

TERENCE could hear voices outside the tent, and see shadows moving against the canvas. It was an unusual occurrence: normally nobody dared come so close to Dion's quarters unless they were bringing a message or supplies. On those occasions, Terence made sure that all visitors were received and then dispatched as quickly as possible. Life at the garrison took more of a toll on Dion than most realised, and the petty disruptions brought by the delivery of inconsequential reports did nothing to help.

Deciding to intercept the loiterers before they could disturb his prince, Terence quietly slipped out of the tent, approached them with a hand on the hilt of his sword, and said sternly, "Gentlemen."

There were three of them, he now saw; barely of an age to have finished their training, and yet here they were in full uniform, minus the helmets, which most men tended to remove away from the field. He watched as the three of them exchanged a nervous glance and then dropped into a quick salute; there was one who looked vaguely familiar, perhaps the younger brother of a contemporary of his. Once they were looking up again, he nodded to acknowledge their deference, and said, "Are you expecting something?"

"Please, sir," said the boldest of the three, "we have a request. For His Highness."

"A *request*," Terence echoed sceptically. "His Highness is not a servant for you to command."

“It is merely a request,” the boy mumbled. “And – and a report, from our patrol of the perimeter.”

“Very well,” said Terence. “Proceed.”

“Sir,” said the boy, saluting quickly again. “While patrolling this afternoon, we encountered a young wyvern. If left to its own devices, it could enter the encampment by night and disturb the men. We thought it proper to report the matter.” His voice was light and breathy: Terence rather suspected he had memorised the little speech in advance.

“And you did not kill it?” he asked.

“We were going to, sir,” said one of the others. “But then we remembered, His Highness is supposed to be able to tame them, isn’t he? And the beastkeepers are always grumbling about losing their units when we have to go to the frontlines –”

Terence sighed. “I see. You thought His Highness would subdue this wyvern for you, that we might add it to our own forces. Do you even know its species? You must know our recruitment of beasts is limited to those races the beastmasters deem suitable for combat. And they do not often appreciate it when we dragoons attempt to interfere with their procedures.”

“But they would never refuse His Highness, sir,” said the first boy.

“I find it more to the point,” said Terence, “to consider that His Highness might refuse *you*.”

The young dragoons looked sullen; Terence was about to instruct them to go and dispatch the wyvern themselves and think more carefully before trying to bother the prince next time, but there was a rustle of canvas behind him, and a rather sleepy voice said, “Whom am I supposed to be refusing?”

“Your Highness!” the boys gasped, dropping into another salute with a much lower bow than before. Terence studied them: it was probably the first time the three of them had seen Dion at such close quarters.

“I shall apprise you of the matter inside, my lord,” said Terence, gesturing towards the tent before turning back to the boys and adding, “Wait here.”

The two of them went in; Terence carefully laced up the entrance of the tent to ensure nothing of the subsequent conversation would be heard from outside, and then turned to face Dion, who had taken a seat on one of the small stools with which the spacious quarters were furnished. Terence approached his prince, regarding Dion’s face carefully; it had been a full three days since their last skirmish, but the prince still seemed tired and slow. Battle was starting to exhaust him more than it had when they were younger, and Terence was starting to fear that before too long its damaging effects would be more permanent.

“Well?” said Dion.

“You should not concern yourself with it,” Terence said, forcing his worries aside. “They encountered a young wyvern

while on patrol, and they seem to have taken this ludicrous notion that you might be able to tame the creature and present it to the beastmasters as a new recruit. They are just boys – they’re clueless. I shall tell them to go back and kill the wyvern themselves, before it wanders into our camp and starts upsetting the men.”

“I see,” said Dion. “Although it would be a pity ...”

Terence folded his arms.

“The beastmasters are not my concern,” Dion went on. “But as for the rest – I should be glad to leave the garrison for a while for the sake of something other than my father’s orders. I daresay this would be an enjoyable outing.”

“You must rest, sire,” said Terence.

“Must I?” Dion replied. “But, dear Terence, resting is so tiresome. Wouldn’t you rather we did something interesting?”

There was a grin on Dion’s face that Terence knew well. It was the way Dion grinned when he had an idea for some activity that was not quite befitting of his station; and yet it was the privilege of Dion’s station that ensured he was always able to act on such thoughts.

“You know I cannot stop you,” said Terence.

Invigorated already, Dion bounded into a standing position and seized Terence by the shoulder. “You’ll like it,” he said. “I’m sure you will. We’ll ride out together and then we can pay a quick visit to this beast – it won’t take long at all. What say you?”

Terence would really have preferred Dion to continue resting – but the sight of his prince’s enthusiasm was impossible to resist, as always. “Of course,” he murmured, smiling back at him.

“My armour, then?” said Dion.

A few moments later, Dion was fully dressed for battle. Terence had fastened him into his armour so many times now that he could do it almost without thinking – or indeed, he would have been able to do so had the feeling of Dion’s body under his hands ever ceased to remind him of how great an honour it was to serve his prince, in this and so many other ways. Countless times Terence had performed this duty, and countless times he had felt his own heartbeat quicken as he gently arranged the gauntlets and pauldrons around Dion’s flesh, passing close to his face and feeling Dion’s warm, calm breath against his own.

“Done,” he breathed at last, raising a hand to disentangle Dion’s hair from his pauldron.

Dion let out a most unprincely snort, pressed his lips against Terence’s in a kiss so brief Terence swore he could almost have missed it, and then moved away to retrieve his lance.

They headed back outside. The three young dragoons were waiting there as commanded, and assumed another deep and uncoordinated bow upon catching sight of the prince; Dion surveyed them with a wry smile, and then said, “It is decided. Sir Terence and I shall deal with this wyvern. Fetch

your mounts – you are to lead us there.”

“Thank you, Your Highness,” they chorused, before dashing off.

Terence walked over to the stables himself with significantly more dignity, retrieving Dion’s chocobo and his own before returning to the place where his prince stood waiting. Soon, the others had returned too, and all five of them mounted the birds and made their way out of the encampment.

They followed the young men into the nearby forest. Terence couldn’t help stealing the occasional sidelong glance at Dion as he cantered by his side, bent low over the neck of his steed with a determined expression. It was clear that Dion was enjoying this chance to command his men away from the battlefield. Dion had never shied from giving orders, but had only ever shown concern for the fate of his dragoons; this type of low-stakes outing allowed him to assume his rightful authority while knowing nobody would be put in danger. It reminded Terence of the many times the two of them had gone hunting in their youth.

One of their companions tugged on his chocobo’s reins in front, and then turned to Dion and Terence behind him. “It was that way, Your Highness,” he said, indicating the direction. “By the thicket over there.”

“Very well,” said Dion, bringing his own mount to a stop and descending gracefully to earth. “Sir Terence and I shall go on from here. You three, stay here with the birds. Under-

stood?”

“Yes, sire,” they replied.

Terence slipped off his bird’s back too, handing its reins to one of the others; then he continued by Dion’s side, neither saying a word until they made their way to the indicated place.

“This way,” Dion murmured, veering to his right.

Terence had no such intuition, but accepted his prince’s word. Being the Dominant of Bahamut brought a kind of sixth sense for dragons, he had come to understand. While any man in the Sanbrequois army could slay or capture such a beast, if he was skilled enough, only Dion was possessed of the special talent that allowed him to communicate with them and, if the dragon was sufficiently young and suggestible, to subdue those not bred in captivity such that they might fight in the service of His Radiance. In his younger days, Dion had undertaken a tour of Sanbreque, visiting the woods and meadows and making the acquaintance of the smaller dragons and wyverns that resided in them. It had been during the time that Terence had more often than not found himself apart from his prince, not long after the two of them had completed their preliminary military training, but before Terence had gained the experience that had allowed him to ascend the ranks and assure his position by Dion’s side.

They walked on, twisting and turning and doubling back on themselves as Dion’s sense for the wyvern’s presence dictated, until eventually they came to a clearing, and Dion sud-

denly grabbed Terence's shoulder.

"Quiet," he hissed.

The two of them stood in silence for a moment, and then at last it appeared: a small, red wyvern that slowly extended its wings as it scurried around in the leaves on its two spindly legs.

"Oh," said Dion softly. "You're just a baby, aren't you?"

He walked a little further forward, his eyes narrowed, and then carefully bent and laid his lance down on the ground.

"Sheathe your sword, Terence," he commanded, not taking his eyes off the creature. "No, in fact – leave it there, beside my lance. And stay two paces behind me."

Terence did as he was told; he would have felt uneasy about the fact that both of them were now unarmed were it not for the fact that his trust in his prince was absolute. He watched as Dion bent low to the ground again and extended his arms carefully in the wyvern's direction.

"It's all right," said Dion.

The wyvern stilled; its wings fluttered a little; and then it began, slowly, to approach Dion's crouched form. But halfway there, it stopped and began to look around with sudden alertness, its small head darting in all directions.

Dion drew up slowly, concern gradually spreading across his face; then he said, "Oh."

"What?" said Terence, but before Dion could reply there was a rustling in the leaves around them. Suddenly, a much



larger wyvern appeared, each of its wings at least as long as Dion and Terence were tall. The smaller beast scuttled away; the larger one drew itself up to its full height, beating its wings so fiercely that Terence instinctively raised a hand to shield himself from the breeze.

“It’s the mother,” said Dion. “She’s too big to tame – we’ll have to –”

What they would have to do was clear enough despite the fact that the wyvern chose that moment to lunge forward, cutting off the end of Dion’s sentence. Terence took a few steps back, intending to run to the spot where they had both left their weapons, but the creature followed, drawing its body into a tight circle and slamming against him, knocking him off balance. He stumbled, falling awkwardly onto his back; as he did so, his foot caught in the root of a tree, and he was suddenly aware of sharp, stinging pain spreading from his ankle.

It overwhelmed him for a moment; there was nothing he could do but lie there on the ground and listen to his own voice crying out. Seconds later, he felt more present, but remained unable to move from his supine position, capable only of staring up at the wyvern in horror as it advanced towards him. Worse had happened on the battlefield before, but on those occasions he had always had his sword; this time he had nothing but desperation. He caught sight of Dion behind the wyvern’s tail, looking shocked and pale, and finally had the presence of mind to call out to him: “Fall back, my lord! Take your lance,

and call for backup!”

Dion, the fool, was shaking his head; he made no move to retreat, but merely watched the wyvern’s slow advance with an increasingly determined expression. Then, at last, he shouted, “Move aside! You will not hurt him!”

The wyvern hesitated a little at his words, but continued to focus on Terence, its tail flicking from one side to the other as it inched ever closer.

“Your lance, Dion,” Terence begged through gritted teeth, but Dion still made no attempt to turn away. Instead, Terence saw his fists clench in his gauntlets and his mouth curl into a snarl; he saw his eyes narrow as he lowered his head; and then, just as he understood what was about to happen, the space behind the wyvern burst into blinding light.

A few seconds later, Terence’s eyes adjusted. There was Dion, no longer standing but *floating*, held aloft by two enormous wings; he shielded Terence’s eyes from the light, and yet at the same time he *was* the light, illuminating every leaf and tree around him. Gold streaks ran across deep turquoise skin, mapping every one of Dion’s veins, and his unblinking eyes shone with the same vicious gold, a mesmerising and awful beauty.

Terence had seen this a few times before, but rarely; Dion was skilled enough with his lance not to have great need of the extra power that semi-priming afforded him in battle. And on none of those few occasions had Dion assumed this form

for Terence's sake. The realisation that Dion was doing this to protect him made Terence's heart flutter; he felt his jaw go slack as he watched, overwhelmed by a deep adoration for his prince that made the pain in his ankle almost unnoticeable.

"Move aside!" Dion bellowed again; it was no longer solely his own voice that spoke, but one imbued with something inhuman, as if Bahamut himself was speaking within him. With that, finally, the wyvern took notice, and lumbered away from Terence in Dion's direction.

They circled each other, two deadly beasts, each intent on destroying its foe. The wyvern swiped at Dion from all directions; he dashed this way and that to avoid the blows, sending balls of white light forth from his hands to graze the wyvern's scales. Both were snarling at each other in a show of intimidation, wings and tails twitching as they sought to land each hit, focused only on the need to destroy. And then, at last, Dion drew his head back, and brought his arms across his chest; he let out a terrible yell, and a pillar of light burst forth from his body, striking the wyvern with such force that it could do nothing but shriek, its voice joining Dion's in an unearthly cacophony.

The light faded; the wyvern convulsed one last time, and then slumped onto the ground, motionless – dead. Dion's wings drooped, and then receded entirely, and suddenly, he was a man again, bent over with his hands on his knees, shaking with exhaustion; but then, abruptly, he drew himself

up and hurried towards where Terence lay.

“Terence,” he said hoarsely when he drew close. “Are you all right? Can you stand?”

“I’m not sure,” Terence admitted, seizing Dion’s outstretched hand and attempting to pull himself up. For a moment, it seemed as if he would be successful, but as soon as he tried putting weight on his injured ankle, an eruption of new pain forced him to the ground again with an agonised gasp.

Dion hesitated for a second, before crouching down and taking hold of Terence with both hands; Terence found himself borne gradually upwards, pressed close against Dion’s chest. Dion was holding him firmly in his arms, one supporting his knees and the other at his back; Terence reached out instinctively to cling to Dion’s shoulder.

“I’m sure I’m heavier than you are,” he murmured. “This can’t be –”

“I have Bahamut’s strength,” said Dion. Pressed against him, Terence could feel his voice almost as much as hear it, a calming rumble in his chest. He leant in, letting his head rest against the mail that covered his prince’s body.

“Are you sure?” he asked.

“Of course,” said Dion, who was starting to walk back towards where they had left their escorts. With each of his steps, Terence felt a small tremor, an echo of the impact his prince’s

feet made against the ground; yet nothing about this journey felt unstable. He knew he was completely safe in Dion's arms.

After some walking, they came close to the place where the dragoons were waiting. Terence could see them hesitating, faced with the strange sight of the prince carrying the man who was supposed to guard him; the three had a brief, urgent conversation, and then the most well-built of them surged forward.

"Your Highness," he said, performing a brief salute and then reaching out as if to take Terence from Dion's arms. "May I –"

"Does it look as if I need help?" said Dion coldly.

The young man stepped back quickly. "Forgive me, Your Highness."

"Our weapons are yet in the place where we did battle," Dion went on. "You will fetch them for us."

"Right away, sire," the dragoon stammered, before sprinting off.

Dion continued to where the chocobos stood, depositing Terence carefully onto his bird's back; Terence gradually arranged himself into a more dignified position, expecting Dion to head in the direction of his own steed, but instead Dion mounted the same bird, slipping into the space in front of Terence and taking hold of the reins himself before Terence managed to reach for them.

“I can ride on my own,” Terence murmured, his mouth close to Dion’s ear. “There is nothing about this injury that would impede my ability to –”

Dion turned to face him briefly, and said, “Quiet.”

They began riding back to camp, accompanied by just one of the boys; the other was to wait with the three remaining chocobos until his comrade had retrieved Dion and Terence’s weapons. As the birds picked up speed, Terence found himself clinging to Dion’s waist, resting his head against Dion’s neck; the feeling of having Dion so close brought him some relief from the ongoing pain in his ankle, and he wondered whether that was why Dion had insisted that they ride together.

Arriving back at the garrison, Dion dismounted the chocobo and then helped Terence down, taking him in his arms again with gentle strength. “The physickers’ tent will be too crowded,” he informed the boy who had accompanied them. “Bid one of them come to my quarters.”

“At once, Your Highness,” said the dragoon, before dashing off.

Dion carried Terence into his tent and straight to the bed that they had so often shared, letting him down slowly so that he lay on top of the blanket. Without pausing, he turned to remove his own armour, tugging off the gauntlets and pauldrons and then impatiently reaching behind himself to unlace each fastening until he stood there in only the clothes he wore underneath. The physicker he had requested still hadn’t ar-

rived, and while Dion had many virtues, patience was rarely one of them. He had begun to pace back and forth in front of the tent entrance, frowning so intently that Terence was beginning to wonder whether there was a chance he might semi-prime again.

A shadow drew up on the canvas, and Dion hastened to meet the visitor, but it was the young dragoon he had sent to collect the weapons. "Thank you," he said, practically snatching them from the boy's grip. "Dismissed."

He set the lance and sword carefully in a corner, stepped back, and stood very still for a moment; then he let out a loud grunt of frustration and suddenly marched out of the tent. Terence watched, wishing he had thought to call him back before it was too late; but his ankle was now hurting so much as to render him incapable of thinking anything particularly insightful.

Not long afterwards, Dion returned, accompanied by a small grey-haired man Terence recognised as the dragoons' principal physicker. "Once again," he was saying, "I'm terribly sorry, Your Highness. If I had known the order came from you, I would have sent one of our men straight away –"

"Enough," said Dion, gesturing in Terence's direction with an arm that was not entirely steady. "He's there. See to him."

"At once, Your Highness," said the physicker, drawing close to Terence's side and setting down the medicine chest he carried. Despite being the target of Dion's wrath, years of expe-

rience had given him an unremittingly pleasant bedside manner, and he carefully removed the relevant piece of Terence's armour before inspecting the injury, gently turning the ankle in his hands and asking Terence to describe how it felt.

"It's a sprain," he concluded, once he had used a crystal to chill the injury and covered it with a snug bandage. "Nothing too worrisome – you'll be on your feet again in a day or two, sir. Now, if I may boil a little water, I can make you some tea that will help dull the pain."

"The pot's over there," said Terence, pointing; "thank you."

The physicker took his fire crystal and headed to the place, warming the mechanism that let the water heat evenly; while it was preparing, he fetched a little pot of dark herbs and sprinkled a portion into one of the cups. After that, he stole a glance at Dion and said, in a tone of slight apprehension, "Perhaps Your Highness would also like some tea. It's very good for calming the nerves."

"That won't be necessary," said Dion, who had positioned himself such that he was facing into one of the corners of the tent.

"Dion," said Terence; then he remembered they were in company, and added, "Sire. I believe it may be a good idea ..."

Dion turned to look at him, then quickly moved his head away again, and said, "Very well."

The man poured the tea, leaving Dion's cup on the table and handing the second one to Terence, who awkwardly drew



himself into a sitting position and did his best to offer a grateful smile. It did nothing to diffuse the tension in the atmosphere; fortunately, the physicker seemed to understand it was best to leave, and packed up his things with a few brief words of advice to Terence about how best to manage his recovery before making his way out with surprising speed.

“Drink your tea, my prince,” Terence murmured once he was gone.

Dion made no reaction for a moment, and then stalked over to the table and drained the cup in one swig. He set it down carefully, threw his head back, sighed deeply, plunged his head forward again; everything he did made it quite clear that he was troubled. At any other time, Terence would have stood and approached his prince; he would have let Dion take his hands and draw him into whatever sort of embrace might put his mind at rest, and pushed soothing breath against Dion’s mouth; but now, he could only lie where he was, hoping Dion might be the one to come to his side instead.

Fortunately, Dion did. In silence, he drew close to the bed, his eyes downcast as he stopped where Terence lay. “Does it hurt terribly?” he murmured.

“I have known worse in battle,” Terence reminded him.

“But,” said Dion, a little more loudly, “in battle, yes, but – Terence, this was my fault. I ordered you to cast your sword aside; I left you defenceless. Had I thought for but a second, I should have realised how utterly foolish I was.”

“You had also left your lance,” said Terence.

“Yes,” said Dion, “and I am a Dominant. And you are a *man*, Terence, merely a man; and you were thrown into an ambush, with nothing to protect you, by my hand –”

“And we had no idea that creature was nearby,” Terence interrupted him. He drew forward, grabbing Dion’s wrist before he went on: “Dion, I hold you in no way responsible. Please do not believe it was your order that caused this. If I had been quicker, or if I had not fallen, I might have managed to retrieve my sword.”

“So you blame yourself?” said Dion. “Is that why you bade me turn away to fetch my lance and leave you to be mauled by the beast?”

“That was not why,” said Terence firmly. “I do not blame anyone – neither of us knew we were about to be surprised. It was the result of unfortunate circumstances alone. I asked you to save yourself because I am under the same oath as any member of your guard – the oath we swore to protect your life above all others. I made that promise willingly.”

“You would die for me,” said Dion quietly.

“Of course,” Terence replied without hesitation. “That is my sworn duty.”

“And yet ...” said Dion, not looking at him. “And yet, if you were to die, I should wish for my own life to end.”

Terence reached out to take hold of Dion’s other hand. “My prince,” he said.

“Which means,” Dion continued, “that your life is at least as important as my own. Heresy, I am sure, but the evidence is irrefutable.”

The thought occurred to Terence that he would be quite content to keep holding Dion by the hands like this forever. He tugged at them a little, and Dion seemed to understand; he let his knees bend slowly until they were resting on the bed and his face was close enough for Terence to kiss. Terence did so, stretching up to meet Dion’s lips with his own, taking hold of the back of his head with both hands.

“Please do not think you endangered my safety,” Terence said, glad that Dion now seemed less worried and brittle than he had when they first returned to the tent. “On the contrary: you did much to protect me. You transformed for me, and –” He thought back to the sight of Dion in semi-primed form, for his sake, and said, “You were magnificent.”

The corner of Dion’s mouth twitched into a smile. “Truly?” he whispered.

“My prince,” said Terence, “truly. I adore you.”

Dion initiated the kiss now, long and slow and luxurious; Terence let himself be pushed back until he was lying horizontally again with Dion over him, his hot, sweet breath tickling Terence’s face.

Terence caressed his prince’s cheek for a few seconds, and then said, “I believe I shall need help removing my armour.”

“Of course,” said Dion, drawing back and smirking. “Shall

I send for a valet, then? Or perhaps he would take as long to arrive as our physicker did.”

“Most inefficient,” said Terence. “I shall have to beg your aid, Your Highness.”

Dion chuckled. “Then you are fortunate that I find myself willing.”

Terence lay still as Dion began to see to him, unstrapping each of the plates and laying them carefully aside; after a few moments, he reached out to help with one of the smaller pieces, but found Dion’s hand closing over his own.

“Be mindful of your injury, Sir Terence,” said Dion. “Please do not trouble yourself.”

“As you command, sire,” said Terence.

He watched while Dion continued his work, taking in the sight of his prince as he assumed the familiar expressions that indicated he was giving something his full concentration. The way his eyes narrowed slightly, his eyebrows arched a little more than usual, his lips drew together: Terence had seen these things so many times that he could predict each one to the smallest detail. And yet the sight of Dion remained the loveliest thing he had ever seen. He would never cease to find this vision entirely perfect.

His armour was all removed, now; he was lying on the bed in nothing but his clothes. Dion bent to add the last piece of Terence’s armour to the neat pile he had made on the floor, and then turned towards him again, and began to unbuckle his belt.

“Ah,” said Terence. “I see.”

“It appears you are fortunate,” said Dion. “Most men would not have such an attentive valet.” He drew Terence’s belt off in one long motion and dropped it to the ground.

Terence blinked: that one simple statement was somehow impossibly arousing. “Well,” he said, finding himself a little breathless, “I must thank my valet for his scrupulous service. Although – is it not a knight’s duty to demonstrate to his attendants the proper methods of serving one’s liege lord?”

“By all means,” Dion purred. “I am most eager to learn from you.”

Terence reached for his prince with both arms – this time, Dion did nothing to stop him – and then, keeping his gaze fixed on Dion’s face, he removed his belt in turn before reaching up to his doublet and undoing each buckle. Once all of them were unfastened, he peeled the doublet back over Dion’s shoulders, caressing the lovely skin that revealed itself beneath.

“Like that,” he whispered, “my prince.”

“I see,” said Dion, reaching forward to do the same.

Soon, they were both naked apart from Terence’s breeches: it took a little more care to pull the fabric over his bandaged ankle, and he couldn’t help hissing at the renewed pain. Dion had clearly been doing his best to perform the task as gently as possible, but at the sound of Terence’s gasp, he froze in place.

“I’m sorry, Terence,” he said, abandoning the ankle and surging up towards Terence’s face to kiss him again. “I did

not mean to hurt you, my love.”

“It’s all right,” Terence murmured as soon as there was enough space between his and Dion’s lips for him to do so. He wound his fingers through his prince’s hair, and said, “Finish it – please.” It was better to get through it, surely, and to reach the sweet relief of having Dion’s nude body pressed against his own: that would be a cure for even the greatest of agonies.

Once his breeches were off with minimal extra fuss, the two of them fell into the patterns they knew so well, modified slightly by Terence’s injury. Mindful of the need not to move his leg too much, he let Dion lead; Dion traversed Terence’s body, scattering kisses across his chest before reaching up to his face and down to his cock at once, drowning Terence’s emergent whimpers of pleasure with his mouth as he used a hand to pleasure him in just the way Terence liked it, firm and fast. Terence reached for Dion in turn, feeling him grow hard under his touch.

“Let me take you,” he gasped out between kisses. “Please, Dion, please.”

“But –” said Dion, “I do not wish – your foot –”

In his excitement, he elongated the *f* sound of *foot*, huffing hot breath against Terence’s face. Terence almost laughed aloud in delight; after so long, it was still such a joy to see how he could give his prince such pleasure. Dion’s duties were more of a burden than any man in Sanbreque knew, and Terence was only glad that he could play some part in letting him

leave them aside, if only fleetingly.

“He said it would help if I raised it,” Terence said; then, to demonstrate, he lifted his injured leg with a slight grimace and placed it against Dion’s back.

“Good Greagor, Terence,” Dion stuttered, now wedged firmly against Terence by the weight of the leg. “Are you sure? Please don’t make me hurt you –”

“Fetch the oil,” said Terence.

Dion pressed a swift, rather off-target kiss to the edge of Terence’s mouth, before slipping out from under the leg with the utmost care and ducking under the bed to retrieve the small bowl of oil he kept there for these moments. There had been an occasion, Terence recalled, when he had been present while the tent was being cleaned; the manservant doing the job had found the oil and held it in his hand with a somewhat puzzled expression. Dion, the rogue, had told him entirely straight-faced that he kept the oil there so as to better administer the Greagorian rites. If the man had been told the truth, he would no doubt have been shocked and embarrassed; but there was nothing shameful about being what they were, two young, healthy men in love. This was what happened, sometimes, when they found themselves alone in Dion’s quarters: some innocuous remark would result in both finding they were suddenly in possession of the urgent need to take each other’s clothes off.

Dion returned to the bed, smothering his hands in the oil;

Terence reached for it as well, daubing it onto Dion's hard cock in the way they had done to each other so many times before. Now he hooked not one but both legs over Dion's back, and Dion was thrust forward against him before Terence felt slick fingers against his hole, spreading the oil over it, pushing in a little here and there. It was impossible to stay still, and elevating the ankle hadn't seemed to prevent fresh pain slamming through it with each tiny move, but Terence ignored the feeling and focused on the pleasure Dion was giving him instead.

"Inside," he growled. "Please – need you."

Dion brought his face to Terence's, kissing him hard; at the same time he pushed Terence's hand away from his cock, and moments later Terence felt Dion against his entrance, warm and eager. Then he was inside; Terence could feel Dion filling him, just as it was meant to be, each thrust bringing Dion closer to the spot. A few more moments of exquisite back and forth, and then, finally, Dion was all the way in. The contact made Terence quiver suddenly, violently; his legs shook against Dion's back, his ankle felt as if it was on fire, but even that sensation was nothing in comparison to the delight that now filled his whole body. Dion was moving inside him, back and forth with increasing fervour, and each motion sent another ripple of joy through Terence, igniting him from his centre to his fingers and toes.

"Fuck," he gasped, "Dion –"

Dion silenced him with a kiss, hot, flushed cheeks press-



ing against Terence's face. He could tell Dion was close from the way he shook against him, the way his beautiful eyelashes drew erratically over his eyes. Terence redoubled his efforts at his own cock, stroking it more vigorously where it was wedged between their bellies; he wanted the two of them to come in tandem. Nothing could be more sublime.

With a delicious moan, Dion let himself release, and the sensation was enough to push Terence over the edge; he let himself go, clutching a fistful of Dion's lovely hair as he felt it overwhelm him. For a few seconds, there was nothing but wonderful, white-hot bliss; Terence was vaguely aware of his own shaking whine of pleasure; and then, as he gradually regained his senses with the accompaniment of a few more delightful ripples through his body, he found himself thinking that such climaxes were not altogether different from the sight of Bahamut's light.

They were still now. Terence's legs were back on the bed, and Dion had withdrawn from inside him; eventually, they shuffled a little so as to lie more comfortably in each other's arms. Dion was once again taking care not to disturb Terence's ankle; he carefully rolled to the side, letting their bellies inch apart where the stickiness of Terence's come had begun to bind them together. He raised a hand to Terence's head, caressing his hair with impossible gentleness.

"In Greagor's name, Terence," he murmured, "you are divine."

“Heresy again, my prince,” Terence replied.

Dion smiled, so softly and beautifully that Terence felt a twinge in his chest. He closed his eyes, and was silent for a while; then, eventually, he looked back at Terence, and said, “You cannot convince me that was good for your injury.”

“Perhaps not,” said Terence, “but it was worth it.” The pain had worsened again, it was true; but maybe that was merely the result of the medicinal tea’s effects wearing off.

They lay still, and then found each other’s lips again, kissing gently and sleepily this time. Dion yawned, loudly and at great length; “Forgive me,” he said. “I am exhausted.”

“You were exhausted even before we rode out,” Terence reminded him.

“I cannot deny it,” Dion replied. “At the time, though, the prospect of resting another day did not seem especially appealing. But now ...” He leant forward to kiss Terence again, and then added, “How long did the physicker say you should stay abed? Two days?”

“One or two,” Terence confirmed. “So you will take my advice, for once, and rest when you need it?”

“To think,” said Dion, “all those times you took such great trouble to insist I look after myself, and all you needed do was lie in my bed and invite me in –”

“You *scoundrel*,” said Terence, grinning. “Had I not duties of my own, I should have employed that technique long since.”

Dion ran a finger lazily through Terence's hair and smiled, but said no more. Terence watched as his prince's eyes slowly closed again; soon enough, his deep and even breaths made it clear that he was asleep. With that, Terence could allow himself to sleep too; he moved against Dion's cheek to kiss it once more, shuffled a little in his arms, and then finally succumbed to peaceful, untroubled slumber.