

Chilly Mourning

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The spring storm raced along the blue sky, seeding it with dark clouds that flashed with barely contained lightning. A wind began to pick up, starting with a whisper of sound and growing until it howled in the trees, bringing the smell of rain into the air. The rain itself followed a few breaths behind, one moment it was humid, the next huge sheets of water slashed at the ground.

On a hill, near the edge of a farm, a single man stood, his head bowed. A large man, Garvin was dwarfed by nature as he rubbed his hands together. His short-cut hair was a dark stain on his skull, made darker by the rain that poured down his face and mixed with his tears.

Slowly, his knees buckled underneath him and he slammed into the ground, his impact unfelt in a roll of thunder. Below him, the fresh dirt of a grave seemed to haunt him. At one end, a simple stone stuck out of the mud; only one word was written on it: "Cleoria."

A sob caught in his throat as he plunged his fingers into the slick mud and curled them into fists. He made no effort to pull them out, but his shoulders shook with the force of his cries, lost in the noise of the storm.

For a long time he cried, alone, with his fingers curling in the mud.

Then movement from the edge of the hill barely caught his attention, a man. Blond hair plastered down, showing off the streaks of white; even though the man was ten winters younger, he still had the white of an ancient man, just not the body. The man's lips moved silently before he let his head drop over his wife's grave.

From the side of his vision, he watched as his friend of many years began to hike up the hill with obvious effort.

“Whew. Maybe I should come up here more?”

The larger man threw his friend a dark look before staring back at the stone marker of the grave. The blond waited for a moment, then walked around him to another marker right next to the first. On it was a small inscription: “Ignis, Wife of Matthew, Bitter Old Hag and Best Friend.”

Matthew’s eyes grew softer for a moment as he traced his finger along the inscription, “Thought I would find you up here, Garvin.”

Blinking away the rain from his eyes, the dark haired man looked up with another glare. His brown eyes flashed with the lightning above, but Matthew didn’t seem to notice. There was a hallow cheer to him, a false effort both of them knew was a strain on the blond man.

Slowly, Garvin pulled his fingers from the mud and stared at them. The rain slashed down hard on them, quickly washing away the mud until it fell in brown-colored drops back into his wife’s grave.

His voice was harsh and broken, almost a whisper of stone grating, “She’s gone.”

Matthew nodded, the fake smile on his face dropping quickly, “I know. I miss her as much as my Iggie.”

Garvin looked up, anguish and frustration visible on his face through the flashes of lightning, “I hated her so much, Matt, the screams, the yells, even stabbing me during a fight. But, why do I miss her so much!?”

His voice was growing louder as rage began to color his voice. Matthew held his ground, though his eyes widened. When the large man surged to his feet, Matthew tried to step back, but the edge of the grave caught his foot and he began to fall.

Hands snapping out, Garvin easily caught him in mid-fall by the front of his shirt. Powerful muscles flexed and the larger man yanked Matthew to him, “WHY DO I MISS HER!?”

Matthew, only particularly concerned for his well-being, blinked and looked up with clear brown eyes, “Because you loved her. Even through the fights and the bitching, you still loved the old bitch with all of your heart.”

Emotions began to storm in Garvin's face for a moment before he threw Matthew down. The slender blond caught himself and stood up, ready to defend himself but Garvin was staring down at his wife's grave, tears running down his face.

Hesitantly, Matthew stepped up next to Garvin, his shoulder brushing against the larger man's. Next to each other, Matthew was a few hands shorter than Garvin, but the height seemed magnified as they stared down at the grave.

"You loved the old woman, Garvin, but she and Iggie were always on the mean side. There... there are no words to say but maybe we both need to move on."

A slight surprise rippled through Garvin and he looked over at his friend. Matthew was smiling at him, though it was a thin almost scared smile. The blond shrugged, "Maybe I've been stuck in my house too long, but I think it's time I left Iggie alone. She's got company now, your Cleo, and I'm sure they'll be bitching about us until we join them in the grave."

A faint chuckle brought a smile to Garvin's face. The dark haired man nodded once and turned away. Matthew patted him on the shoulder as he turned himself, away from the two graves, "Come, let's get a drink on me."

Spring had taken over the small village of Harasburgh, filling it the brilliant greens and blues. The sounds of birds, even near the end of the day, was a chorus that echoed off stone walls and down the dirt-filled road. The setting sun, a bare whisper of color splashed against the horizon, cast the entire village into a reddish glow.

Some of the villagers were cheerfully moving around the square, with the four buildings surrounding it on all edges. To the north was the town hall and makeshift inn. The general store was to the east, it doubled as the tavern during celebrations. To the south, an old barn with the common property and to the west a shrine to the village spirit, Old Man Haras.

The noises that filled the square were bright and cheerful, from people who knew each other their entire lives. Many of the sentences were left unfinished, their listeners already knew how they ended. Jokes, innuendos, and cheer bounced back and forth, uncaring of the world outside of Harasburgh.

But, when two figures started to enter the square, the cheer and joy quickly faded away. Garvin and Matthew were walking through town, close but not touching. Their steps seemed in sync as they moved quickly forward, both of them ignoring the stony silence that followed them like a dark cloud.

One of the old ladies, almost reaching her century, glared at them and spat on the ground in front of Matthew. The blond gave her a smile and bowed slightly before stepping around the saliva and bounding up the stairs to the general store.

Pulling out a key from a leather pouch around his neck, Matthew fitted it in the hole and unlocked the door. He opened the door enough for Garvin to step through before turning to face the sullen mob around him.

“The general store is open for those of you who need it.”

Silence answered him back. Silence and glares.

With a flourish, he bowed again and stepped inside, leaving the door open. Garvin was already sitting on his chair, a wooden monstrosity full of burns, nicks, and the occasional food stain. His feet was resting on the front counter of the cozy store, one of his fingers in his mouth as he chewed on a nail.

“They don’t trust us, Matt.”

The blond looked up at the noise, thought for a moment, and nodded, “Nope. They be thinking things that aren’t happening, and assuming they are right.”

His smile sparkled for a moment before he continued, “Besides, why do you care? Before...” his voice trailed off for a moment before he changed sentences, “You never came into town much, why do you care what they think? You pay taxes and tend to your fields, just like all the other farmers here.”

Resentment began to grow in the large man, “Yeah, but I still have to sell it to the co-op, to bring it into town.”

Matthew smiled and patted his friend on the knee, “Don’t worry, I’ll make sure you don’t get the wrong end of the deal.”

Garvin felt suddenly uncomfortable and pulled his leg back, setting it on the ground. He finished the one nail and started on the other, cleaning it with his teeth. Matthew smiled briefly then slid behind the counter, his fingers deftly pulling up some papers.

Neither man said anything for a while until Garvin finally cleaned his nails and rested his hands on his lap. His dark eyes scanned the general store, admiring the sense of pattern from Matthew's organization.

"So, are you going to the spring festival?"

Garvin's voice was filled with hope for a conversation, an uncomfortable silence somehow bothering him. Matthew looked up from his papers and shook his head.

"No, I wasn't planning on going. It was the festival I met my Iggy and... I don't think I can do it."

Despair crashed into Garvin and he slumped back down on the chair, his head resting on his chest. His right hand shook slightly as he smoothed over his pants, ignoring the mud that shifted to the ground. A single tear formed on his eye, but refused to slide down as his breath grew slowly ragged.

Matthew watched for a moment, his eyes growing misty with his own memories. Garvin knew that every night, when the blond headed home, he was expecting to hear Iggy scream at him for hours; he knew he was still waiting to hear Cleo's shrill scream when he was working on the back fields.

With a sniff, Garvin brought his thoughts under control and looked up, his hands trembling more with the effort to contain his emotions. Matthew and him stared at each other for a moment, then both nodded with an understanding.

A bell on the front door caused both men to jump as a young boy, about eight winters, bounced in with wide eyes. In his hand was a small bag of coins. Without hesitating, the child ran for the small, glass-fronted counter with candies and sweets; the boy's voice was so high-pitched and fast that Garvin could only hear noise, but Matthew didn't have a problem as he helped the boy find some candies and collected the money. As fast as he entered, the boy ran out of the store, screaming happily at the top of his lungs.

Garvin chuckled as Matthew walked around the counter to pick up a broom and begin sweeping.

"I don't know how you do it."

"The children? Easy. Listen to what they ask for and give them something they want in return."

Talking stopped for a moment as Garvin watched Matthew sweep for a few moments. The soft swishing noise of the broom seemed relaxing as he struggled with his thoughts. Finally, he spoke up softly, "Me and Cleo never managed to have one."

Matthew stopped sweeping and leaned on the broom, watching Garvin. The older man looked down at his hands, "We kept trying, but she never got one. I think it hurt her."

"Me either. Never wanted one much, just..." the blond thought for a moment, "Never knew what I wanted. It wasn't the road, I've traveled enough during my trader days, but it wasn't the home either. The thought of coming home to Iggy was reason enough to stay on the road."

Garvin chuckled and Matthew continued, "After she... she died, I found that I wanted to stay here and take care of the store. It was easier, I think."

"Yeah," the older man's sigh almost hung in the air as he looked around, a troubled look in his eyes.

Matthew started to sweep again, "Take it easy for a while, I need to stay open until dark tonight, then we'll find something to do away from the festival."

Garvin's eyes thanked him, but he couldn't find the words to actually say it. Matthew nodded slightly and returned to his sweeping, his body moving in long, smooth movements of someone who's done it his entire life.

Summer came and past Harasburgh in a swirl of work and sweat. Matthew spent his time in town, at the store as traders began to filter through. He worked long hours and didn't have much time to make the trek up to Garvin's house. The rumors faded in town, Garvin guessed, but he never heard what they were in the first place.

Every night, he found himself coming home to an empty house, dark and brooding. His dinners became simpler until he was just eating a few vegetable every night before sleeping on the couch.

His bed, the one he shared with his wife, was empty. Dust gathered on the comforter and he barely stumbled up the stairs to look at it. He found life easier if he just threw his clothes in a basket near the door and never went beyond the kitchen, living room, and the front door.

Life grew into a solid pattern. He rested one day in ten, but never bothered going into town. Instead, he found himself straining to sleep as long as he could, to make time past until he could return to work. On occasion, he would make the hike up to Cleo's grave, but when he got there, he couldn't find any words to say. With tears in his eyes, he turned around every time and went back down in silence.

Garvin found work becoming his obsession. He woke up every morning in a gray mood, looking forward to each blister and ache and dreading when the sun drew down far enough until he could no longer see in front of him. Sometimes, on the bad nights, he would continue to trim, weed, and cut until darkness forced him to stop. There was a furtive quality to his life, but he couldn't find the energy to change, just to continue.

It was winter, beyond any doubt. Wind howled at the windows to Garvin's house, pounding to be let in with a ferocity that would have scared Cleo, if she was still alive.

Instead, it was just another cold night. Garvin sat in front of the fire, barely a meter away and he tried to warm his hands over the flickering flame. Many times, he found himself starting at the flames, unwilling to move or even eat. His face was gaunt with almost paper-thin skin stretched out over his bones. Dark shadows hung under his eyes and his joints ached with every howl of wind outside his house.

When he shifted, a faint groan of pain escaped his throat, but he was no longer aware of it. His eyes, once a dark brown, were now pale in color, almost white.

Garvin sighed as he stared at the flames, his hands moving closer to the dying flames. One hand reached out to an empty tray and scraped along the bottom. His eyes, moving with pained slowness, trailed over. His fingers curled up and he drew his hand back, but took no effort to do anything about the lack of warmth.

His breath fogged in front of him as the flames began to turn blue; after a few moments the last of the flames blew out and the room was plunged in darkness.

Garvin didn't move.

His mind barely shifted, he became aware of the growing cold but couldn't find the energy to do anything. His thoughts focused briefly

on his dead wife, but those memories were already fading. Feeling that something was wrong, he focused on other memories, trying to find the energy to wake up, to move.

Even though he strained to find something, he couldn't find any happy memory of his wife and Cleo. He went through every memory left, every shrill scream and disgusted shiver he felt when he crawled into bed. Even the anger he used to feel was gone.

There was nothing.

Part of him started to panic in the dark, his hands shaking too much to do anything. The wind howling outside scared him, a terror that had no logic left to it but he couldn't find the energy to move.

Frantically, he thought about more memories, letting his mind drift toward the images of Matthew. Suddenly, he felt a spark of something, a desire to continue. His thoughts focused on his friend of many years. The image of Matthew's face was somehow burning into his mind, sending waves of heat that somehow was bringing him closer to moving from the lethargy that consumed him.

Garvin focused on Matthew's image, the blond hair streaked with white to the soft hands that always brushed lightly against his shoulder or leg. Garvin always felt uncomfortable at the touch, but there was something about it that brought a flush to his cheek. With a gasp, he pushed one foot out against the warm stone of the fireplace; pins and needles began to sparkle along his nerves, but he was focusing hard on Matthew's image, trying to bring life to a body that he no longer remembered.

Flashes of memories continued to move him, Matthew's touch and smile. A brief burst of memory, when one time he and Matthew decided to streak naked in the middle of a ritual, brought a smile to his face; his face ached from muscles he hadn't used in a long time, but he found a desire to keep smiling.

The images focused on Matthew, the naked ass running in front of him, the look of Cleo and Ignis and their utter horror. The shrills of laughter and choking of the town villagers as they ran. Cleo screamed at him for days, but it never removed the smile from his face.

It was fun.

And it was letting him break through the lethargy that was destroying his life.

Garvin focused on the memories of his friend until they burned brightly in his mind, forcing his body to follow until he manage to crawl to his feet and then pull himself up on his feet. His entire body shook with the effort and his entire body tingled painful from the movement, but at least he was moving.

He took one unsteady step toward couch, then another. His fingers reached out for the blanket. Finding it, he wrapped it around him to warm himself. In the morning, he would cut some wood and get on his with his life.

In his mind, he vowed to never let the lethargy consume him again.

Winter had darkened over Harasburgh, but Garvin's life was brighter. He hummed quietly to himself as he hauled a huge pile of wood up to the back door and toed it open with one boot. As the door swung open, he manage to push himself into the room and drop the pile of wood next to the fireplace.

The walls were clean, but the gray of winter still flooded the room. He brushed the last of the melting snow out of his short hair and looked around, as if trying to find something he forgotten. With a sigh, he stomped back to the door and started to close it.

A flash of gold caught his eye and he peered out over the snow-covered floor. In the distance, at the edge of the trees, he saw the movement again, the winter sun sparkling on something gold or blond.

Frowning slightly, he stepped outside and closed the door behind him. His boots crunched in the snow as he trudged toward the gold flashes, his breath fogging heavily in the still winter day. In the back of his mind, he kept thinking it was Matthew's hair he saw, even though there was no reason for the trader to be out in the fields, but it kept flashing through his mind.

As he got closer, he began to worry. The gold was no longer visible, but he still felt a need to explore it. His hand gripped tightly on his gloves as he used a tree to pull himself out of a furrow in the field. The snow was up to his knees, but his legs easily plowed through the heavy snow as if it wasn't there.

As he got closer, the frown on his face deepened. The faint smell of alcohol drifted in the air, close but not close enough to identify. A faint smell of something else drifted in the air, but no matter how

he strained, he couldn't identify it. Garvin moved faster, shoving through the snow as he scanned the white for any break.

Despite his efforts, he found Matthew by stumbling over him. As the snow rushed up to meet him, he saw a flash of blond and blood. Before he stopped moving, he surged to his feet, grabbing hold of one branch as he yanked himself up.

"Matthew!"

Spinning around, he saw his friend sprawled out on the ground, face down. Around both of his hands, the snow was red from blood and wine; a broken wine bottle was shattered against a rock next to him. What surprised Garvin more was Matthew's lack of clothes. The blond man was stripped down to his trousers and boots. Garvin felt a surge of sorrow and concern slam into him as tears began to form in his eyes.

Crouching down, Garvin picked up one of Matthew's hands and inspected the shallow cuts. None of them were deep, only bloody. Relieved, Garvin worked the fastenings of his coat and removed it. Wrapping it around Matthew, managed to push his hands into the snow under his friend and picked him up. Grunting from the effort, Garvin lifted his friend higher and held him closer, shivering as the cold began to seep through his shirt.

With some effort, Garvin hoisted his friend on his shoulder, looking around for Matthew's clothes. Not seeing them, he sighed deeply and began to the long trek back to his house.

It seemed to take forever as Garvin stumbled through his field, shielding Matthew's body from the wind as he trudged through the thick snow. Without his jacket, the wind's bite easily cut through his shirt, chilling him to the bone. But, a frantic need to save his friend gave him the energy to keep moving, to keep putting one foot in front of the other as he moved closer to his home.

The back door to his house surprised him, but he didn't let it stop him long before he kicked it open and almost threw Matthew into the house. His breath was coming in fast pants as he felt himself falling and caught himself on the door frame. Straining himself, he pulled his body into the room and pushed it shut; the heat of his home began to seep through his chilled skin but the world shook around him, turning a brilliant black as the floor rushed up to him.

The sound of glass against stone broke Garvin from the darkness that chilled him. Memories of the lethargy and his vow slammed through him and he sat up with a yell. His eyes refused to see anything, only the darkness that surrounded; his yell turned into an anguished scream that echoed against the walls. His hands fumbled against his face, but his fingers couldn't find anything, not even the curve of his face.

His scream turned higher, a high-pitched noise that ended in a strangled sob. His hands pawed at his face in a blind panic, but a soft hand on his shoulder stilled him.

The world shook with each beat of his pounding heart as he looked blindly toward the touch. The soft hand gripped him tighter as a voice, Matthew's cut through the darkness.

"Shhh. Garvin, it's me."

A flickering of light burst into the darkness, a candle, and Garvin turned to face it, as if it held the answers to everything. As his eyes adjusted to the sudden brightness, he saw Matthew's face on the other hand, very close to his. The dark shadows under Matthew's eyes reminded him to much of his own struggles and the expression of concern troubled Garvin deeply.

"Matthew?"

Silently, his friend nodded. Reaching out with the flame, he lit a lantern and the room was flooded with a warm light. Garvin noticed Matthew was next to him, sitting on the edge of the bed. The blond's soft breath brushed against Garvin's skin and the older man realized he was naked and still on the floor. One hand dropped to his waist, covering himself as the other curled up into a fist, unsure of how to react. His eyes looked around, finding the wet pile of his clothes in the corner and the heavy blanket thrown over him.

Matthew smiled shyly, "I woke up here. On the floor. You were next to me, but... but you wouldn't wake up. I couldn't move you. Y-You were too heavy..."

The blond's voice trailed off with concern and Garvin felt his heart flutter for a moment, with relief and concern for his friend. He tried to talk, but the words caught in his voice. He tried again but only a croak came out.

With supreme effort, he manage to force out the words, "Your hands?"

In the light, Matthew's face darkened into a flush as he gingerly lifted his hands, showing off the shallow cuts, "Healing."

"Good," a brief flash of amusement crossed through Garvin's face, then faded into a frown.

With a sudden growl, his hand snapped out to wrap his fingers around Matthew's throat. Pushing himself off the ground with his other hand, he held Matthew's throat tightly, almost cutting off his friend's breath. His voice was vibrating with almost uncontrolled anger as he spoke in a tense whisper, "Now, what the hell were you doing in the snow without a shirt?"

Matthew pawed at the hand around him, his mouth opening slightly to gasp. His pawing grew more frantic, then Garvin realized what he was doing and dropped him.

He looked away, ashamed as his own reactions, "Sorry."

Gasping, Matthew nodded and shrugged, "I-I would have done the same thing... if I had the muscles. Damn you're strong, Garv."

Garvin chuckled briefly, "I guess so. So, what were you doing?"

"Trying to drown myself in my sorrows. Life got so pointless, one day after drinking too much, I guess I decided to visit you."

"Without a shirt?"

Matthew smiled sheepishly, "Must have gotten hot."

"In the winter!?"

"I seem to recall someone thinking he could walk on the bottom of the river..."

Garvin flushed briefly at the memory of him trying to drown himself many years before, "Okay, we do stupid things while we're drunk. But why here?"

As he finished speaking, Garvin could see the sadness flicker in Matthew's eyes. The blond dropped his head slightly, sighing in a shuddering gasp, before looking up. Garvin was surprised to see the pain burning in his eyes.

"There is no one there for me. They buy from the store, but they have no time for me. I-I can't go to any festivals, can't do anything. Ig-Iggie dragged me everywhere, and not that she's gone... there is nothing."

His own feelings echoed the pain in Matthew's eyes. Garvin sighed and stood up, ignoring his nakedness for a moment. He held out a hand to his friend.

“Come on. Let’s get me some clothes and get you something to drink.”

Matthew took it and let Garvin pull him up. The older man realized Matthew had nothing on but a towel around his waist and chuckled. Matthew blushed, “Couldn’t find any dry clothes that would fit me. You are rather larger than me.”

“Try Cleo’s?”

The blond made a face, “Why would I wear women’s clothing? Besides, you offered me a drink. What do you have? Anything strong?”

A sly grin quirked Garvin’s lip, “Water and that’s all you get until you clean yourself up.”

The blond’s face dropped before he spoke in a softer voice, “Water?”

“Yeah, water.”

Garvin gathered up his wet clothes and carried them into the laundry room. Tossing them in a basket, he rummaged for a moment before pulling out a mostly-clean tunic and pulling it own. Patting his chest, he grinned at Matthew.

“Much better.”

“What about me?”

A grin, “Towel seems to fit.”

Matthew threw him a glare and Garvin chuckled, amusement flooding through his veins. Both men stood there listening to the chuckles, then Garvin started to laugh out loud. Matthew joined him after a moment, one hand holding the towel up while the other held the wall. The laughter didn’t have a purpose, but it released the pain in them as they just enjoyed it. As it died down, the sorrow in both of their eyes was less painful.

Garvin, gasping for air, clapped Matthew on the shoulder, “Come. Let me get you some of that water.”

Rolling his eyes, Matthew followed behind the larger man, “Joys.”

As the day grew darker, Garvin found himself in front of a roaring fire. Matthew was nestled in a thick blanket, his hand holding a glass of water. On the floor, between them, the dishes from dinner were empty. Garvin sat back as he set the poker down and let the fire continue to burn merrily.

Neither man said anything for a long time, each one lost in memories. On occasion, one would look up for a moment, then back into the flames. Garvin toyed with his hands as he stared into the flames, the uncomfortable memories of the lethargy forcing him to stay moving.

Finally, the need for noise pushed Garvin to speak.

“So, how is the store this year? Any interesting traders?”

Matthew latched on something he enjoyed talking about and brightened, “Yeah. I actually had a few Silfae wander through, they left these wonderful wooden carvings that I managed to sell to some traders heading into Franome...”

Something snapped between them and Garvin felt a sudden swell of... some strange emotion. He smiled as Matthew began to talk excitedly about the year, spinning tale after tale; some of them Garvin knew were false, but the sense of being near a friend warmed his heart. He realized that the lethargy would never come back, as long as Matthew was in his life.

Dreams were swarming over Garvin; bright images flashing one right after the other. A brief memory of Cleo, her blond hair dancing in the summer light, as she walked up the makeshift aisle to marry him. Later, them walking home after one of the festivals. And another memory of them standing next to the kitchen table, screaming at each other.

She wasn't smiling in any of them.

More images flooded through him, of Matthew, Ignis, and the rest of his life. His blond friend showed up with his infectious smile as he led Garvin from one adventure to another. Frequently, he saw images of Matthew naked, but they flashed by before he could understand their significance.

Slowly, the dreams took on a sexuality quality, of heavy breathing and soft caresses. Matthew continued to haunt his dreams, his blond hair flashing more often as Garvin struggled to make sense of the his emotions that were raging inside him. They bounced from fear to longing to warmth and back to fear in rapid succession, each one leaving him more confused as he tried to make sense of his dreams.

His mind struggled with his dreams until a sense of clarity came into his dreams. It was of Matthew and him on his old bed; Garvin

realized it was a dream because he no longer slept there. His blond friend was naked with his back to him. Feeling himself growing harder, he looked down to the tight muscles of Matthew's butt.

Biting his lip, he brought one finger along the smooth skin and traced around the curves. Somehow, he felt the warmth inside him growing as he explore his friend's backside, a surprisingly intimate gesture that caught his breath with each caress.

Matthew respond with a soft moan, his back tightening for a moment before he pushed his hips back against Garvin's hand. The older man froze, afraid Matthew would attack him, but the blond did nothing but rest his head back on the pillow.

Feeling braver, Garvin stroked his finger along the curve between the two buttocks, feeling a heat that surprised him and brought another surge to his hardness. Unwittingly, he looked down at himself, briefly wondering how his cock, which was never hard for Cleo, was standing erect in painful throbbing.

The dreamlike quality continued to wash over him, a feeling of peace and comfort and that his body wasn't quite his own. Enjoying the sensation of his own body, he continued to caress Matthew's buttocks. His other hand stroked along the smooth skin, curling up into the blond curls of hair and trailing along the streaks of white. His lower hand continued to move down, following the curve of Matthew's left cheek until it curled back in between his friend's legs.

Garvin could feel his breath coming quickly, short gasps that shook his entire body. The dream was becoming more real, more vivid but he couldn't stop himself from touching the memory of his friend.

It was more real.

The faint musk of his excitement caught on his senses and he breathed in deeply, enjoying his own scent mixed with Matthew's; he could almost taste the excitement coming from the both of them and it brought a smile to his lips.

The need for curiosity pushed at him and he continued to slide his finger around Matt's ass. With one movement, he began to slide his finger up and down the tight canyon of the smooth buttocks, gently parting them as he felt skin shiver underneath his touch.

A moan encouraged him to continue.

He eased another finger into the crack, marveling at the heat as he drew both fingers between the firm mounds, feeling softer flesh underneath. One finger caught on the wrinkled opening of Matthew's anus, but instead of disgusting him, he became curious. His cock throbbed painfully, begging for release.

Being careful, Garvin gently circled the tight opening with one finger, feeling it twitch underneath his touch. His other finger found the opening and pressed lightly; he enjoyed the feeling of muscles tightening against him. With growing excitement, he pushed a little harder and Matthew jumped slightly.

"Gently."

Matthew's words snapped Garvin out of his dream. To his growing horror, he realized that he wasn't dreaming; his fingers yanked from between his friend's ass as he pulled away. He began to shake in fear as he started to crawl off his bed.

Matthew looked over his shoulder, a sly smile on his face, "I said gently, not run away in fear."

The confidence and calmness in his friend's voice stopped Garvin, but he didn't sit back on the bed. His body vibrated, like a tightly strung bow.

"I-I'm sorry. I didn't... didn't..."

Matthew rolled over, his smile broadening. His cock was hard, almost bouncing on the soft stomach as he turned. It was longer than Garvin's, but much narrower and a lighter color. Matthew's balls were covered in short blond hairs, which matched the sparse triangle of hair above it.

Blushing, Garvin realize he was staring at his best friend's cock and looked away quickly. Matthew chuckled before sitting up and pulling his hair out of his face. He looked at Garvin, then looked again with concern on his face.

"Are you okay?"

The older man remembered to breath and exhaled loudly. His shaking hands gripped the side of the bed as he shook his head curtly, his mind already spinning frantically.

"No... I-I'm not... no."

A slight smile on his face, Matthew shifted closer to the edge of the bed; Garvin watched with growing fear on his face. When the

blond's toes brushed against his bare leg, he jumped slightly, but couldn't move away.

Matthew looked up, "You know, you weren't hurting me."

Fighting back to the urge to run away, Garvin stared at his friend speechlessly for a moment, his mouth working. Stunned emotions raced through his mind as he tried to understand Matthew's words.

"N-No?"

The blond chuckled and shook his head, "No. Compared to Iggy, you were practically gentle."

Garvin's breath caught in his chest, a painful lump in his throat. Sweat dappled on his brow as his mind struggled to understand the words his friend just spoke; it refused and he found himself just staring down at Matthew.

Matthew's eyes sparkled with mirth, "Didn't know that, did you?"

The older man shook his head slowly. Matthew shrugged and Garvin felt a flush.

"Iggy liked doing that. It was okay, except when she was in a bad mood, then it hurt. Unlike you."

"H-How?"

His friend made a face, "Fingers and occasional her fist. Sometimes she would use a dildo or something."

"And you liked it?"

With a detached part of his mind, Garvin felt his manhood beginning to twitch back to life. Matthew smiled broadly and nodded.

"Yeah, sometimes."

In his mind, a few things snapped together for Garvin, "And you... liked it when... I...?"

Matthew's smile softened, "Yeah, I did."

Garvin's shaft jumped with his heartbeats as his veins started to pound with his excitement. His cock began to stand up, thickening until it almost vibrated with each heartbeat. Matthew's eyes slowly traveled down to look at it. Lifting one hand, he gently reached out to touch Garvin's length; the older man shivered with the intense sparkle of sensations that rippled down his spine.

His breath caught in his throat as Matthew trailed a finger down to his base, teasing the bottom edge of his hardness until the finger reached the curve of his testicle.

Matthew looked up with a smile and spoke softly in a playful voice, "Looks like you don't seem to mind it."

Blushing fiercely, Garvin looked down, "I'm-"

Interrupting him, Matthew wrapped his fingers around Garvin's thick member, his thumb sliding up to rest under the ridge of the arrow-shaped wedge. His eyes dropped down to to Garvin's shaft as he finished the larger man's sentence.

"...am enjoying this."

Garvin started to correct him, then stopped with his mouth open as he realized he was enjoying the feel of Matthew's soft hand wrapped around his length. A soft gasp of surprise and pleasure vibrated through his chest as he watched the hand stroke him slightly.

Peeking up through his hair, Matthew smiled softly, "Did she ever do this?"

His eyes still staring at the hand moving up and down on his shaft, Garvin shook his head, "No, she... never."

Bringing his other hand up, the blond wrapped both hands on Garvin's hardness, one moving down to cup his balls as the other stroked along his head. A faint smear of precum coated his palm, lubricating it as he rubbed Garvin's cockhead with delicate movements. Garvin watched with rapt fascination, his breath coming fast and short as he shivered with pleasure.

In Matthew's hand, Garvin's cock looked huge, a thick sausage a dark purple in color. But, somehow, Matthew made him felt like the largest man in the world as his tender hand stroked up and down the shaft, spreading his slick fluids along his entire length;

In a matter of moment, Garvin's breath was coming faster as he watched Matthew stroke gently from end to end of his hardness. Then, with a smile, the blond pulled his hands away and let the thickness bob in the air.

Feeling the shock of the sensations leaving, Garvin stared down at Matthew, "Did I... do something wrong?"

Matthew smiled, "No, but I figured you would be more comfortable on the bed," he motioned toward the bed, "Unless you want to stop."

A hunger for something besides food burned in his chest and Garvin found himself crawling back on the bed before he realized it. His cock bobbed slightly as he sat down, unsure of what to do.

Pointing to the pillow, his friend gestured for him to lie down, "If you please."

Feeling excitement tingling along his spine, Garvin positioned himself so he was lying down on the bed, his cock pointing straight up. Matthew knelt next to him, his left hand gently holding the hardness as he ran his thumb along the ridge of Garvin's glans. The larger man hissed slightly as he felt the stirrings of pleasure stroking the heat of his excitement.

As Matthew bowed his head, Garvin felt the soft heat of his friend's breath on his hardness. It surged in Matthew's hand, sending sparkles of pleasure through his body.

"Are you...?"

Matthew's eyes slid over as he smiled, "Going to suck on you? Do you want me too?"

Giving a choice of something he never had, even as Cleo refused to do it, Garvin found himself nodding dumbly. Chuckling, Matthew bowed his head further until his lips brushed against the spongy head of Garvin's manhood.

A moan of pleasure escaped his throat as he lifted his head to get a better view of his purple hardness pressed gently against his best friend's lips.

Without pausing, Matthew pulled the throbbing hardness into his mouth, past tightly stretched lips. A wet heat pressed around his cock as it slowly slid into Matthew's mouth. The blond's hand stroked along the hairs on Garvin's cheek as the hardness continued to slowly ease into the wet heat.

To his surprise, Matthew's cheeks sucked in as he felt the pressure build on his shaft. His tongue reached out to stroke along the ridge of Garvin's cock, exploring the cockhead with delicious agony. Garvin's breath caught in his chest as he watched Matthew suck harder, pulling down his shaft until he felt a wet pressure slide along his cockhead before it brushed against something hard—the back of Matthew's throat.

His friend managed to get three-quarters of his length into the wet heat of his mouth, but Garvin silently begged him to go further.

He felt Matthew's mouth shaking for a moment before the blond pulled up to take a deep breath.

"Wow, always wanted to do that."

"Always?"

Matthew blushed and grinned sheepishly, "Well, for the last few months."

"Months?"

"Last fall, a few days after the first snow. I got so lonely and I started thinking about you."

Silence filled the room as Matthew bowed his head again, sucking on Garvin's cock until the older man felt his shaft reach the back of the blond's throat. His hands clutched the blankets as he felt the wet sucking sensations around own his entire length as the tongue explore every centimeter of his hardness.

Gasping softly, Garvin felt Matthew bob his head up and down slowly, sucking and blowing with every stroke until Garvin felt the heat begin to build inside him, a sense of urgency beginning to fill his heart.

Then Matthew stopped, looking up as he licked a thin trail of precum from his lips. Garvin whimpered softly, "Why... did you stop?"

The smile his friend gave him brought an uncertain smile to Garvin's lips. The blond pointed down to his own hardness, "Would you be willing to return the favor?"

Even though he felt a surge of uncertainty, Garvin nodded and started to push himself up. Matthew shook his head, "No, let me."

Lifting one leg, his friend positioned himself until his throbbing hardness was poised above Garvin's mouth. The older man looked at it with uncertainty, then opened his mouth as Matthew lowered himself.

A single drop of precum gathered at the tip of Matthew's cock, then dropped into his mouth. He closed his mouth reflexively, tasting the salty sweetness of his friend. His hands reached up, curling his fingers around the tight muscles of Matthew's ass. His fingers curled around the taunt buttocks and pulled him down, pulling the hardness into his mouth.

His lips stretched around Matthew's length as he felt the warm hardness slide into his mouth. It tasted musty, but somehow the

taste he expected from his friend. His tongue explored it curiously, running along the edge of the hardness; each fast beat of Matthew's heart send a tiny surge into his mouth as he held it there. A sigh of pleasure caught his ears and he pulled Matthew's hardness into his mouth until he felt it beginning to tickle the back of his throat.

Wrapping his fingers tighter around the smooth skin of Matthew's buttocks, he gently guided the hardness out of his mouth, straining not to brush his teeth against the sensitive skin. The blond's sigh of pleasure encouraged him as he pulled Matthew back into his mouth, tasting a fresh flood of juices as they dribbled down his tongue.

Under his fingers, he felt Matthew beginning to push down, trying to thrust deeper into his throat; the soft head of his friend's cock brushed against the back of his throat, tickling his gag reflex before he forced it up to take a deep breath.

Even as his fingers pulled him up, Garvin could feel Matthew push down, thrusting slowly inside his mouth. At the same time, he felt the warm mouth on his own cock, sliding it down his length.

Gasping around the hardness in his mouth, he let Matthew's thrust bury the hard cock into his mouth, then pull out with a short stroke. The hardness grew hotter in his mouth as Matthew began to stroke in and out with short strokes; in his hands, Garvin could feel the strain his friend was fighting to pound in his mouth. As soon as he felt comfortable with the thrusting in his mouth, he gently guided the blond to stroke faster and harder. In a matter of moment, Garvin felt out of control as Matthew thrusting in his mouth, rapping his cock against the back of his throat.

On one stroke, Garvin swallowed hard and felt the tip dip down his throat. He did it again on the next stroke and felt the shaft bury into his throat, blocking his breath until Matthew pulled out. The mouth on Garvin's cock sucked harder as the blond pounded faster.

The hardness in his mouth surged with a wet heat and Matthew suddenly thrust hard into his mouth, ramming the entire length of his cock into his mouth almost painfully. The shaft slipped down his throat, stretching it out as it surged inside him.

Garvin felt the hardness pump a wet heat into his throat, but the shaft in his mouth prevented him from choking or even gasping for breath. Instead, he just held Matthew's ass down, keeping the

hardness as deep in his mouth until he felt the last surge burst inside him.

Matthew gasped and pulled out, leaving a streamer of cum from Garvin's lips to the tip of his shaft. The older man choked for a moment on the taste of the blond's cum and sat up, pushing Matthew forward as he did so. The blond landed on his lap, with Garvin's cock rubbing against Matthew's as Garvin coughed hard a few times.

He finally got a good breath of air and swallowed the last of the warm-tasting cum back down his throat. He looked down at Matthew and chuckled, his hand stroke along the blond's ass.

"Well... that was new."

Matthew looked over his shoulder, his hands on each side of Garvin's knees, with a smile, "For me too."

"Are... are we...?"

The blond shrugged, "Who cares? I think we both need this."

Garvin started to say something, but the blond lifted himself slightly to adjust Garvin's cock flatter against his body. Garvin looked down at the muscles flexing as Matthew spread his legs further apart, pressing his hips down against Garvin's hips with a shy smile.

"You know... you didn't come."

Guessing at Matthew's intention, Garvin lifted one hand and gently stroked it along the inner curve of Matthew's ass. The blond looked forward, gasping with pleasure as his ass rose slightly under the touch. Garvin felt his cock growing harder as he brought his other hand up to pull the soft cheeks apart, exposing the dusky opening of Matthew's anus to his curious gaze. The blond moaned softly, rocking his hips back and forth as Garvin's fingers explored the delicate flesh.

Matthew's moans encouraged Garvin to continue, using his fingertips to probe the tiny opening with a single finger. It resisted, but Garvin continued to stroke along the wrinkled opening until it began to relax and he felt his finger slip into the tight opening. Matthew continued to writhe under his fingers; the older man felt the skin between both of their cocks getting soaked with their precum.

Inspired by the slickness, Garvin dipped his hand between the two of them and rolled his fingers in the precum. Then, with a gently tease, he began to probe his finger in and out of the tight opening, teasing it open with his gently strokes.

The soft moans vibrated through his body as Garvin managed to ease his finger all the way into the tightness of his friends opening. His slick fingers easily stroked in and out, evoking whimpers of pleasure from Matthew's head with each slight movement.

After an endless pleasure of teasing, Matthew finally looked back over his shoulder with a look of lust and need, "Please... inside me?"

Garvin eased his finger out of the tight opening, "How?"

Matthew shuddered slightly, then pushed himself off his friend; Garvin felt the cool air tease his precum-soaked cock. His friend turned slightly, moving back into a spoon position with Garvin behind him; Matthew's buttocks pressed lightly against Garvin's hips with the older man's cock pressing against the blond's tail bone.

Looking over his shoulder, Matthew smiled, "This time, be gentle."

Being careful, Garvin snaked his hand down to wrap his fingers around his hardness and guided it down between the tight cheeks. His cock, slick with precum, easily slid down until it caught against the wrinkled opening; Matthew sighed with pleasure as he rocked back against the hardness poised to enter him.

Moving his hips in gently strokes, Garvin gently pushed and pulled on his shaft, teasing the thick head of his cock against the tight opening. He felt it's resisting as Matthew moaned softly with each stroke. Garvin stroked his hands along the soft skin of Matthew's back, one hand reaching down to rest against his hip while the other held the blond on the shoulder.

His thrusting continued to move, easing the wrinkled opening with each stroke as Garvin felt a satin tightness wrap around the head of his cock before he slipped it out and eased it back in. With each stroke, Matthew moaned softly, pushing back on the hard shaft.

Garvin's breath was coming faster, matching with Matthew's as he pushed forward with his aching hardness. It gently eased into the tight opening, pushing inside the hot tightness as Matthew moaned

loudly. Garvin's hand tightened on his hip, holding him down as his cock thrust deeper into his friend's ass, feeling the pressure and heat as delicious waves of pleasure.

Matthew moaned, "Please, harder."

Garvin responded by shoving harder, burying his hardness into the tight opening. The tight sheath of his friend's rectum teased his senses as he found his entire length buried inside Matthew. A swell of emotions raced through Garvin as he pulled out and pushed it back in, feeling Matthew tightened his anus around the base of his shaft.

Thrusting harder and faster, Garvin started to shove his cock inside, pushing forward. Each movement rocked the blond's body forward as Garvin hooked one leg over Matthew's hip as he felt his cock slipping into the slick opening with long, powerful strokes. His hands held the blond tightly as he felt his body shiver with pleasure with each deep thrust.

As he felt the heat growing inside him, Garvin began to shove harder, rocking Matthew until the blond finally rolled forward. Garvin followed the motion and soon found himself straddling Matthew as the blond rolled on his stomach. As Garvin thrust forward, he felt his cock plunge deep into the tight, slick heat of his friend's rectum; Matthew begged softly for more.

The older man began to thrust hard, shoving as much of his cock down into his friend's body as he felt an orgasm begin to ripple at the base of his shaft. Grunting with the effort, he sped up his movements, his cock easily shoving in and out of the tight opening with rapid, powerful movements.

"Oh, yes!"

Matthew's whimper of need pushed Garvin over the edge and the old man grunted loudly as he thrust hard into his friend, burying his entire length into the tight opening. His cock felt like it burst into flame as he felt his cum surge inside the slick depths of Matthew's ass. A wordless grunt filled the room as he jabbed harder in Matthew a few times before collapsing.

With a shuddering sigh, he let his cock slip out of the tight opening as he fell to the side. Matthew turned his head and smiled at Garvin.

"Thank you."

Garvin nodded, his panting preventing him from saying anything. A slow smile crossed both of their faces. Garvin chuckled and Matthew grinned.

“Think we’ll do that again?”

Matthew reached up to stroke his finger along Garvin’s shoulder, “Any time you want; whenever you want.”

Spring was coming around to Harasburgh again. This time, Garvin’s life was even brighter. One early morning, he got up early and crawled out of bed. He stumbled down into the kitchen, spying a note on the table. It was from Matthew, saying he already went into town to open up the store. Garvin chuckled and tossed the note back on the table.

Grabbing a pair of raw onions for breakfast, he pulled on his coat and boots and headed into the woods, toward the hill where Cleo and Ignis were buried. It took him a long time to get there, but soon he was standing next to her grave. He looked over the weathered stone with a soft smile.

“Hello, you old bitch. I miss you. Not as much, but I still do. It got real bad for a while, but I found someone.”

Imagining Cleo screaming at him, he shook his head, “No, not going to get married. Just going to have... a friend. Don’t worry, I’ll bring him over to visit Iggy on occasion, but I wanted to finally say what I couldn’t.”

Slowly, he knelt on the ground, resting one hand on his wife’s tombstone.

“I love you, Cleo. But, I can’t kill myself while I love you. You’ll always be my wife, but there is someone else who needs me more than you right now. Bitch at me when I get there, but right now, Matt needs me more.”

Happy that he finally could say the words, Garvin pushed himself up and trudged down the hill.

t'Sade

About the Author

t'Sade has been happily using third-person singular since the late eighties. Besides that strange quirk, they enjoy writing a brutal combination of sex and violence for decades. Most of their stories explore the fringe edges of sexuality in the epic quest of trying to write a story for every fetish and turn-on known to the human libido.

It's going to take a long time.

Their writing can be found on their website, tsade.com. Most of it is free to read and enjoy.

t'Sade

About the Publisher

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