mordred curled up on the windowsill, staring out over the city. He strolled over to his lover and stroked his hand over the cascade of hair falling over Mordred's back.

“What are you thinking about so hard, love?”

Mordred looked up at him, resting his head on George's stomach. “Was I wrong?”

“Wrong?” He frowned, not used to Mordred second-guessing himself.

“To have Seamus cast a love spell and get Bailey and David together.” Mordred's laugh was self-deprecating. “You know how I always believe I'm right. You and Seamus warned me about messing in mortal lives.”

He swept Mordred up in his arms and switched places on the windowsill, cradling Mordred on his lap. “There are worse things you could have done to them, Mordred. You were just trying to do something nice for a friend. Who knows? It might still work out.”

“I'm going to feel terrible if David turns his back on Bailey.” Mordred laid his hand on George's chest, seeming to draw comfort from the feel of his heart beating.

“I don't think you have to worry about that.”

Seamus's voice made both of them jump, and George glanced up to see his friend appear in their living room. He smiled but didn't stand. He loved having Mordred in his arms, but being mortal meant less time during the day for them to spend with each other.

“What do you know?” Mordred eyed Seamus.

“I talked to our errant Romeo on his flight to London.” Seamus stretched out on the couch, put his hands behind his head, and smiled up at the ceiling.

“Did you tell David you cast a love spell on them?”

Seamus rolled his head to the side, flashing Mordred a wink. “Sweetheart, I believe they already figured out something was going on. I mean, Bailey came here to talk to you, didn't he? All I did was explain to David what love spells can and can't do. I think he understood that everything he felt was real, just enhanced and uninhibited.”

George shook his head. “They are so afraid the intense feelings of yesterday weren't real, and yet, if they had only had the courage to approach each other before this, they would have discovered their own feelings are far stronger than anything you could create for them.”

“They're mortals, my friend, and as such, they don't understand the more subtle nuances of love like immortals do.”

Snorting, George hugged Mordred closer. “You're full of shit, Seamus. At least, I believe that's what the mortals would say to you.”

“Too true.” Seamus nodded sagely and looked serious for a moment before rolling off the couch onto his feet. “Still, I do think David will pleasantly surprise all of us. Don't give him too hard a time when he comes back. It's hard to give up on the dream of winning your father's approval.”

That was something George understood; even though his youth was centuries behind him, he still remembered how hard he had tried to be the kind of knight his father wanted. In the end, it hadn't mattered whether his father would have been proud of him or not. He fought for a different cause.

“I have to go before Gaia starts to wonder where I am. She's been having me dance attendance on her.” Seamus grimaced.

“Oh, I meant to ask, but forgot several times. Did you and Hester ever get Aiden back to his realm?”

An odd look crossed Seamus's face, and George wondered what had happened between the Unseelie and Aiden. Seamus nodded.

“Yes, the spell Merlin gave us worked. Amazing, I know, considering how fried the poor wizard's brain is.”

Seamus disappeared, and Mordred eased back from George to look up at him.

“Do you get the feeling there's more to that story than he's telling us?”

“Yes, but since we can't chase him down, we'll have to live without knowing.”

Mordred pouted. “I hate not knowing.”

“You are a born gossip, love.” He kissed Mordred's nose before pushing the elf off his lap.

Landing on his ass, Mordred gasped and glared at him. Grinning, he stood and offered his hand.

“Come on. Bailey's going to sleep for a while, and Kael and Hugh won't be over for a couple hours. I can think of better things to do than discuss Seamus's private life.”

Need made Mordred's eyes gleam, and George found himself being dragged down the hallway to their bedroom. Oh yes, there were better ways to spend an afternoon than worrying about his friend.

\* \* \*

Voices whispering woke Bailey up. He listened while trying to figure out where he was.

“We should wake him up. He'll miss dinner.”

“You just want to know what he and David got up to yesterday.”

“Not true.” A pause. “All right. I do want to know. They were so into each other all day, and they didn't stay very long at the party.”

“They had better things to do besides hanging out with us.”

“Yeah, like each other.”

“Okay, you two. Get out of here. If Bailey wasn't awake before you started discussing his sex life, he probably is now and trying not to die of embarrassment.”

Hugh's brisk voice made Bailey jump. He opened his eyes to find Kael and Mordred lying on the bed, one on each side of him. Hugh propped his body up by leaning a shoulder on the doorframe, his hands tucked into his back pockets.

“Look, he's awake.” Mordred grinned at him.

“Ummm...good afternoon?” He pushed up to rest against the headboard, keeping the blankets pulled up to his chest.

“Evening actually. Don't worry, Mordred and Kael were just leaving.” Hugh eyed both men, who pouted but scrambled off the bed and out of the room like naughty kids.

“Thanks.”

Hugh laughed and shrugged. “I bought you a brief moment of peace. Be prepared when you come out for dinner. Mordred's over feeling bad about what he did, and he'll want to know all the details of your adventure with David.”

“I'm not sure how many I remember.” Bailey blushed, remembering it all started with a blowjob in the room next to the party.

“If you let him, Mordred will get every last minute detail from you.” Hugh waved a hand behind him. “We'll be in the living room when you're ready.”

Bailey waited until the door shut behind Hugh before he climbed out of bed. He figured it was George who put him to bed since he still wore his underwear. Mordred would have stripped him naked. He grabbed his pants off the chair where George had tossed them.

He knew the tonic Mordred had given him worked because his balance was better while he dressed. His muscles didn't ache as much as they had, and his trembling was slight. He searched his pockets for his watch. Panic welled up in him when he couldn't find it.

He headed to the living room. “George, did you see my watch when you put me in bed?”

“You weren't wearing one.” George caught his worry. “What's wrong?”

“It was a gift from someone really special to me. The only thing I have from him.” He sank onto the couch and buried his head in his hands. “I was wearing it yesterday.”

“Could you have left it at David's?” Mordred asked, joining him on the couch and rubbing his back.

“It's possible. I left there in kind of a hurry this morning.”

“Then call him and ask.”

“Mordred,” George warned.

“What?” Mordred blinked at his lover with innocent eyes.

Bailey chuckled. “I'm not sure he would answer if I called him.”

“You don't know until you try.” Kael handed him a cell phone.

Hugh grabbed it before Bailey could take it. “I'll call and ask. There's no point in pushing this situation. Let David have some time away from all of us.”

“Thanks, Hugh. At the moment, I just want to make sure I didn't lose it.”

Bailey wasn't ready to talk to David.

“Okay, you don't want to talk to him, but how was it yesterday? Is he a good kisser?” Curiosity filled Mordred's face as both he and Kael leaned forward.

“Goddess, you two are just like teenage girls.” George shook his head.

“Hey, I resent that sexist comment.” Monica peered around the edge of the wall separating the kitchen from the living room.

“Yeah.” Irene supported Monica.

“Sorry, ladies. Forgot you were here.” George turned back to Mordred and Kael. “You two are worse than chattering magpies.”

“You're forgiven.” Monica sailed in and sat in one of the chairs. “I have to admit to dying of curiosity though. Is Captain Wellmine a good kisser? I mean, he looks like he would be.”

He didn't know what to say. David might not like Bailey talking about what they did, not that Bailey was going to describe everything and draw diagrams or anything like that. He might get into real trouble if David decided not to pursue their relationship any further.

“Enough.” Tom, Hugh's brother, came in with several beer bottles and a tray with tea mugs on it. “I didn't come back for the weekend to listen to some other guy's sex life.”

“Come on, Bailey. Throw us a bone and we'll leave you alone. I promise.” Kael crossed his heart.



It couldn't hurt to tell them one thing.

“Yes, he's a great kisser.”

“I knew it.” Monica high-fived Mordred. “Didn't I tell you that the first time I saw the captain?”

Bailey blushed, but he couldn't help the smile crawling across his face. As embarrassing as it all was, his spirits lifted. Whatever happened between him and David would happen and he couldn't stop it, but his friends would be there to help him laugh and heal.

“Bailey, David says he has your watch. He'll be back in town tomorrow and will call you to set up a time to return it to you.” Hugh tossed the phone to Kael. “Now let's talk about something else, or Bailey might die of embarrassment.”

He gave Hugh a grateful smile as Tom, George, and Alan Larkin, whom Bailey just noticed, distracted the others with talk about the local football clubs. As the debate grew heated, Bailey let their voices fade into the background.

David was returning tomorrow. What had gone wrong? He was supposed to stay for several days, visiting his family. Bailey didn't want to hope that David's coming back early was a good sign.

Kael crawled over him, trying to get away from Mordred tickling him, and Bailey got trapped between them. He decided not to worry about what was going to happen tomorrow, even though he had the strangest feeling his future hung in the balance.

## Chapter Twelve

David set his bag down in the entrance of his parents' London home, crouching to tug his mother's present from his duffle. The butler glanced at the bag quickly before looking at David and taking his jacket.

"May I take your bag up to your room, Master David?"

"No, Johnson. I don't think I'll be staying long."

The butler's usually passive face wrinkled into a slight frown. "Certainly, sir. Should I tell Roberts to bring the car back around front?"

"That's all right. If I leave, I'll get a taxi."

"Of course, sir. Your father is in his study, and your mother is in her room, finishing up final preparations for tonight's dinner party." Johnson knew better than to escort David to either place.

Having servants was just one thing of many he hated about his family. He jogged up the grand sweeping staircase, knowing that each step closer to his parents would be one step closer to his world changing forever.

He knocked on his mother's door leading to her suite of rooms. Alice, his mother's personal assistant/maid, opened it and smiled at him.

"Master David, you made it."

"Nice to see you again, Alice. I was wondering, is my mother available?" He held up the elegantly wrapped present in his hand. "I wanted to give her my present privately."

"Your mother would like that." Alice stepped back and waved him into his mother's sitting room. "I'll go and let her know you're here."

"Thank you."

He set the box on the coffee table and wandered the room, searching for something in the sterile setting that held any bit of his mother's personality. There was nothing, not even family pictures, which shouldn't have surprised him. They had probably sat for one portrait since he'd been born, and that was when he was ten. It hung over the fireplace in the front parlor. His mother's sitting room looked like a perfect magazine picture, nothing out of place and no dirt or dust anywhere.

“David.”

Turning, he smiled as his mother swept toward him, her hands held out. David clasped them gently in his and leaned down to peck his mother's offered cheek. No hugs because those wrinkle the clothes. Another lesson learned young. He'd only been punished once for hugging his mother and wrinkling her favorite Chanel suit. After that, he kept his distance, and she never encouraged him to breach that invisible wall she put up.

“Your father is going to be pleased that you got here in time for cocktails. He has some people he wants you to meet.” She glanced at his clothes. “Why aren't you dressed yet?”

“I just got in, Mother. I wanted to give you your present before everyone else got here.” Because he doubted he was going to be staying after what he had to say to his father.

He gestured to the box on the table. His mother sat on the settee, back straight and legs tight together. No slouching for his mother. She carefully unwrapped the present, folding the paper neatly and setting it aside. The tape holding the box closed was slit with a small letter opener. Not worth the risk of breaking a nail.

“Oh, David. Thank you. It's my favorite scent.” She lifted the small bottle of Chanel No. 5 out of the box.

Standing where she couldn't see him, he exhaled silently. Of course it was her favorite scent. Some of the most expensive perfume on the market and the only gift he could give her that she'd use. She squirted some on her wrists.

She smiled at him and stood, holding the bottle out to Alice. “Put this on my dressing table, Alice.”

“Yes, ma'am.”

He delivered another light kiss to her cheek. “I have to go talk to Father now. Happy birthday, Mother.”

“You're a wonderful son, David. I'll see you in a few minutes, but remember to change before you greet our guests.” She drifted back into her bedroom, and he wondered what else she had to do to get ready.

He strolled out of her suite and took the stairs two at a time back down. Johnson peered out of the parlor where he must have been dealing with the last-minute problems that always popped up at dinner parties. David waved to him as he headed toward the study.

Stopping in front of the door, David inhaled deeply and straightened his shoulders. He ran his fingers over Bailey's watch face. Whoever Jake was, the man had the right idea. Time flew by, and chances at love were fleeting. He didn't want to let Bailey slip away, even if it meant never gaining his father's approval. He knocked on the door.

“Enter.”

He stepped in, and his father glanced up from where he sat behind a large mahogany desk.

“Ah, David. You're here.” His father eyed his jeans, T-shirt, and boots. “Go upstairs and change right now. I ordered a new suit for you, and it's hanging in your closet. Wear the blue tie with it.”

His father dropped his gaze back to the papers in his hands, but David didn't move. When he didn't hear the door shut, his father looked up again.

“David, our guests will be arriving soon. You need to be ready. No matter what your mother thinks, it isn't fashionable to be late.”

“No, Father.”

Surprise widened his father's eyes, and he watched as his father set the papers down before pushing to his feet. Circling the desk, he moved to the middle of the room, hands resting on hips.

David didn't let his father's cold stare intimidate him, not anymore. Silly that it ever had. The drill sergeants he'd dealt with during basic training were far scarier than his father.

“Did you say no?”

“Yes, Father, I said no. I won't be joining your dinner party tonight.” He stood at parade rest, hands clasped behind his back to hide the sweating palms, feet spread slightly for balance.

“Do you realize what I had to do to get our guests here tonight? There are two women I want you to meet. Either one would make you a good wife.” His father frowned, ice growing in his voice.

“That's one of the problems, Father. I don't want a wife.”

“I thought the same thing when I was your age, but the voters like a settled man. They don't want a bachelor or a playboy. A good woman will iron out your rough spots.” Rubbing his chin, David's father narrowed his eyes as he stared at David. “I probably shouldn't have allowed you to stay in the military as long as I did. It seems to have made you a little more independent than I wished.”

David closed his eyes and steadied his nerves. His fingers rested on Bailey's watch. “I don't want a wife because I'm gay. I don't want to follow in your footsteps. I want to make the army my career.”

As David blurted out his true thoughts, tension released in him and his pulse calmed down as well.

“Really? You would prefer risking your life for an ungrateful country instead of becoming one of the powerful who run it?” His father folded his arms over his chest and glared at David.

“I'm not interested in power. I like my job, and I like serving in the army.”

Interesting how his father skipped right over the gay part of the confession.

“You'll never accomplish anything worthwhile shooting guns at people or strange creatures. You'll never find a wife who can help advance your career. Being a soldier isn't prestigious enough to attract the right kind of woman.”

David took a step forward. “Did you hear me? I'm not looking for a wife. I'm gay, and actually I've found a man I love and who doesn't mind that I'm a lowly soldier.”

His father cringed. “I sent you to all the best schools. Made sure you met all the right people, and this is how you repay me. Wasting all the money I spent on you by playing soldier. Throwing away the opportunities I've arranged for you.”

David's phone rang, and he pulled it out, checking the ID display. It was Kael's phone number. “I'm sorry, Father. I have to take this. It might be important.”

He didn't wait for permission. “Wellmine.”

“Hey, David. It's Hugh.”

“Hugh. Is everything all right?” He hoped it wasn't about Bailey.

“Things are fine here for now. Though I hope you know what you're doing, man, because you're going to have some folks all over your ass when you get back.” Hugh chuckled.

“I know. I screwed things up, but I wasn't prepared. Everything kind of caught me by surprise, and I don't react well to surprises. I must have gotten that from my father.” He glanced over his shoulder at his father, who stood stock-still in the middle of the room.

“What I'm calling about is Bailey needs to know if you've seen his watch.”

Holding his hand up, he stared at the watch on his wrist. “Yeah. I've got it with me. Grabbed it by accident as I ran out of the flat to catch my flight.”

“Great. He seems real attached to it. I'll let him know you have it.” Hugh sounded relieved.

“Tell him I'll be back tomorrow and I'll call to set up a time to meet him. I need to talk to him, besides giving him back his watch.”

Hugh hesitated and David continued, “Don't worry. I think Bailey will like what I have to say to him.”

“Okay, man. It's on you if you hurt him. I'll tell him.” Hugh hung up.

“You can't leave. I have people coming to meet you.”

Tucking his phone in his back pocket, David bit his lip. Beating his head against a brick wall would get him further than continuing the discussion with his father.

He clearly and distinctly pronounced each word. “I'm not staying, Father. I'm going back to Ireland and my life there. You know how to get ahold of me if you wish. I love you, but I can't be what you seem to think I should be. I can't be you, not anymore.”

Spinning on his heel, he blinked back tears. It hurt to know he was destroying the only connection he had with his father, but Seamus had been right. He'd spend his entire life trying to win his approval, only to find himself cold and alone one day without anyone he loved around.

“Master David, shall I call a taxi for you?” Johnson stood in the entrance, worry in his faded eyes even though his voice revealed no emotion.

“No, thank you, Johnson. I'll flag one down when I get outside.” He took his jacket from the butler and drew it on. Before he bent for his bag, he held out his hand to Johnson. “It's been a

pleasure having you with our family. I appreciate all you've done for me. Tell all the others that I said good-bye and thank you from me.”

“Are you leaving for good, sir?” Without hesitating, Johnson shook his hand. It was such a familiar thing to do that David was slightly surprised that the butler dropped his formal manners to do it.

“I don't know. They know how to contact me if they need me, so it might be a little while before you see me again.” He grabbed his bag and headed to the door.

“Sir, if I might be so bold?”

He stopped and turned back to look at Johnson. “Go ahead.”

“I'm proud of you, Master David. You would never have been happy living your parents' life. You're meant for something different. Maybe not greater or more earth-shattering, but different, and you'll be far happier for that.”

David dropped his bag and hugged the butler quickly. “That means a lot to me. I'll try calling in a couple weeks and see if they'll talk to me. I'm not disowning them, Johnson. It's just time for me to live my own life instead of the life he wants me to live.”

“Of course, sir.” Johnson handed him his bag and opened the door. “Maybe next time you are in London, you can bring your friend by.”

“Were you listening at the door?”

The butler shook his head. “No, sir. I figured out long ago that the only way you'd break from your father is if you found someone to love.”

“Keep your fingers crossed that I didn't screw everything up by coming here.”

“Good luck, sir.”

He waved as he raced down the front steps to the sidewalk, where he grabbed a taxi. There was no way he'd get a flight back to Ireland that night, but he'd exchange his ticket for one tomorrow morning. Then he'd find a hotel near the airport to crash for the night.

## Chapter Thirteen

Ridiculous. Crazy. The whole idea that David would give up the whole career plan his father put together for one damaged soldier was absurd. Bailey paced slowly from one end of his living room to the other. He plucked at the hole in his jeans while he did it. So far he'd managed to hit his shins once on the coffee table. Oh, there would have been more injuries, but Maksur moved anything he might run into before he did it.

“Why are you here again?” He glanced at the lieutenant, relaxing in his favorite chair with the TV remote and a Guinness.

“I figured you wouldn't want to wait for the man alone, and I had nothing else to do during the day.” Maksur winked at him. “Tonight would have been a different story, but I'm thinking you might be as busy as I am.”

Bailey blushed and started pacing again. “Aren't you wiggled out or anything about this whole thing?”

“What whole thing? You and the captain getting busy?” Maksur shrugged. “I could see you liked Wellmine from the beginning. I just didn't think it would take him this long to return the favor.”

“But he's my commanding officer. We're breaking a whole list of rules by dating.”

The “no fraternization” rules were the least of Bailey's worries, but he didn't really want to talk about how insecure he felt at the moment.

“Bloody hell, man. You're not going to stay in the army much longer, are you? Even if Wellmine makes a career of it, you're not.” Maksur stretched and scratched at the thin strip of skin his T-shirt revealed. “You're throwing obstacles up before you even figure out if you're going to head down that path.”



Flopping down on the couch, Bailey stared up at the ceiling. "I know, but I can't help thinking that there's no way, no matter what we did on St. Patrick's Day, the captain is going to stick with me. I'm not a good bargain anymore."

"Now you're just being mean, teasing me like that about your exploits the other day. You know, I'm dying of curiosity as to what you all did." Maksur turned the volume of the football game down, set the remote aside, and leaned forward to rest a hand on Bailey's knee. "Listen, Wellmine would be crazy to let you get away. If you hadn't already fixated on the captain, and weren't too good for me, I would have made a play a long time ago."

He dropped his gaze to meet Maksur's. The seriousness in his eyes belied the grin on the man's face.

"I didn't know."

"I know that, Bailey, and that's why I didn't tell you, aside from the fact that I'm really not good enough for you. Been playing the field for so long, I'm not sure I'd be able to settle down, and you're the settling down type."

A knock sounded on the door, and Maksur stood.

"That's my cue to leave."

Bailey stood to walk him to the door. Before he could open it, Maksur bent a little and brushed a kiss over Bailey's lips.

"Remember, he'd be crazy not to want you."

The lieutenant yanked open the door before Bailey could reply. David looked surprised to see Maksur emerge from Bailey's flat.

"Captain." Maksur nodded as he edged past him.

"Lieutenant Maksur." David swung around to watch Maksur walk down the corridor to the lift.

"Would you like to come in?" Bailey asked.

"Yes. What was Maksur doing here?"

David's question sounded casual, though Bailey thought he heard a hint of jealous undertones. He shook his head. More wishful thinking.

“He came over to borrow a hammer and ended up keeping me company for a while.” He wasn't about to admit that Maksur was there to keep him from going insane waiting for David to show up.

“Nice of him.” David settled in the chair Maksur had been using.

“He has his moments.” Bailey rubbed his palms on his jeans. “Would you like something to drink?”

David stood, took Bailey's hand, and led him to the couch, where they both sat. He stared at David's profile while the older man seemed to hesitate about what he wanted to say.

“Do you have my watch?”

“Yes.” David rolled up his sleeve and unfastened it from his wrist. “I found it on my dresser yesterday morning and didn't even check to make sure it was mine until I got on the plane. I'm sorry about taking it.”

He took the watch in his hands and ran his fingers over the engraved words on the back. “It's okay. I was fine as long as I knew I hadn't lost it. It means a lot to me.”

David straightened his shoulders and quirked his lips. “I wasn't going to ask because it really isn't any of my business, but I find I have to know. Who is Jake?”

“Jake?”

“The name on the back of the watch.” David gestured to Bailey's hands.

“Oh, right.” He opened his hand to reveal the watch. “Jake was the first boy I loved and my best friend.”

A gentle sadness danced along his heart when he thought of Jake.

“Are you still in touch?”

He shook his head. “No. Jake died seven years ago from cancer. He was only twenty-one.”

“I'm sorry.” David trailed his fingers over Bailey's knuckles. “Were you still lovers?”

“Nah, by then, we'd figured out we were better friends than lovers, but we still loved each other.” Bailey handed the watch to David and stood. He wandered over to one of the bookshelves and pulled out a photo album. “I have some pictures.”

David nodded when he glanced at him. “Sure.”

He sat close enough to David for their knees to brush. Flipping through the pages, he stopped at a picture of him and Jake, arms around each other with a football field behind them.

“Jake and I met when we were sixteen. I had just figured out I was gay, and he'd known about himself for a while. So it was time for exploring our feelings and things like that.” Bailey grinned, remembering all the things he and Jake had done. He met David's gaze. “Are you sure you want to hear any of this?”

Resting his hand on Bailey's leg, David nodded. “I do want to know, Bailey. Jake was extremely important to you, and I want to know everything about you.”

“Why?” Bailey traced the outline of Jake's smile. “When I left you yesterday, you weren't sure what you wanted to do.”

“I'm sorry for that. I guess I panicked and ended up hurting you, which is something I never wanted to do.” David tapped the wrist Bailey wore the watch on. “The inscription Jake put on your watch made me think. Also, I met someone who explained how love spells really work, and I realized I should never have questioned my feelings for you.”

Bailey frowned and tilted his head to study David. “What about love spells?”

“Seems they only work if you already have feelings for the person. They can't make two strangers fall in love.”

David slid his hand up Bailey's arm and around the back of Bailey's head, applying pressure to bring their mouths together.

For one second, Bailey thought about resisting, but really, it was silly. David was back, and while he hadn't said he wanted to take their relationship further, he hadn't been given time to talk. Bailey set the book to the side without breaking the kiss and leaned into David until the man gave ground.

“Umpf.” David landed on the couch with Bailey lying on top of him.

Grinding his erection into David's, Bailey whimpered. It had only been a day and a half, but he already missed the way David's cock filled his ass. David slid one hand down Bailey's back to grasp one cheek and rock them harder together.

“Yes.” Bailey didn't know what he was agreeing to, but he didn't care at the moment.

“It'd be more comfortable in a bed,” David murmured in his ear.

Bailey rolled off, and David's hands on his hips kept him from falling on his ass. He shot his lover a grin before leading him down the hallway toward his bedroom. Setting his watch on the dresser, he caught a glimpse of the words etched in it and smiled to himself. He was grabbing all the seconds he could, and if, in the end, David changed his mind, Bailey would have some great memories to cherish.

Clothes flew around the room as they both did the fastest stripteases anyone had ever seen. They weren't interested in teasing or enticing each other. Now that the barriers between them had been breached, they could let their attraction show without worrying about what the other was thinking.

"Oh yes," Bailey whispered, his eyes glued to David's cock rising from the dark nest of curls at his groin. He stalked across the room, prepared to drop to his knees in front of David.

"Whoa. Wait a second." David caught him under his arms and turned him toward the bed. "I think this will work better."

He found himself lying on his back while David crawled over him, straddling his head and presenting him with an up-close view of his cock. His intense focus on David's groin distracted him from what the other man was doing.

"Oh my God!"

His head almost exploded as David swallowed his cock down to the root. A slight chuckle vibrated along his shaft, and he shuddered. David twitched his hips, rubbing the head of his own prick against Bailey's lips, reminding him of his own obligations.

Opening his mouth, he sucked just the crown in, teasing it with his tongue, pressing into the slit. He could feel David moan, and he smiled. They settled into a matching rhythm, each driving the other closer to the edge. Tongues, teeth, and fingers. Licking, scraping, and stroking.

David's rough fingers trailed down behind Bailey's balls to his hole. As David pressed one digit into Bailey's channel, Bailey massaged his lover's firm ass. They rocked together, and Bailey's balls drew tight to his body. Pleasure pooled at the base of his spine, warning him of his impending climax. He tapped David's hip to warn him before he came, flooding David's mouth with his cum.

He managed not to harm David while he came, and as soon as his climax eased, Bailey went back to sucking, demanding David give him everything.

“Bailey.” David grunted as he came, spilling bitter, salty liquid down Bailey's throat.

Swallowing, he took every drop David gave him. He sucked until David's cock softened; then he licked it clean. David eased away from him and swung around until they were wrapped in each other's arms. He brushed a kiss over David's lips.

“You know, it was Jake's inscription that really pushed me to tell my father I didn't want to be what he'd planned for me.” David trailed his fingers down the center of Bailey's chest.

“It was his last gift to me right before he died. I'd stayed at his side through all the treatments and everything. I wasn't the most outgoing person and let guys hit on me instead of approaching them myself. Jake always pushed me when we went out.” Bailey closed his eyes and rested his head on David's chest. “I think the watch was his way of reminding me that we don't have all the time in the world.”

“Isn't that the truth?” David chuckled. “After everything we've been through since we started this adventure, we should know that.”

“How did your parents react to your news?”

Bailey hoped David's parents reacted like every marvelous parent he'd heard about but was never sure existed.

“My mom doesn't know, or at least I didn't tell her anything. Just gave her the present, told her I loved her, and went to talk to my father.” David rolled over onto his back and stared up at the ceiling.

Bailey tried to hide the wince as he pushed up on his elbow to look down at David, but David caught it.

“Do you need a pill or some of your tonic?”

“I could probably use a sip of it.” He climbed out of bed and headed to the bathroom where he'd left the bottle. He took a small sip before returning to David.

David leaned against the headboard, holding up the blankets for Bailey. He slipped under them and laid his hand on David's hip.

“You didn't tell your mother about being gay or anything like that?”

“No.” David shrugged. “I’m not sure how she would have handled it, except that she would have made me go talk to my father. Mother isn’t the most welcoming or warm person, so I don’t know how she would have reacted to the news. I wonder if Father will even tell her why I left.”

“What did you tell your father?”

Exhaling softly, David looked at Bailey. “I told him that I wanted to stay in the military, that I wasn’t interested in having a seat in Parliament, and I was definitely not interested in marrying a suitable woman.”

Bailey laughed. “I hope you don’t want a woman. I don’t share well.”

“Don’t worry, that’ll never happen. One thing I told my father was that I found the man I love and that he didn’t care that I was a lowly soldier.”

Bailey met David’s gaze with a hopeful spike in his heart. “Were you serious?”

David gripped Bailey’s hands and smiled. “Yes, I’m serious. I love you, and no matter what, I’m not walking away from you. I’m sorry I wouldn’t admit to it yesterday. I guess I needed to clear my head after everything that had happened.”

“I understand, but Mordred told me he didn’t mean anything by it. He just wanted us to be together like George and him. I think Mordred sees himself as a bit of a matchmaker.” Bailey frowned. “I thought he couldn’t do magic anymore. One of those conditions Gaia set for him when he turned his back on her.”

David grinned. “I can answer that question. An Unseelie named Seamus cast the spell.”

“What’s an Unseelie?”

“Don’t know.” David shrugged. “I didn’t ask and he didn’t explain, but it must have something to do with what Mordred was before he showed up on our side of the barrier. Seamus also explained some things to me about the spell he cast.”

Bailey leaned forward and kissed David. “I’ll thank Mordred the next time I see him and tell him to thank Seamus as well. I’m not sure I would have had the courage to approach you and risk my heart.”

“Without a little help, I probably would have continued to let my father run my life, which is foolish considering how old I am.”

Bailey slid under David's arm and rested his arm over David's waist. They snuggled closer together. "It's not foolish, really. Every man wants his father's approval. It just took you a little longer to figure out that you'd probably never get it, even if you did everything he wanted you to do. Sometimes love is conditional and we have to decide if we'll accept that or demand more."

"Is that what you did with your father?"

Shaking his head, Bailey thought about his dad. "No, I accepted what he was willing to give me and didn't ask for more. I had my mum and siblings. Their love was enough to make me a relatively normal person. Not that there is such a thing as 'normal.'"

"True." David nuzzled Bailey's cheek. "So what do you say? You willing to throw in with a soldier who won't ever be anyone important or powerful?"

Bailey tilted his head and smiled at David. "Are you willing to throw your lot in with a slightly damaged ex-soldier?"

"Ex?"

"Yes, I'm taking my medical discharge. Hugh already said that he has a job at the lab waiting for me." Bailey glanced at David. "He has a place for you as well, for when you want to leave the military."

David got a thoughtful expression on his face. "I still want to continue in the military for a while, but I'm glad to know Hugh has a place for you. At least you'll have friends around for those tours when I'm stationed somewhere else and you can't go with me."

Bailey relaxed, happiness swelling in him as he accepted the fact that David loved him and wanted them to be together for as long as life allowed them.

"No more fighting dragons, real or imagined," he murmured as David embraced him tighter. Their dragons had been slain, and it was time to build the life they wanted instead of the one they thought they'd be forced to accept.

 THE END 

## Loose Id Titles by T. A. Chase

*Dreaming of Dragons*

*Fighting Dragons*

*Ghost of a Chance*

*Here Be Dragons*



## T. A. Chase

I'm a day dreamer and a person who loves to wonder 'what if' all the time. That's how my stories have gotten started with that one little question. I'm intrigued by life and the world. The interactions of humans amaze me. The lengths we go to shut each other out, but also the pain we are willing to endure to love someone.

I live in the Midwest with my partner of nine years. We're doing our best to prove that couples like us can stay faithful and together forever if we so chose. We're owned by two slightly neurotic cats.

Visit me on the Web at <http://tachase.blogspot.com/>