

Title: Paraffin and Peonies

Major pairing: 3x4

Author: The Fables spinner ~*D*~

Rating: R

Genre: AU: Late 18th Century England Romance

Author's Note: Loosely based on the Novel "The Secret Garden" Several Major Changes to story line will take place. Only similar elements will appear from the Original story.

Disclaimer: Inspiration from many places, none of them mine, much to my lament.

Trowa stood on a low rise overlooking the desolate dreary landscape. Grey clouds looming on the horizon bearing the promise of yet more rain as was common this early time of spring. As the ground slowly warmed and thawed from winter's harsh hold and began to give birth to tiny chutes of verdant colored plant life, and bright swatches of sparse color as early wildflowers began to pepper the landscape.

But not this place, this windswept, inhospitable plain of moors, as far as the eye could see, looked as if death herself ruled the land with her withered hand and icy breath. There was nothing here, barren and bleak, with craggy rock outcroppings, stunted brush and bramble, and trees, hardly more than naked and crooked stumps jutting up from the ground in twisted and crooked patterns. Like smoke rising from the fire, the limbs curved upwards, reaching for the sky and the sun that seemed never to reach them with its warmth.

A gust of wind sent shivers down Trowa's spine as his cloak flapped wildly around him. Pulling it closer to his tall and lean frame to ward against the chill, Trowa asked himself again silently what he was doing out here in the wilds all alone. He answered his own question mentally as he continued to walk the paths towards his destination. He was running away, away from convention, his home, his lifeless existence, towards unknown adventure, or hardship.

It was either face this desolation with his eyes wide open to possibilities, or return home to Barton Manor, watch helplessly as his life was dictated by tradition and constraint. Earl Barton, Trowa's Uncle had taken Trowa as his heir, when Trowa's mother, the Earl's sister had died in Childbirth. And being unwed, the truth had been swept under the carpet to Trowa's origins. To the world the Earl claimed Trowa was his own son, the mother having died while they were abroad. A neat little package of lies, all to save the family pride.

Trowa hated the fact his mother's name and circumstance had all been obliterated from the family history. He'd learned the truth from the myriad of servants who had been in attendance at Barton Manor during the time of Trowa's birth.

It had appeared his father had been the groundskeeper and gardener. He had fallen in love with the young lady of the manor, and she with him. The servants had shown Trowa the bed of peonies built directly under the window that had been his mother's chambers. They had been her favorite flower and the young gardener had built for her a private garden in which all she had to do to gaze at her favorite bloom was to peer from her bedroom window. Trowa was a hopeless romantic at heart; he'd been touched deeply by the small gesture of love his father had shown his mother.

Apparently he got his romanticism from his mother, for she had been touched too. He was born not long after. His father had been sent away from Barton Manor never to be seen again, his mother died giving him life. Now all he had was his Mother's heart for love, and his father's gift for horticulture. Trowa's hands had always loved being up to the wrists in dirt. Prodding stubborn roses to grow, plucking weeds that threatened to choke his mother's peonies out of the garden bed. He loved coaxing a seed to life with a little water, a little sun, and tender care.

The servants had told him his father had been exactly the same. He had inherited not only his dashing good looks from him, but his green thumb as well. How he would give anything to meet him.

Which was why he was here now, standing on the road leading to Saddleworth, the last known place of his real father. Up ahead in the distance stood a dark and foreboding Manor house. Hardwicke Hall, the only sign of human life for twenty miles in any direction stood like a dying sentinel against the harshness of the plain surrounding it on all sides. A place like this should have seemed welcoming to a weary traveler on the moors. But rather it sat there like a cancer on the landscape. A blackened tumor, spreading its decay across the land that in and of itself was loneliness and isolation personified.

Trowa shuddered, and not from the cold. This was his choice, to disown himself from and uncle who wanted nothing more from Trowa than a good bridal dowry from some hapless lady of breeding, and moldable young man to do whatever his uncle demanded.

This however was not something Trowa wanted, for many reasons. He had no desire to marry for reasons his Uncle would have never allowed, considering on more than one occasion the old earl would spout his condemnation of men who were a blight against nature for seeking love in the arms of another man. Trowa had never once dared tell his uncle the truth fearing the lash. The truth being Trowa's desires had never been directed at lovely female suitors. But often his eye strayed to the brother's in attendance. He'd known for quite sometime he was attracted to men, and his secret was crushing him and would continue to stifle him had he stayed in Barton Manor.

The second reason, Trowa by nature was almost a solitary creature. Almost feline in his affections as Mrs. Copperbottom the cook used to say. She was like a mother to Trowa and she had been the one responsible for answering his questions about his lost parentage. She used to tell him repeatedly how much like his father he was. Quiet and slow to voice an opinion, listening to the argument at hand before rushing to judgment or opinion. Preferring a soft chair by the fire to a night in the pub socializing. Trowa had never been a social creature, preferring his books to rowdy nights in town with friends.

Not that he had many friends due to this rather solitary life choice. Mrs. Copperbottom often would ruffle his hair and say to him "Stick in the mud like yer father. But wait young one. There will be at least one person out there you'll nary be able to live without and seek company with when the nights grow cold in winter. So it was with yer father, when first he cast eyes on yer fair mother. Love does that to a man. It will do it to you too when you least expect it."

He doubted it, well at least his sensible side did. His inner romantic heart prayed for that to happen, he wanted nothing more than someone to care about, to love, and to be loved in return. It was a dream, and another reason he was walking toward Hardwicke Hall not as

the Lord he was, but as Trowa Barton, son of a gardener and lady, just a man seeking his future and employment if his father did not happen to reside here any longer.

This was his new life, this was what he wanted, and even in this lifeless countryside, for the first time in his short two decades, he felt alive and truly a man in charge of his own destiny.

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There was a stifling stillness in the air as Trowa walked up the road and around to the servant's door at the rear of the estate. Raising his hand to knock, the door opened before he had a chance. A young kitchen maid jumped, not expecting a young man to be standing there. Her dark black hair tucked neatly into a bonnet, her light blue eyes wide with shock, then with mirth as she smiled in welcome. "What brings you here stranger?" She asked, her voice bright and gay in comparison to the atmosphere around them.

"I've come to seek employment with your groundskeeper. Can you tell me if a man by the name of Nathaniel Bloom is still your gardener?" Trowa asked, his mouth dry with anticipation.

"Gloomy Bloomy? Aye, he's just inside. Come in stranger." The young maid said brushing past a young stable hand with a long braid of chestnut and caramel colored hair who smirked at her in passing, a mischievous twinkle in his violet hued eyes, before he smacked her backside and sauntered out the door. "Duo Maxwell you cheeky sod!" the young maid yelled and Trowa could hear the young man's laughter ring like bells as he disappeared around the corner.

"My name's Hilde by the way." The young maid said as she led Trowa into the kitchen.

"Trowa, Trowa Barton." Trowa said as his eyes fell on a Man in his late forties who sat at the table with a cup of tea. Trowa froze in place. He was looking at an older version of himself.

"Hey Nate, this man here came asking for you." Hilde said getting his attention.

When Nathaniel looked up, his eyes froze on Trowa's face, their gestures mirroring each other in mannerism.

"It can't be." Nathaniel choked knowing at a glance precisely who this young man was.

"It is. Father." Trowa said smiling and his eyes misting. In two strides Nathaniel was off his chair and crushing Trowa in a hug.

"I never thought I'd ever get to see you." He sobbed clinging to his son as if he were a ghost about to be spirited away. Trowa held back in tears of his own.

"Nor I you father. I'm sorry it took me so long to get here." He said and Hilde just stood there, jaw agape.

"Why did you come? I shamed your mother." Nathaniel said, his voice heavy with anguish and loss even after twenty-one years.

"Love is nothing that can shame. The shame came from my Uncle in keeping my parents apart. I am alive today because you found a way. For that I am eternally grateful father." Trowa said still reveling in joy at being close to the man responsible for his very life.

"That is something your mother would have said." Nathaniel said stepping back to take a good look at his grown son. "You have her eyes. But the rest of you, I am looking in a mirror and seeing myself as I was when I fell in love with your mother."

"So I've been told. Mrs. Copperbottom made sure I knew the truth. I was just waiting for the right time to come and find you." Trowa said a slight smile on his lips.

"What does your Uncle say? Surely he does not approve of this." Nathaniel said and Trowa folded his arms in defiance.

"He can sod off. I am my own man and I will make my own choices. I never asked for his approval, or his blessings. I want none of it, I want my freedom, and I want to make my place with my own two hands. I don't want his titles, I don't want his money, and I certainly do not want his oppressive rules and prejudices. I am Trowa Barton, I am your son, not his, and I am quite capable of deciding what is in my own best interests." Trowa said and Nathaniel smiled with pride.

"And that is something every father wants to hear his son say. A son and a man a father can be proud of, and I am more than proud." Nathaniel said when a sniffle from Hilde made them both turn to look at her.

"Oh god, that's so beautiful!" She said sobbing dabbing her eyes with her apron. "Sit both of you, I'll get the tea. Oh mercy me." She said blubbing and going for the kettle. Trowa looked at his father.

"Miss Hilde, is a sweet child, you'll get used to her. She's got a heart of gold, and one of the few rays of sunshine in this place. You've come to a forsaken household son. Thankfully his Lordship is away most of the time, and it's just us servants. When he is here, there is much sorrow. There's a curse on this place, it can suck the life out of you if you're not careful." Nathaniel said sitting across from his son.

"What do you mean by that?" Trowa asked as Hilde returned to the table with a pot of tea.

"What he means is, beware of Mrs. Tatlock. She's the head Mistress of Hardwicke Hall, and a right stiff neck. And never, EVER go into the east wing, that's off limits to all the servants." Hilde said and Trowa raised a brow and looked at his father.

"It's criminal." Nathaniel began with a sigh. "There's nothing wrong with that boy." He ended with a growl.

"What boy?" Trowa asked and Nathaniel sighed.

"Two years after I got here, after you were born, the Lady Winner had an accident. She was in her garden and was heavily burdened with child. She stumbled and fell and went into labor early due to the fall. We lost her sadly and almost lost the babe, he was born so weak and so frail. Lord Winner was inconsolable. A curse fell on this place, in fear Lord

Winner fled, leaving the care of the babe to Mrs. Tatlock. Granted as a babe he WAS sickly, but he's eighteen now, you'd think she have figured out if he's made it this far in life he's quite capable of surviving a cold or a bout of the sniffles." Nathaniel spat angrily.

"But no, he's kept locked away in that east wing, his father never visits him, and the doctors that come, I want to strangle the crackpots. They know full well that boy is all right, but an easy meal ticket. I don't care to think of the torture they put that lad through for money. His cries I can hear from outside are bad enough." Nathaniel said with a shudder.

"That's horrible. Have you ever seen him?" Trowa asked and Nathaniel nodded.

"Once, he was about ten at the time. Such a beautiful boy he was, fair of face and hair like his mother. He was in his wheelchair peeking out the window. I never saw Tatlock move so fast. He's not allowed sunlight for some sick reasoning or another. Tatlock is so afraid he'll die on her and she'll be fired she refuses to let the boy do anything. No sun for fear of burning his skin, no windows open in case the spores get him. HA! Crazy woman, a flower is not likely to kill the boy. He eats nothing but this tasteless nasty gruel the doctors have Tatlock make. Give the boy a steak for crying out loud." Nathaniel ranted and Hilde nodded.

"It's true, and I hear the only reason he's in a wheelchair is because they never taught him how to walk as a baby. Afraid he'd fall down and hurt himself. It's sick, and depressing. All of us have to leave the house when the doctor's come, and even then you can hear him crying well into the night after they leave. And none of us are allowed in there to comfort him. Poor thing." Hilde said just as a tall woman in a gray high collared dress walked into the kitchen.

"I'll not have gossip in my kitchens. Especially to strangers." The woman said glaring at Nathaniel who didn't even flinch.

"Not strangers. This is my son." Nathaniel said and Mrs. Tatlock's eyes widened briefly.

"Hn, so I can note the resemblance. I take it he's working for you now?" Tatlock asked. Knowing of all the servants only Nathaniel equaled her in rank and he could hire and fire his own staff. The house and grounds were separate entities.

"He is. So he'll need a room Eleanor please." Nathaniel said and Tatlock scowled. She hated when he called her by her familiar name. Even if he was within his rights, his lack of respect for her galled her to no end.

"He'll have to use one in the north wing. I have nothing available closer to you." She said, moving Trowa as far away from the father as she could in spite.

It didn't bother either of them; it was a bed and nothing more. They would be spending days together and meal times, sleeping was all they needed a room for to begin with.

"Follow me Mr. Bloom." Tatlock said and Trowa cleared his throat.

"It's Barton Mrs. Tatlock, I have my mother's surname as mine own. I have only recently learned my father was here." Trowa said and Tatlock snorted.

"Ah yes, I forgot Nathaniel's son was a bastard born." She said snidely and Trowa frowned. He could easily tell why his father was so vocal in his distaste of the woman. Trowa was two steps short of smacking her for her rudeness. Woman or no woman, her attitude and behavior towards him was not befitting to anyone and quite deplorable. But he bit his tongue and followed.

Hilde turned to Nathaniel. "Well, if I didn't believe it before, I do now. He's your son. Fire in the eyes, calm demeanor, and pride that will not allow him to even acknowledge she made that horrible slur." Hilde said smiling at the groundskeeper.

"He is technically a bastard. His mother and I were not allowed to marry. However, Trowa knows who and what he is, and that is a mark of a real man. He won't let her comments affect him, he knows they are naught but words that can do him no harm." Nathaniel said smiling. As only a proud father could.

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Trowa was shown his room, and left to acquaint himself with his new surroundings. It was small, but not nearly as small as the servant's quarters his uncle had provided his staff. This was a palace in comparison. A large soft bed, a wardrobe, and even a small private garterobe in which to tend his personal needs, and a large tapestry hung from one wall to decorate the drab little room. It's fanciful scene of knights at a joust, and maidens frolicking around a maypole, dulled in vibrancy from time, but still enough to bring a small smile to Trowa's lips. This was the beginning of his new life, and it could have been far worse.

Trowa found some heavy woolen breeches in his wardrobe, and changed. They were a bit small, but fit nonetheless. No sense in him ruining his nice clothes, he may need them later. He then found more shirts in a trunk at the foot of his bed, and pulled the heavy sweaters out and dressed warmly. Early spring was still a bit cold, and his cloak would only get in the way while he worked.

Working alongside his father, right where he had always wanted to be. He glanced out his window to see if he could spot his father on the grounds and stopped short. About seven windows down, in what was obviously the east wing, Trowa spied the most heavenly apparition he'd ever seen. His breath stilled in his chest, and his heart pounded in his ears as his eyes drank in the view before him.

Blonde hair hung like a halo around a face too beautiful to be real. A face too marked with sadness not to be real. Then he saw her, Mrs. Tatlock descend, and the curtains were drawn, robbing Trowa of his vision of heaven.

That must have been the young lord of the manor. Trowa felt compelled, he had to find out more, he had to grill his father for more information. He was too taken by what he had seen not to find out more. It was like he'd been given a glimpse of an earth bound angel, and he just had to know the name of the creature who sat there in such utter despair and sorrow.

What name would he be saying in his prayers for salvation?

What name would he be singing in his dreams?

Trowa hurried back downstairs and back to the kitchen, his father waiting for him.

"Father, I think I saw him, the young lord you spoke of from my window." Trowa said hushed as they walked outside. "What's his name?" He asked as they reached the greenhouse.

"Quatre." Nathaniel said as he opened the door, "But be careful son, Hilde was right, if Tatlock catches you in the east wing, even I won't be able to save your job here. No matter how much you want to help that boy, it's not worth your job." Nathaniel said pulling out a pair of hoes and rakes.

"Is it not? Father he looked so sad."

Nathaniel cocked an eyebrow at the almost longing tone in his son's voice. "You sounded just like your mother then. What is this I see in you? Defiance? That is most assuredly your mother's influence. Just promise me you'll be careful." Nathaniel said and Trowa smiled and nodded. Being careful came as second nature to him, and there was no way in hell Trowa could ignore his inner voice urging him to ease the young lord's sorrow, if only to pay him a visit to ease the loneliness so apparent in deep blue eyes.

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Title: Paraffin and Peonies 2

"I don't want it." Quatre said pushing the tray of gruel away in distaste.

"But my lordship, the doctors say you need it for strength. I am only thinking of your welfare. You are like a son to me." Mrs. Tatlock said, the tone of her voice patronizing. Quatre wasn't falling for it.

"Would you keep your son prisoner like this and force the same slop down his throat every single day? Would you let doctors hurt him for no apparent reason? I may be an invalid, but I am not stupid. Just let me be sick and leave me alone, I'm tired. No one would really care if I died anyway." Quatre said fighting tears of pain and betrayal from spilling from his eyes.

"Don't say that..."

"Yes, I'll say it. I have never seen my own father, and I know he's been here I can hear him yell and shout when he is in attendance. You only come in to shut me away from the world and feed me so my father doesn't sack you. You care less about my welfare; all you care about is your tenure here. And don't think to protest; I've heard you talk to the doctors. 'Just do whatever you wish to the boy so long as he's kept alive. I'll not lose my job over a sickly burden' or did I hear you wrong?" Quatre said and Tatlock scooped up his bowl in a fury.

"You are an ungrateful, spoiled child. You should thank me for all the years I've spent caring for you."

"I'd use a different word than CARE for me. You don't care, you rule and demand, and let them hurt me, repeatedly."

"They only are keeping you alive."

"Then why do I feel worse for days after the doctors come? I don't want it anymore. I refuse to let them see me any longer." Quatre said folding his arms across his chest where he lay in bed.

"You'll do as you're told. And just because you feel the need to be spiteful young man, you will stay in that bed." Mrs. Tatlock said rolling his wheelchair to the far side of the room and out of reach.

"Bring that back! I can't move without it!" Quatre sobbed horrified.

"You'll learn obedience. Until you do, that chair stays over there. I must away on business for your father. Perhaps by the time I return, you will be of a better disposition!" Tatlock said taking his breakfast and slamming and locking the door behind her.

Hungry, and crestfallen, Quatre turned and sobbed into his pillow, if only he knew how to walk, he'd walk far away from this place, and never look back. Anything was better than this isolation he had to endure day in and day out.

His only joy was peering out his window to watch the servants go about their lives, pretending he was one of them, laughing and singing right along with them.

He had his favorites too. There was the long haired groomsman named Duo who was constantly pulling practical jokes on his fellows Heero and Wufei, they in turn finding ways to pay him back for his mischievous nature in very creative ways.

There were the young kitchen maids, Hilde, Sally, and Catherine who continually scolded the trio whilst chattering away under his window sweet nothings about them when they were absent. Young love, it touched him greatly. And he would strain to hear the talk of midnight trysts, and dream it was him out in the garden in the arms of a lover.

Only he would have much preferred Heero or Duo than one of the girls. He thought boys much nicer to look at, and often had dreams of a tall young man sweeping him away in the night.

He had read one too many romance novels. It was all he had, but at least his dreams were interesting.

Then there was the man nicknamed 'Gloomy Bloomy', Nathaniel Bloom, the groundskeeper. Quatre really liked him, he was quiet most of the time, and looked just as sad as Quatre did. Quatre just knew the man had lost something dear to him, and Quatre's heart ached for the man who silently toiled and made beautiful roses bloom in a barren land. He could only just see the roses from his window, and he lived for late spring when they started to bloom. Quatre often pondered about the people under his window, and just what made them sad or happy.

Sadness he knew, he'd never been happy in his life. Just once before he did die, he'd love to know just what being happy felt like.

He sniffled and wiped his tears away with his sleeve. He needed to look outside; he desperately wanted to lose himself in watching the servants. He could forget his sorrow watching them, but he had no way to the window.

He set his jaw and with his arms he began to drag himself across his bed, and with a heavy thud and grunt, he fell to the floor.

"Ouch, maybe this wasn't such a bright idea." Quatre grumbled as his shoulder began to throb where he landed. But being stubborn, he shook off his dower mood and the pain and began to pull himself across the floor towards the window.

Exhausted by the time he reached it, he tried to pull himself up, only to realize too little, too late, that even though he was at the window, without his chair to hold him up, he could not see over the ledge, nor lift himself by his arms high enough to see.

Devastated Quatre fell with his face to the floor and wept. If only he could walk, he'd run from this house of hell as fast as his feet could carry him.

If he was as sickly as they all said he was he prayed for death, any release would be welcome from the nightmare of his lonely existence.

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Trowa was helping his father tend the rosebushes near the front entrance, as Tatlock swept out of the front doors in a huff muttering something about willful children. She then turned to Nathaniel. "I have word of urgent business in Manchester I must attend to on his Lordship's behalf. I'll be gone a fortnight. See to it that the young master is fed Nathaniel, and you do it. None of the other staff are allowed in there as well you know. And do not make his meal yourself. I have instructed Hilde on the proper way to prepare his food. He eats at 8am, noon, and 5pm sharp. Do not deviate from his schedule. Take in his tray; make him eat it if you must, then leave. Do not talk to him, do not coddle him, and for God's sake do not bring in dirt and where the mask I have hanging by the door. Is that clear?" Tatlock said and Nathaniel nodded.

"Unusual for the Master to call you away." Nathaniel said and Tatlock nodded.

"He's taken ill and needs me as witness to his will. Do not tell the boy his father is dying. And also when the doctor's come on Thursday, be sure the boy does as told." She added in a hurry before rushing to the coach.

"The Master is dying? Oh dear." Nathaniel said as Tatlock drove off. "That cannot be good news. I am afraid Tatlock will talk him out of leaving Quatre his lands which are his birthright." Nathaniel said with a grumble. "Trowa, you take care of the young master. I am going to Manchester to halt that woman in her tracks. I fear her viperous tongue." Nathaniel said whistling at Wufei to halt the carriage. "You wait there, I'm going with you." Nathaniel said climbing into the carriage.

"You will not! What about the boy?" Tatlock said in a rage.

"Master Quatre will be looked after, I do not trust you shrew. Drive on Wufei!" Nathaniel said banging on the roof. With a wicked smile Wufei snapped the reins and the carriage sped off. The voices of arguing fading into the distance and the coach disappeared on the horizon.

Trowa turned to find Hilde in the doorway smiling. "You're a good luck charm Trowa. Can I please make Quatre something nicer to eat than that horrible porridge? I saw he didn't eat any of it this morning, and he must be starving." She said her eyes pleading. Trowa smiled.

"Yes, but nothing too heavy. If he's not used to rich foods, they WILL make him ill. How about oatmeal with cinnamon and brown sugar? That should sit well with him." Trowa said Hilde cheered.

"Hooray! I'll go make it right now!" She said spinning on her heels in a rush of skirts as she bounded to the kitchen.

Trowa smiled and followed her into the kitchen, going to the sink to wash his hands. Soon a piping hot bowlful of oatmeal was set on a tray, the scent of sugar and cinnamon permeating the air. It smelled divine and Trowa grasped the tray and marched forward to the east wing quickly. He was so excited about seeing the boy up close, he didn't notice the sounds of crying until he was about to knock on the door.

Trowa frowned and rapt softly on the door, "Your lordship, may I come in?" Trowa asked softly and a small voice answered.

"No. Mrs. Tatlock will fire you." The shy voice said, dripping with sadness and regret.

Trowa smiled and opened the door. "Mrs. Tatlock is gone for a fortnight. My name is Trowa, and I'll be taking care of you while she's away." He said setting the tray on the table then looking at... an empty bed.

"Over here." Came the small voice and Trowa spun around.

"What are you doing there?" Trowa asked hurrying to his side.

"Trying to see out my window. Mrs. Turlock is punishing me for not eating. She put my chair over there." Quatre said pointing. Trowa was livid.

"She expected you to lie in bed for two weeks? Is she daft?" Trowa grumbled scooping Quatre up without thinking twice about it and carrying him over to his chair.

Quatre was seeing stars, not only was a perfect stranger in his bedroom, but a gorgeous stranger, and he was carrying him!!!! Quatre had died and gone to heaven, no ifs ands or buts.

Trowa felt slight arms tighten their hold around his neck and soft hair tickle his chin as Quatre sighed dreamily and laid his head on Trowa's shoulder.

He was now very reluctant to set the beautiful young man down, but did anyway, receiving a sad sigh when his hold was broken. Trowa had to smile, Quatre had absolutely no idea how he was affecting him.

"Thank you Trowa. Are you sure you won't get in any trouble?" Quatre asked looking up into green eyes that wanted to make him melt in place.

"I'm sure. Hilde made you breakfast. Are you hungry?" Trowa asked and that stubborn pout almost made him want to burst out laughing.

"If it's the same stuff, no. I hate it." Quatre grumbled and Trowa did laugh now.

"That's what Hilde suspected. I had her make you some oatmeal instead." Trowa said and Quatre looked up with a start.

"What's oatmeal?"

"You'll have to try it to see if you like it." Trowa said going to push the chair towards the table. Quatre's hands seized the wheels.

"I can do it. Please let me, Tatlock thinks I'm a baby and I cannot do anything for myself." Quatre said and Trowa stepped back. Liking the fact Quatre was rather assertive, as any NORMAL, HEALTHY young man would be in a situation like this. Trowa knew he'd not want to be coddled like an infant had the circumstances been reversed. So he would not coddle Quatre. Quatre smiled in gratitude and wheeled himself over to the table.

"Oh my goodness, it smells WONDERFUL!" Quatre gasped diving for the spoon. Trowa chuckled pulling up a chair beside his new charge.

"Well eat up before it gets cold. It's nasty cold." Trowa said and Quatre took a tentative first taste. Licking perfectly shaped pink lips, and closing his eyes in ecstasy. Trowa wanted to groan, that look on his face was just irresistible, not to mention causing Trowa to have powerfully sinful thoughts.

"Oh Trowa! Thank you!" Quatre said, with a sudden burst of tears in his eyes. Trowa sat bolt upright. It was just oatmeal... how much had Quatre been deprived if oatmeal made him cry?

"You're welcome Quatre. And please don't cry, just eat." Trowa said wiping tears away with his fingertips.

Quatre sighed, and leaned into the touch briefly before succumbing to hunger and devouring nearly all of his meal. Forcing down the last few bites, eating for taste alone at that point.

"Don't force it Quatre, you'll make yourself sick to the stomach. Hilde packed it with spices and you're not used to it. Besides you want to save room for lunch later." Trowa said taking the nearly empty bowl and setting it back on the tray.

"Tell Hilde I loved it, please?" Quatre said and Trowa smiled.

"Would you like to tell her that?" Trowa asked and Quatre's eyes went wide.

"You mean She can come see me too?"

"No, I meant I take you downstairs for you to tell her." Trowa said and Quatre sputtered.

"I get to leave my room? Won't the spores get me?" Quatre asked and Trowa laughed.

"Quatre the only people in this house who think you are ill are Mrs. Tatlock, and your father. My father told me all about you this morning, and I believe he's right, there's nothing wrong with you that a little fresh air and company won't cure." Trowa said reaching up to ruffle golden locks.

The delighted squeal and sudden attack of arms wrapping around his waist assured Trowa he was doing the right thing after all. He had to reluctantly pry Quatre loose as he moved to his wardrobe.

Which was bare of anything even remotely resembling proper attire, it was one nightshirt after another.

"Damn. I need to go find some clothes for you Quatre. Duo's a bit taller than you, but he's the closest to your size. I'll be back." Trowa said and Quatre looked half scared, half hopeful.

"You'll promise to come back?" Quatre asked, fear in his voice. Trowa's heart broke.

"I promise Quatre." He said leaning down to hug slender shoulders. Quatre's arms holding back unabashedly, having never learned it was "wrong" for men to hug one another. And Quatre was so starved for affection; Trowa would defy God if he had to in order to comfort Quatre. Be it with a tender hug, a simple meal, or whatever Quatre desired.

Trowa was going to see Quatre got it, that smile alone on Quatre's face worth hell and damnation to achieve.

Quatre had been beautiful in sorrow; he was positively radiant when filled with joy. So Trowa hurried to find clothes from Duo to dress Quatre for his first day out of his room in eighteen years.

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Everyone was waiting in the kitchen for Trowa. Duo having pulled out his Sunday best without blinking an eye to give Trowa when he was told they were for Quatre. Everyone was just dying to meet him so they all gathered to wait on pins and needles. Only Duo followed Trowa up to help get Quatre downstairs.

Trowa would carry Quatre and Duo would lug the chair down with them so at least Quatre would be mobile once he was down on the main floor.

Quatre looked quite handsome in Duo's blue breeches and loose white shirt. Trowa having to bite his lip and think horrible thoughts to contain his infuriating lust while dressing his secret crush. It would not do and Trowa was highly annoyed with himself for even thinking such sinful things about Quatre. Trowa vowed to himself he would never cross the line, no matter how much he was falling in love with Quatre, he would never break his trust by taking it too far.

Quatre needed comfort; he did not need some leech drooling all over him. And right now, Trowa's thoughts were lecherous indeed as he slid sky-blue breeches over slender hips. He did note however; there was absolutely nothing visibly wrong with Quatre's legs. In fact they were perfect. Perhaps Hilde was right and the wheelchair was simply due to the fact Quatre had never learned HOW to walk. Not that he couldn't, he just didn't know how to start. The muscles were a bit small, but simply from lack of use, it didn't take very long to build up muscles, Quatre's walking lessons would begin today too if Trowa had any say in the matter.

And technically he did, he had been left in charge of Quatre's care taking after all. He smirked as he picked up Quatre.

"Ready to make your debut Quatre?" He asked as Quatre's arms wrapped around his neck.

"More than ready. Thank you so much Trowa." Quatre said bestowing a huge smile upon him before grateful lips pressed against his cheek.

It was going to be eternally difficult to keep himself in check if Quatre continued that behavior much longer.

But Trowa was not about to complain in the slightest.

"You look like your father." Quatre said switching gears. Trowa sighed with relief.

"So I've been told." Trowa said smiling back at the boy in his arms as they headed out the door. Duo was already at the bottom of the stairs with the chair waiting for them to descend.

"I can't tell ya, how glad we are to see you master Quatre." Duo said grinning at the boy as Trowa set him in his chair.

"Not as glad as I am." Quatre said smiling up at Duo. "Nice to see you got the manure out of your hair." He added and Duo sputtered.

"How did you know about that?" Duo asked and Quatre sparkled as he laughed.

"I heard Heero and Wufei planning it after you put pudding in their pillows." Quatre said and Duo cackled.

"What other secrets do you know hummmmm?" Duo asked as they headed for the kitchen. Quatre allowing Trowa to push him the distance so he wouldn't tire.

"You don't want to know." Quatre said, an evil little smirk forming on his lips.

"Aw man, you're wicked. I LOVE IT! I just knew you weren't like they said all sickly and everything. And not dumb either, Bitchlock, I swear if she dares lock you up again after this, I'm gonna slap her silly. It's stupid." Duo said as they crossed the main hall toward the kitchen.

"I hope not either." Quatre sighed looking up at Trowa.

"We'll do all we can Quatre to keep you out in the open, I promise." Trowa said, and meant every word he spoke. He'd move heaven and earth to keep Quatre happy, nothing was as beautiful to behold than that smiling visage.

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Quatre felt overwhelmed, but gloriously so. All the servants were so very nice towards him, and he couldn't help bursting into tears as Sally, Hilde, and Catherine fussed over him like elder sisters.

"He's just so skinny. For lunch I think tea sandwiches with extra butter and thick cream tea. Then a special trifle pudding I think." Sally said sizing up Quatre with her deep blue eyes and engaging smile.

"I agree, and I need his measurements. I'll make him something that will fit better than Duo's trousers. And he needs a hair cut too, his bangs are hiding his eyes, and such pretty eyes you have too Master Winner." Catherine said brushing his hair with her fingers.

"I'm making an apple pie, I'll make sure to save you piece Master Quatre." Hilde said and that was the final straw and the happy water works began.

"Oh, oh don't cry please Master Quatre!" All three girls began muttering in alarm dabbing at his eyes with aprons.

"I can't help it, you're all so wonderful. I feel like I've died and gone to heaven." Quatre sobbed as a strong hand encased his shoulder and squeezed tenderly. Without thinking, Quatre just rested his cheek against the back of Trowa's hand and rubbed and nuzzled his cheek against the warm comfort.

"Thank you Trowa." Came the whisper and three girls snickered and looked at Trowa's face. Where he stood, Quatre couldn't see his face, but the other's could, and his softened featured belied his deeper feelings for his charge.

"Be careful Master Quatre, I think Mr. Barton here likes your affections." Sally said smirking up at Trowa where she squatted by Quatre's side. Running almost motherly fingers through Quatre's hair.

Quatre blushed and looked up shyly Trowa smiled reassuringly. "It's all right Quatre. Sally's right, I do like seeing you happy like this." Trowa said and Quatre closed his eyes with a sigh. Trowa took that opportunity to glare daggers at Sally. She chuckled.

"Right, like father like son. Stick in the mud. All the more reason to tease I say." Sally said standing and brushing off her skirts. "Well seeing as Bitchlock and Gloomy Bloomy are gone, taking my poor sod Wufei with them, it's just us, and they left you in charge Trowa. What are we to do?" Sally asked grinning.

"I think it's Master Quatre's call. What would you like to do your lordship?" Trowa asked and Quatre smiled.

"Just call me Quatre please for starters." He said shyly and Trowa nodded.

"All right Quatre. What do you want to do?" Trowa asked and Quatre grinned.

"Are any of the roses in bloom yet? I can almost see one of the bushes from my window, I always wanted to see one up close and smell it." Quatre said and Catherine tried to stifle the whimper. Quatre's simple pleasures really struck a tender chord with them all.

"I'm sorry Quatre, it's too early yet. There are only buds on the bushes. I can take you to the garden if you like and show you others flowers that are blooming now instead if you'd like." Trowa said and Quatre nodded eagerly.

"OH! Picnic in the garden Trowa?" Catherine perked with a wink and Trowa nodded.

"Sounds good to me. I think we all could stand to entertain Quatre today." Trowa said and Duo cackled.

"It's day off mid-week! Whoo-hoo! Let's hear it for Quatre!" He chortled getting Quatre laughing and blushing in his chair.

Heero smiled and leaned over holding out his hand to Quatre. "It is a pleasure to see you, it really is. We were all curious about you." Heero said and Quatre shyly shook his hand.

"I always wanted to be among you. Watching you from my window and all, I hope you don't mind me spying on you." Quatre said and it was Duo's turn to comfort.

"Not a bit Quatre. What else could you do? I'm just glad you got a chance to do that." Duo said and Heero snorted.

"And that you could still want to be in Duo's company after seeing the idiot in action." Heero added.

"Hey! Kiss my ass Yuy."

Quatre just laughed. Trowa smiled and cleared his throat. "Right, Duo, Heero. I'll need your help here. Hilde mentioned something this morning that has me thinking. Quatre is there anything wrong with your legs that you know of?" Trowa asked and Quatre shook his head.

"Other than I don't know what to do with them half the time, no. They aren't very strong Mrs. Tatlock says cause I'm sick." He said and Trowa snorted.

"Not very strong cause you never use them more like. Duo, take his chair to the garden please? Heero grab an arm with me, it's time Quatre learns to use these legs of his. We can carry him if he gets too tired." Trowa said and Heero nodded smiling. Duo whooped diving for the chair and Quatre held his breath as two men took an arm each and draped it over their shoulders.

"Okay now, we'll get you in a standing position, Duo will move the chair and we'll see how you fair standing first. We won't let you fall, but we have to see how much weight you can hold up on your own. All right Quatre?" Trowa asked and Quatre nodded chewing his bottom lip as they lifted him upright, onto nervous and shaky legs.

Duo moved the chair as small pink feet rested on cool kitchen tile. Quatre shivered. "The floor is cold." He said and Trowa chuckled.

"Yes, it is, all the more reason to walk to the warm ground outside under the sun. Now get ready, Heero and I are going to let go for just a moment so we can see if you can stand on your own. Don't be scared, we won't let you fall. But I believe you can do it, believe in yourself Quatre." Trowa said as he and Heero let Quatre take his own weight.

He stood wobbling; looking terrified but determined, "It hurts." Quatre said biting his lips, but standing.

"It will, your muscles aren't used to it, but you're standing Quatre, all by yourself. It won't hurt once you get used to it. But you will be sore for a while, but that's nothing an Epsom salt bath and a good massage won't cure after the fact. Are you getting tired yet? Can you continue or do you want me to carry you to the garden?" Trowa asked and Quatre shook his head, almost losing balance. Trowa was there to steady him and grateful, teary eyes gazed up at him.

"My, you're tall. And I want to try more, even if it hurts. I want to walk like a normal person." Quatre said and Trowa nodded.

"Then walk you shall, Heero if you please..." Trowa said and Heero was back supporting Quatre's opposite side.

"You use us for support Quatre, you will need it at first. When you're ready, take one foot and put it in front of you then lean on it, while you move your other foot. Understand?" Trowa asked and Quatre nodded and kicked out his right foot forward. Then grunted as he gripped Trowa's and Heero's shoulders leaning forward.

"Oh god, it hurts. But I can do it!" Quatre said fiercely, bringing his other foot up to stand again.

"Someone just took his very first step. Congratulations Quatre." Trowa said and Quatre stood crying and laughing simultaneously.

"AGAIN!" Quatre wailed gripping shoulders and throwing out another foot. The pain burned his legs, but it was worth it, he was using limbs he thought he'd never be able to use.

"Don't over do it Quatre." Trowa cautioned as Quatre sobbed in pain, but continued.

"Please, I want to." Quatre gasped, his knees finally buckling under him on the fourth step, Trowa catching him up with ease and lifting him up in strong arms.

"I know you do, you have a lot of fire in you Quatre, and that's a very good thing. But these muscles are new to you, and will take time to build up. Rest for a bit, and we'll walk again in a few hours okay?" Trowa asked and Quatre still crying from pain and accomplishment nodded burying his head in Trowa's shoulder. Trowa rubbed his cheek gently atop Quatre head then proceeded to carry him out to the garden.

Heero felt Catherine's arms wrap around his waist and she buried her tears in his back. He smiled and patted her hands where they rested against his stomach. "You're so soft Cathy." He muttered and she sniffled in his back.

"I don't see dry cheeks on you either Heero Yuy. That was the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. He's exactly what master Quatre needed, I only hope it lasts." She said and Heero nodded.

"I do too Cathy, I do too. We have two weeks, let's just pray for more miracles like the one we all just saw today. God's sent Quatre a guardian Angel named Trowa a fool can see a higher power at work here. Even if they can't see it, I can. Look at their eyes, it's all right there." Heero said and Catherine nodded.

"I did see that. I mean Quatre was happy to see us all, but he didn't look at any of us the way he looks at Trowa. And an idiot could tell that mask Trowa wears is cracking under pressure. I think it's divine, and damn Bitchlock to hell if she tries to shatter this when she gets back." Catherine cursed and Heero turned and kissed her lightly.

"I'll remind you later you said that. Now, we've got a picnic to get ready, what can I carry over for you ladies?" Heero asked as Sally and Hilde flew threw the kitchen grabbing unused picnic gear and loading up Heero's arms. With a grunt Heero shouldered his burdens and followed in the wake of Trowa and Quatre towards the garden.

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The afternoon was blissfully and unseasonably warm as everyone descended into the garden for the day. Trowa pushed Quatre around in his chair showing him the various beds of flowers and plant life.

Quatre spotted a small area that looked newly tilled. "What's going in there?" Quatre asked and Trowa smiled.

"Peonies, they are a late spring, early summer blooms. They were my mother's favorite. Would you like to plant this bed Quatre?" Trowa asked and Quatre nodded eagerly.

Trowa pulled off his shirt and laid it on the back of Quatre's chair then said "Lift" and Quatre raised his arms, as he pulled off Quatre's shirt. "No sense in us getting our clothes filthy too. Now come here." Trowa said helping Quatre out of his chair, but allowing Quatre to do most of the work by himself.

Once settled on the ground, Trowa handed Quatre a small hand rake. "Make some rows to put the seeds in with this." He said and Quatre, still smiling brightly, did as told.

Duo nudged Hilde "Pssst, hey look over here guys." He said spying Trowa and Quatre half undressed and planting seeds in a small patch of earth.

"Oh god, that's sooo romantic." Hilde purred as she peeked over the hedge to spy on Quatre for a change.

"No fair, Wufei is with Bitchlock. I want a snuggle too." Sally playfully pouted and Duo hooked an arm over her shoulders and pulled her into his arms with Hilde.

"More than enough of me to go around. Now shhhh, they'll hear us." Duo said as everyone sat dreamily behind the bush and watched.

Trowa took Quatre's hands and poured some seeds from a small bag into them. "Now place them about an inch or two apart, like this." Trowa said demonstrating with a couple. Quatre nodded and leaned forward and began placing his seeds. Biting his bottom lip in concentration as he tried not to over balance himself on his knees. As Quatre lay the seeds Trowa smoothed the dirt over with his hands, patting the earth gently to settle the seeds in place.

Quatre watched Trowa's hands, they were large and weathered, he'd been working in the earth with them for a long time, he could tell. They were beautiful strong hands, and Quatre fell into almost a trance as he watched long fingers follow his path of seeds.

Quatre lost concentration on his balance and fell forward, but he never hit the ground, he fell into the strong arms. "Whoa, I think you're tired now. We'll stop and rest a while." Trowa said softly, shifting Quatre in his arms and laying Quatre's head in his lap. "Take a nap Quatre. We'll eat when you wake up." Trowa said softly and Quatre smiled up at him and without thinking, just reacting as his heart told him to, Quatre reached up and laid his hand on Trowa's cheek.

"So beautiful." Quatre said through a yawn and Trowa's eyes widened momentarily.

"Quatre, don't. You have no idea what you're doing." Trowa replied with his voice tinged with regret.

"Don't I? I know more than you think I do." Quatre said, the tone of his voice almost husky in the heat of the afternoon. Trowa's mind swam in a fog of confusion and want.

"Kiss him, kiss him, kiss him!" Sally chanted softly in the bushes.

"Yeah Trowa, go for it man." Duo quietly urged. But Trowa let them all down.

"Well let's give it time then and make sure you really do understand and are not mistaking these feelings for something else. Sleep Quatre." Trowa said rubbing a smudge off Quatre's cheek.

"I'm not mistaken. I love you." Quatre sighed closing his eyes and reveling in the joy Trowa had brought to him this day. He could wait forever, so long as he had Trowa near, the world was beautiful.

Trowa wanted to weep, and he waited until Quatre was asleep before leaning over and whispering "God help me Quatre. I love you too."

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Quatre didn't sleep long, only an hour or so, and Sally awakened him with a gentle nudge "It's lunch time. I have cucumber sandwiches and tea for you Quatre." She said helping him sit up.

"Where's Trowa?" He asked rubbing sleep out of his eyes.

"He's helping Duo and Heero carry over the table so we can eat. He's not left you love." Sally said and Quatre sighed and blushed.

"Do you think he likes me?" He whispered in query and Sally laughed.

"Oh love, he more than likes you. All of us can tell he loves you, never you fear." She said tucking blonde hair behind Quatre's ears.

"You think so? Really? It's not wrong is it? I mean the doctors that come tell me I'm not normal, and it's because I'm sick I like boys more." Quatre said and Sally wanted to vomit, she was now livid.

"What did the doctor's tell you?" She asked making sure she heard right.

"Well, when I was about fifteen, I was reading a really good book about this knight who came and helped a mercenary Woman in battle, and they were both so strong, and they fell in love, and it was really good. And I began dreaming about BEING that soldier who fell in love with the knight and not the lady. I told Mrs. Tatlock about it, and the next time the doctors came, they told me it was wrong to like other boys and not girls. Among other things." Quatre said glossing over the 'among other things'.

Sally was more than livid and she took Quatre's face in her hands. "Listen to me Quatre. There is nothing wrong with you. Love is beautiful, in all forms and love is never wrong to feel. So you love whomever you want to, whomever your heart tells you to love." Sally said and Quatre smiled and fell into her protective embrace.

"You need to tell Trowa about the doctors Quatre. I think it's something he needs to know." She added and Quatre nodded as Trowa reappeared.

"Good afternoon sleepy eyes. You look rested." Trowa began and Quatre nodded. "Good. Now you're getting a little pink in the sun here, let me put this ointment on your back and shoulders so you don't burn." Trowa said still shirtless, as were Duo and Heero now for that matter as they all basked in the warm spring afternoon. Trowa dropped to his knees behind Quatre and began to smooth the cool cream across back, neck and shoulders. Quatre almost purred it felt so good.

When Trowa reached his chest, Quatre did purr and he felt Trowa's hands begin to tremble. "Please don't stop Trowa, it feels nice." Quatre said and Trowa swallowed deeply, getting the task done as innocently and as quickly as possible.

Once complete he helped Quatre settle on the bench at the table as the girls served up the tea and sandwiches.

Quatre looked at his plate "How do I eat this? Am I supposed to it? They look too pretty to be food." Quatre asked poking his small finger sandwich with his finger. Sally laughed and picked it up.

"Open wide." She said and Quatre did, placing the sandwich between his lips. "Now just bite it and chew." She said and Quatre obeyed like a child.

Again that look of near orgasmic joy crossed Quatre's features, and everyone felt swept into the moment and just watched the simple pleasures in life make their golden master glow with almost a heavenly fire.

"Damn, did he react like that a breakfast?" Hilde asked and Trowa nodded still smiling at Quatre.

"Wow, talk about making me feel good about my cooking." Hilde said laughing and leaning over to hug Quatre's shoulders. "You make sure as you try new things to tell me the things you like the very best okay Quatre? That way I'll know what treats to slip you when Bitchlock isn't looking." She said and Quatre nodded eagerly.

"I really like these. What did you call them?" He asked and Hilde smirked.

"Cucumber and tomato sandwiches. Sally made those. That's cream tea in your cup."

"I love these. Breakfast was really good too, but these I like even more. Thank you so much." Quatre said getting misty again.

"Ah, ah. Ah. No tears Quatre. Just enjoy the moment and eat up, there's plenty more to come yet." Trowa said smiling down upon the glorious young man so full of life and joy by his side.

Trowa wanted to show him the world, just so he could selfishly live vicariously through Quatre and see the world again through fresh and un-jaded eyes.

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That evening, after a supper of beef stew and vegetables and fresh baked bread, Quatre could barely move he was so full and exhausted from his day. He was half asleep in his bowl when he felt Trowa move to pick him up. "Someone is dead on his feet methinks. There's always tomorrow Quatre, I can hear your bed calling you." He said and Quatre yawned and chuckled.

"I am exhausted. Today was the best day of my life." Quatre said sinking into those arms as he was carried back to his bedroom.

"Then I am just going to have to make tomorrow even better." Trowa said setting Quatre down on his covers then moving to unbutton Quatre's shirt. Removing it, he then moved to the breeches. And again thinking ugly thoughts to distract himself, he removed them as well. Then lifting Quatre's tired legs up into bed and he pulled the covers up over him.

"Trowa?"

"Yes Quatre?" Trowa asked sitting down on the edge of the bed before leaning over to blow out the candle that lit the room. Plunging them into darkness.

"Do you have to go? Will you stay?" Quatre asked and Trowa's mouth went dry.

"I'm not going anywhere, I'll be here in the morning." Trowa said and he heard Quatre chuckle and then light airy fingers reach up to touch his face in the darkness.

"That's not what I meant. I want to hold you like you held me today. I can only do that here. Will you stay with me tonight? Will you let me hold you?" Quatre asked and Trowa's

more agreeable voice inside was doing somersaults of joy inside. His rational side however was saying no, he'd better not, Quatre wasn't like him, he was just confusing gratefulness with love.

"Quatre, I don't think I should."

"I see, the doctors were right then. I understand. I won't ask again."

Trowa's mind screeched to a halt. "What do you mean the Doctor's were right?"

"Nothing, it's nothing."

"Tell me please Quatre." Trowa urged moving closer and running fingers through soft hair in the darkness.

"That's it's wrong for me to like other boys like I do. It's because I'm sick in the head and possessed by the devil they say."

That was it. Trowa leaned over and pulled Quatre into his arms. "Don't ever think that Quatre. They were wrong. Horribly mistaken in fact. You think I'm normal right?" Trowa asked and He felt Quatre nod against his chest.

"And so are you then." Trowa said closing the gap and claiming Quatre's lips in a tender kiss. A kiss that brought Trowa to his spiritual knees with longing and Quatre to feel ten feet tall as he drank in Trowa's kiss.

"It's not that I do not want to stay with you Quatre. I fear I will not be able to control myself being so close to you. I refuse to compromise your bettering health with my lust. I want you; I want you more than you know. But right now is much too soon, do you understand now Quatre why I say no?" Trowa asked and Quatre smiled and held tight.

"I do. I can't help loving you more for that either. You care about me, no one ever cared about me before." Quatre said as Trowa pushed him gently back into his pillows.

"I do care, very much Quatre. Now sleep, and ring the bell here when you wake up and I'll bring your breakfast. I want you to sleep in late if you can, you did work very hard today and you need your sleep." Trowa said planting another kiss on those welcoming lips before rising.

"Goodnight Quatre." He said once more from the door before shutting it behind him.

"Goodnight, Brave Knight." Quatre said almost giggling as he finally had a face to give the knight of his dreams and favorite book.

He was tall, with defiant auburn brown locks that fell forward and shaded a sharp, angular and stunning face, and emeralds eyes, far more precious than the jewels they resembled. And his Knight's name was Trowa Barton.

Quatre sighed and snuggled into his covers, a blissful smile clinging to his lips as his dreams began and sleep pulled her shroud over his exhausted body.

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Trowa wandered back down the hall in a daze, he'd just kissed Quatre. He could die right there on the spot and die happy. He was so wrapped up in the haze he didn't hear the snickering from behind him at first.

"Soooooooooooo, Mr. Barton you look like you've found a cloud with a silver lining. Did you kiss him at least goodnight?" Sally said oozing out of the shadows with a smirk on her face.

"That obvious?" Trowa said turning and leaning up against the wall to face her.

"It's written all over your face." Sally said with a chuckle, plopping herself down on the stairs.

"I feel like a fool Sally. I have never in my life been so... so... at a loss for lack of a better word." He said sitting down beside her.

"That's love for you handsome. It hits you blind side like a brick when you least expect it to." She said grinning.

"I've heard that before, I never believed it. Until now that is. It was like the minute I saw him from my window, I just knew I had to be there for him. Stupid huh? To base everything on one five second view." Trowa said turning confused eyes to the woman beside him.

"Not stupid at all. Your heart will override your common sense every time. When everything around you seems normal and routine, love will come along and turn all of that into chaos in the blink of an eye. Making everything you value become meaningless and worth casting aside if just one more time you can hold the one you love." Sally said patting his hand.

"I think you may need him more than he needs you. How long have you been lonely Trowa?" Sally asked and Trowa gave her a weak smile.

"Always. It's not like my choices in life are commonplace. And where I came from, let's just say it would have never been tolerated, let alone condoned. It's one of the reasons I left. I knew I'd rather be lonely with at least some chance of happiness, than lonely with absolutely none. I never in a million years expected to find Quatre. I really didn't." Trowa said and Sally smiled and laid her arm across Trowa's shoulders.

"That's why it hit you so hard. You didn't expect it." She quipped like it was the cosmic answer to the meaning of the universe. And he was a fool not to have figured at least that much out.

"He loves you, and I don't think he's mistaking it for gratitude. I know you're worried about that." She added and Trowa wondered how she could read his mind so well.

"I have to be sure Sally. I'd hate for him to realize later on down the road he could have done better than I."

"Now, you're just selling yourself short Trowa Barton. That you get from your father, and I've known him since I was a little girl, so I know and I can tell. Both of you are far too ready to sacrifice your own happiness for someone you care about because you don't think you're good enough. Well guess what Barton; life will pass you by if you don't stop thinking poorly of yourself. Because until you accept the fact that someone CAN love you, you'll never be happy." Sally said brushing Trowa's hair out of his face.

"I know you may not want to hear this, but you realize your father has been all alone all this time? Not once did he believe he could love again and he shut himself away from the world. Don't turn into your father; it's okay to just be you. Trust me, you'll be loved just the way you are." She said kissing his cheek and rising. "You're hard not to love Trowa. You may wear a frown most of the time on that face, but I don't need my eyes to see how big your heart is, and that is a beautiful thing indeed. Now march your ass back to Quatre right now mister. I can guarantee he's going to need you tonight." Sally said and Trowa cocked an eyebrow.

"Come again?"

"He ate a lot of new foods today, think about it."

"Oh Christ, that's right. Thanks Sally, I forgot about that." Trowa said leaping to his feet and kissing her cheek.

"Anytime Trowa. I put fresh linens just outside his room in the closet. And there are plenty of towels just in case there's an accident along the way." She said and Trowa grimaced.

"I hope not. He'll be mortified if there is, I know I would be in his shoes."

"Precisely. You'll understand, and he'll need that." Sally said heading down the stairs. "Goodnight Trowa. See you in the morning." She said disappearing downstairs as Trowa did an about face and headed back to Quatre's room.

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Quatre heard his door open again and raised his head from the pillow. "Trowa?" He asked groggily.

"Aye, it me. Go back to sleep." Trowa said softly settling in a chair.

"Wha-what are you doing over there in the dark?" Quatre asked.

"Taking off my boots. I need to keep an eye on you tonight. I forgot you ate a lot of new food today Quatre. You might get sick during the night. I need to be here." Trowa said and Quatre heard his boots hit the floor.

"Bad sick?"

"Probably. You'll live though, it's not fatal, just rather annoying. Nothing to worry about, it may not even happen. I'm here just in case it does." Trowa said and Quatre felt the bed dip and a warm body dressed only in breeches lay down beside him.

If Quatre had been able to dance, he would have been waltzing across the room. He turned and couldn't help but reach out to pull him closer to hold. "I want to hold you, may I?" Quatre asked and He heard Trowa chuckle.

"I cannot deny you anything." Trowa said feeling slender arms wrap around his neck and a head move to use his chest as a pillow.

A contented sigh escaped Quatre's lips as he melted into the warmth that lay beside him.

"Your skin is soft." Quatre said rubbing his cheek lightly against firm muscles.

"Quatre..."

"Hm?"

"Go to sleep. You'll drive me mad if you don't. It's bad enough just having you this close. It is taking every ounce of will power I have just to lay with you and not do more. Please don't tempt me." Trowa groaned and he heard stifled laughter.

"Quatre..."

"I'm sorry. I'll behave."

"You'd better."

"Is that a threat?"

"Yes."

"What will you do to me if I'm naughty?"

"QUATRE!"

"Sorry."

"No you're not."

"Goodnight Trowa."

"Goodnight Wolf in sheep's clothing. You don't fool me Quatre. You're the devil in disguise."

"Do I get punished now?"

"That's it, I'm sleeping in the chair."

"Why aren't you getting up then?"

"Damn it, you're a test. I'll win this battle yet. Go to sleep Quatre."

"I'm not tired anymore. But I will cease teasing you." Quatre said moving up to kiss Trowa's cheek. "I do love you. Thank you so much for coming here, I've never been happier."

Trowa rolled onto his side and wrapped arms around Quatre and settled deeper into the mattress, kissing Quatre's forehead lovingly. "I love you too. I've never been happier either." Trowa said and Quatre melted into his arms and soon both drifted to sleep.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Morning broke gray and foreboding and rain pattered and pelted against the windowpane but Quatre thankfully was at last back asleep. They'd been awakened around three am, when the cramps hit Quatre and it was a mad dash to the garterobe. True to Trowa's prediction, Quatre had been mortified. It took several hours and several more visits to the privy for Quatre to realize Trowa wasn't sickened and didn't love Quatre any less from an upset digestive system. Nor by the fact Trowa was the one who had to carry him to and from the privy and help with the more distasteful aspects of the aftermath.

Sally had brought up some bicarbonate of soda and it had seemed to assuage the symptoms and Quatre had finally been able to go back to sleep. Trowa however was still too alert and listening for any signs of distress to find repose himself, so he disengaged himself from Quatre, planting a tender kiss to a bare shoulder before tucking him in and going over to Quatre's book case.

To say Quatre had diverse tastes was an understatement, and Trowa was thoroughly pleased. It appeared they did share at least this in common. Quatre had books ranging from science textbooks to beautiful art books, to poetry, to... well, well, well, torrid romance novels tucked under rhetoric and prose. Trowa chuckled and tucked the illicit copy, which was well worn, back into its hiding place. And continued his exploration of Quatre's room.

It was in the next bookcase Trowa lost his breath, and just stood in awe. Upon every shelf lay a figurine of sorts made from paraffin. All a riot of motley hues as if Quatre had taken the drippings from his candles in order to sculpt them. And there were no tool lines, each figure was obviously pressed together using nothing but delicate warm fingers. The heat from Quatre's hands softening the wax to mold, and upon closer inspection, Trowa picked out each household servant the figurine represented.

There was Duo with his braid looking like it was blowing in the wind, beside him was Hilde making an adorable matched set. Then there was Sally and Wufei, looking like they were arguing with one another; it was a perfect capture of personality. Next came Heero and Catherine, a mismatched set that worked oh so well together. Catherine's vivaciousness, and Heero's silent brooding, together they stood hand in hand overlooking something only the sculptor could see in his imagination as he created the figurines.

Next came almost a full sized bust, replete with glorious detail. This was of his father, and the sadness in his features made Trowa want to weep it looked so real.

"That one is my favorite. I tried to capture his sorrow in hopes I could keep it locked away in here with me. It didn't work, but I tried." Came Quatre's soft tenor and Trowa turned carrying the bust over to the artist.

"Thank you for trying Quatre. But I'm afraid it will take more than wishes. This is beautiful, it looks exactly like him." Trowa said setting the bust down on the nightstand reverently.

"I always wondered what he would have looked like younger. Now I know." Quatre said tracing the curve of Trowa's cheekbone with his finger. "It is amazing how much you look like your father. All the same except the color of your eyes. You have such wonderful eyes." Quatre said with a sigh.

"My mother had green eyes." Trowa said laying a kiss to Quatre's palm then clutching his hand in his lap.

"I never knew my mother, she died giving birth to me." Quatre said and Trowa sighed.

"Mine too. That is why my father looks so sad. He wasn't allowed to marry my mother, and was sent away before she could have me. He lost us both; I am a part of that sorrow he bears. He was a part of mine. When I got word he had been traced here, I left home to find him. I found much more than I bargained for." Trowa said smiling down at the young man who lay before him.

His hair a wild mop of sunshine, splayed haphazardly across the pillows, his pink skin still flushed from the day before, his lips full and inviting, with eyes like the wide open skies, deep, caring, and searching.

Trowa fell in love all over again just looking at him. "So much more." He said leaning over to lay a gentle kiss upon perfect lips.

Quatre sighed and smiled as Trowa sat up and moved to return the bust to its shelf. "May I sculpt you? Would you mind?" Quatre asked and Trowa returned to his side and stretched out beside him.

"I'd be honored." Trowa said as they just lay there in blissful silence; listening to the rain make it's music as it fell upon the tiles of the roof and windowsill. The prevailing peace allowing both young men to drift off once more for just a little while longer. It was still quite early in the morning, and no one else in the household had even stirred from slumber yet.

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The rain lasted well into the day, so most of Quatre's day consisted of walks around the Parlor with Trowa and Heero's help. He even took one step all on his own which was quite a breakthrough and testament to Quatre's will and desire to succeed.

Trowa convinced him to show the others his wax sculptures and Quatre shyly agreed. Everyone sat looking at his or her effigies in bewilderment. They were simply astounded Quatre had made them with nothing more than candle wax and his own two hands.

When Quatre gifted them to his new friends as a thank you, there was hardly a dry eye in the house as Quatre received more hugs and kisses in one afternoon, than he had in his entire previous eighteen years.

All in all, despite the dreary day outside, the sun was shining brightly within Hardwicke Hall. Something that had not happened since the Lady Winner had passed away. She was alive and well in her son, and it seemed the house itself was celebrating the return of laughter to it's halls.

Over afternoon tea, Quatre sat at a chessboard with Trowa and Trowa was losing miserably to him. Quatre had a strategic mind like a steel trap, and Trowa fell for his bait every single time.

It was annoying, it was highly stimulating, and he was certain the little shit was cheating. Somehow.

And he still had not figured out Quatre's secret by the time Sally sauntered in and announced that playtime was over, it was dinnertime, saved by the bellow. Trowa mused as he packed up the board and helped Quatre into the dining room.

Quatre's meals throughout the day had been made with care and concern to his system and while bland to everyone else's tastes, Quatre was still in euphoric bliss. More oatmeal for breakfast, some vegetable broth and bread for lunch, and just a bit of cod grilled with lemon for dinner. All mild and harmless for his system, and all wonders to his virgin taste buds.

Not long after dinner, Quatre bid the others goodnight and retired to his bedroom with Trowa.

He wasn't sleepy, and neither was Trowa as they settled in for a quiet evening. Trowa stoked the fire in Quatre's fireplace, and set Quatre up at his table, where brilliant hands went to work on the clay Trowa had dug up from the back garden. If Quatre was good with wax, he was positive with real clay Quatre could create a miracle.

As Quatre worked, Trowa reclined in the chair by the fire with that book Quatre thought he'd had hidden. Halfway through the first chapter Trowa was almost drooling. "Jesus Christ Quatre. Where the hell did you get this book?" Trowa asked and Quatre laughed.

"Good isn't it?"

"Tawdry"

"Like I said, Good isn't it?"

"I'll say. Oh my God. Okay, this goes back on the shelf awhile. I don't need anymore ideas thank you very much." Trowa said replacing the book on the shelf and digging out a textbook on chemistry. He needed something boring and mindless to derail his overheated thoughts.

He moved to the low settee and reclined. One arm bent behind his head, the other propping the book up on his chest while he read.

"Trowa?"

"Hm?"

"Will you take your shirt off? I want to make sure I get the proportions right." Quatre asked and Trowa smiled and sat up long enough to divest himself of his shirt before leaning back down with his book.

About a half hour later Trowa felt his curiosity piqued and set the book down to go take a look at what Quatre was working on.

Trowa's eyes grew wide as he realized Quatre was sculpting him in the nude.

Last he checked he was still wearing his breeches. "Um, Quatre?"

"Yes?" Quatre asked not looking up from his work. His tongue poking out the corner of his mouth while he concentrated on his task.

"Why am I naked?" Trowa asked and Quatre laughed.

"Cause I haven't formed your legs yet, they're just sort of stuck there for now. I'm still working on your torso. Why? Do you want me to make a 'David' version of you?" Quatre asked looking up with almost a smirk on his face.

Trowa coughed. "Sorry I asked."

"I'm not. I wouldn't mind. That is if you don't."

"I don't know... I've never been turned into a piece of art before."

"You already are a work of art, I'm just replicating a God created masterpiece I like looking at." Quatre said and Trowa melted. Right there, just like the clay in Quatre's hands, he was molded and shaped and found there was absolutely nothing he wouldn't do for Quatre.

It took all of two steps for Trowa to fall to his knees and clutch Quatre to him as he wept. Sally had been right; perhaps he had needed Quatre more than Quatre needed him. He'd waited his whole life for someone to make him feel the way Quatre made him feel.

Like he was special, like he was needed, like he was loved.

Trowa clung to him tightly, burying his face in Quatre's lap where he purged all his past sorrow away in grateful tears of joy. Quatre all the while silent and smiling down upon him. His slender fingers combing Trowa's hair lightly and tracing patterns along Trowa's shoulders where they shuddered against his knees.

"I love you Quatre." Trowa sobbed and Quatre leaned over and brushed a kiss to Trowa's temple.

"I love you too." He whispered before Trowa sat up to wipe his eyes.

Trowa smiled then stood. And Quatre stared wide-eyed and jaw agape as Trowa unfastened his breeches and let them slide down his long legs and to the floor. He stood in all his unabashed glory for Quatre to see before sauntering back to his seat by the fire and stretching out languidly.

"If you show the girls this sculpture, I'll murder you." Trowa said picking up his book once more.

Quatre feverishly went back to work, fighting off drool and praying he'd finish before Trowa came to his senses and changed his mind.

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Trowa opened his eyes, when had he dozed off? And why was he naked? As the drowsiness cleared he'd figured out he'd dozed off with the Quatre's boring book, and the heat of the nearby fire. He looked over at Quatre, his head hung limp from where he sat in his chair by the table. Fast asleep with his hands still covered in clay. Trowa frowned, he'd let Trowa sleep and all the while he was stranded in that chair.

Trowa felt like a heel. He immediately got up to tend to Quatre and paused for a moment. Quatre had finished his sculpture.

"My god." Trowa breathed looking at the figure in soft clay. It was perfect; Quatre had even included the book and the sofa. "Thank you for being kind with the anatomy." Trowa muttered with a smile, gently bending down to place a kiss on downy hair before scooping him up carefully to carry to bed.

"Mmm, Trowa?" Quatre murmured as Trowa lay him down.

"Who else would it be?" Trowa asked walking over to the washbasin to get a cloth to wipe Quatre's clay coated hands with, not to mention that adorable smudge of gray mud on his nose.

"When did I fall asleep?" Quatre asked yawning, sitting up and not arguing with Trowa as Trowa washed his hands. He normally would have protested the pampering but it felt good when Trowa did it, he never made Quatre feel helpless, just loved. There was a big difference.

"I don't know. I was dozing myself a minute ago." Trowa said smiling as he swiped at Quatre's nose with the damp washcloth. Quatre smiled emitting a breathy laugh.

"I need to cover that with something, I'm not done with it yet." Quatre said and Trowa quirked and eyebrow.

"It looked done to me." Trowa said and Quatre smiled.

"Not quite yet, almost though." Quatre said leaning forward and wrapping his arms around Trowa's shoulders. "Thank you for posing for me, you're so beautiful. I'm afraid I'm not doing you justice." Quatre sighed and Trowa pulled him close and buried his lips in Quatre's hair.

"It's wonderful. You're wonderful." Trowa said suddenly realizing he was still au natural as he shivered.

"You're cold, Let me take care of you for a change, let me keep you warm." Quatre said lifting the edge of the covers. Trowa smiled.

"In a moment. Let me cover this for you first." Trowa said standing and laying a cloth gently over the table before turning back towards the bed. Where he gasped and froze in place.

In the moments while his back was turned, Quatre had divested his shirt and breeches and had tossed them to the floor. He was smiling and relaxed leaning into plush pillows and holding his arms out in welcome to Trowa.

He was divine, a porcelain china doll, a gorgeous, stunning, god in silk sheets. "Quatre... I..."

"I won't break Trowa."

"It's not that, it's just, my god you're beautiful." Trowa said drinking in the view before him. He'd seen him naked, just not like this, not when it hadn't been necessary to see him nude. This was an invitation, a vision, and being nude as well, Quatre could be in no doubt the effect he was having on Trowa.

"Quatre do you even know what you're inviting?" Trowa asked his throat parched with want.

"I told you once Trowa, I am not so naïve as you think. I may not be experienced, but I'm not unknowing if that is what you fear. I know precisely what I'm offering to you. Will you take it and my heart?" Quatre asked and Trowa crossed the floor in quick strides to slide into those arms reaching out to hold him.

"Quatre, how can you love me this much?" Trowa asked and Quatre smiled, pulling Trowa down to rest his head against a soft pink shoulder.

"How do the stars sparkle in the sky? How does the tide know when to ebb and flow? I don't know how. I just know I do. How can you love me? Can you answer that yourself?" Quatre asked and Trowa chuckled.

"No, I can't. It defies explanation." Trowa said looking up into the sublime expanse of azure pools that cast his reflection and realized he could never live a day without looking into those eyes again. Not when those eyes spoke more of love than words ever could, Trowa was home.

Quatre was his home, not this bed, not this hall, but these arms that held him, but those eyes that tolled the bell loud and clear, singing the simple truth, Quatre loved him, Trowa Barton.

Trowa rolled, pressing Quatre into the mattress, worshiping him with lips and caresses. Words no longer needed, not when two hearts beat as one. For every touch, for every breath, one gave a gift of love and the other took the offerings, only to return it ten fold.

There in the light of the dying fire, love and passion ignited, and hands dared touch plains of flesh and curves of muscle that no one dared touch before. Kisses were laid to tender skin, and tears mixed in joy and release as two souls who had never thought love possible, found each other at last.

Shyness tinged with desire tempered the flames and each found strength in the other to press forward and revel in the pleasure simple gestures of affection could create.

Fear was laid to rest in Trowa's breast as his seemingly frail lover proved looks were indeed deceiving. There was power there, in abundance, and inner strength that pushed and pleaded and desperately grasped for more.

Trowa would not let him fight too hard, just enough, then meet him halfway. And when touches were no longer enough, Trowa rolled Quatre over onto his stomach, and setting up pillows for support beneath his abdomen, just for today, for now his legs would not be strong enough to match the iron will, but not today. Today they would need help.

Kissing and comforting as he positioned Quatre, Trowa eased into the joining.

Quatre was indeed an Earth bound angel, because this was heaven on earth.

Together they soared to new heights, and together they plummeted back to earth.

Tired, elated, spent, and full of joy, they nestled together in the heat of the bed, and of their lovemaking, and found sweet repose knowing that what began this night in trepidation and in clumsy and awkward newness, would only grow more graceful and even more beautiful in time.

Tonight was only the beginning of their lives together. Both knowing with certainty and without needing to say it, that whatever happened, their not being together wasn't an option.

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Trowa woke with the dawn and smiled a lazy and sated smile. Quatre's hair splayed across his chest like a fan of gold, one arm draped over his midsection, still fast asleep.

Carefully as not to wake him, Trowa gently slid out from under his human blanket and tucked the covers securely around him. Before silently padding across the room to dress, pulling on his clothes and boots and then silently slipping out the door and down to the kitchen.

Sally was already up and the water was boiling. "Well don't we look like the cat who ate the canary this morning?" She said smirking and pouring him a cup of tea. Trowa kissed her cheek.

"Thanks to your advice, yes. Thank you, you were right." He said and she smiled.

"I'm always right. Welcome to the human race Trowa. Faults and all, it's worth it." She said as he sat at the table.

"Amen." Trowa said drinking heavily from his cup, downing the piping hot liquid in almost one gulp before standing once more with a sigh. "And as much as I'd like to sit here and tell you all you're dying to know. It looks like more rain today, and I want to get some things done out in the garden before another downpour and before Quatre wakes up. Will you listen for his bell for me?" Trowa asked as the other women filtered into the kitchen, Duo and Heero groggily in tow.

"Will do. One of us will bring him his breakfast if he rings. Then come get you." Sally said smiling again as Trowa shrugged on his jacket and headed outside.

"Trowa certainly looks perky this morning." Duo said smirking.

"And that wasn't singing I heard last night was it?" Catherine asked Sally with an evil grin.

"Oh leave them alone. It's nice to see this house alive again." Heero said tugging one of Catherine's curls in playful scolding.

"But it's so romantic. Love at first sight..." Hilde began

"Nookie the second night...OW!" Duo finished before getting smacked by Sally in the back of the head.

"Crass bugger. It's beautiful." Sally said shoving a cup of tea under Duo's nose. "And if you think for one minute I'll let you pester and tease them, you've got another thing coming." She added and Duo just grinned.

"Would I do that?"

"YES, you would." Everyone else answered in unison.

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Trowa set to move a particularly stubborn boulder, wanting to keep the peony seeds from washing away by setting up the boulder to deflect run off when Heero and Duo appeared in the garden.

"Want some help Trowa?" Heero asked and Trowa nodded.

Both men moved in to the task to help shift the rock into place.

"So Trowa?" Duo grunted. "How was it?" He asked and Trowa looked up glaring.

"HA! I knew it, that look says it all." Duo said as the rock dropped in place.

"If you embarrass Quatre..." Trowa began and Duo held up his hands.

"Whoa, no way. I promise. We all think it's wonderful, really. I'm just poking fun at ya." Duo said and Trowa sighed.

"Thanks, I know it's a strange turn of events, It's as unexpected to me, as it is to you believe me. But thank you for the support. I may need it." Trowa said looking upset.

"It's Bitchlock you're worried about huh?" Duo asked and Trowa nodded.

"Quatre is the lord here don't forget." Heero said at last. "Despite what Tatlock thinks, does, or says. When Lord Winner is away, Quatre is eighteen, by law he is lord here in his father's stead. With our support under him, I know he'll find the courage to stand up to

her. He just needs to know he has us to catch him when he falls, and that Tatlock isn't the only one here who can. So to speak." Heero said looking at Trowa.

"You're right, and I know Quatre will, he's a lot stronger than anyone of us gave him credit for initially." Trowa said smiling with no little pride.

"Fuck me, a lot more Tro. I was expecting a...well, a shriveled corpse basically. Dumb, blind, and drooling on himself type stuff. Quatre's not sick, just got some under used muscles big deal. That can be fixed in a few weeks. Hell, the king's got the clap and God know what else, and goodness knows how many other so-called lords are walking around hacking up lungs and considered 'fit'. I'm not worried about Quatre in the slightest." Duo said grinning inanely.

"Thank you both." Trowa said relieved.

"Thank you for letting us help you with Quatre. We gained from this too ya know. Friends are priceless." Duo said extending his hand to Trowa to shake.

As their hands clasped, Heero added his. "To Standing up for your friends." Heero said as all three shook.

The silence and camaraderie shattered with an ear-piercing cry of agony.
"TROOOOOOOOWWWWWA!!!!"

Trowa paled as his name was screamed in Quatre's voice. Sally came rushing out to the garden.

"Oh my God. TROWA! Hurry! I don't know when he got here; the bastard never rang the bell! The Doctor is in with Quatre and he's bolted the door!" She cried, trying to keep pace with Trowa as he bolted up the stairs two and three at a time, Duo and Heero just as angry and right on his heels.

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Quatre awoke slowly, and began to stretch languidly as he came around from his sleep. He yawned and realized then his bed was empty. Hearing movement in his room, he just sighed and snuggled back into the mattress, never opening his eyes. "Trowa? What are you doing out of a nice warm bed? Are you daft?" Quatre asked chuckling, but the voice that answered chilled him to the bone, and he sat upright with a start.

"I take it this Trowa is the person in this... this... blight to art?" The doctor asked smashing his cane down into the wet clay!

"NO! How could you?! Get out!" Quatre asked in near tears as he watched the doctor mangle and destroy the sculpture on the table.

"Not when my patient is getting worse. Now you dream phantom lovers? Worship graven images? Sin against all that is holy by your unnatural desires? Perhaps I have been too lax in my treatments. The devil is in you boy, and he must be purged!" The doctor said grabbing a now thrashing Quatre by the hair and pulling him out of bed to land with a sickening thud to the floor.

"And NAKEDNESS? Dare to tempt me now will you Satan?" The Doctor accused bringing up his cane. "BEGONE!" He said bringing the cane down with a crack against Quatre's back.

"TROOOOOOWWWWWWA!!!!!!!!!!!" Quatre cried out in agony as the doctor raised his hand to strike again.

Crack

"Release this boy from your depravity!" The doctor bellowed as the second blow fell.

Quatre crumpled into a ball weeping and screaming for Trowa.

"You want your demon lover? Is that who you call now?" The Doctor asked, spitting on Quatre in the process. Raising his hand to strike again when the door splintered from its hinges and Trowa flew through it in a rage. His eyes widening with fury as he saw HIS Quatre in a broken heap on the floor and the Doctor ready to strike.

Screaming in a blood curdling rage, Trowa lunged and slammed the Doctor to the wall. Grabbing the cane from his hand. "You like torture do you? Now feel what it's like from the other side of fear." Trowa said striking the doctor across the face with his cane in a full swing.

Blood spurted from the Doctor's nose as he cried out in terror and pain. Trowa raised his hand again "And this it to remind you, to never, EVER lay a hand on Quatre again." Trowa said with another sickening crack of bone under flesh as the rod connected.

"Devils!" The Doctor wailed curling up into a ball on the floor.

"I see only one devil in this room, and that is you. Duo, Heero, would you please take out the trash for me?" Trowa asked and Duo and Heero charged in.

"With pleasure." Duo said, an evil gleam in his eyes as he and Heero brutally dragged the doctor bodily from the room.

Trowa threw the cane across the room and with a sob gathered Quatre into his arms. "Forgive me, forgive me Quatre. I didn't know he was here, I'm so sorry." Trowa said weeping into Quatre's hair when a small hand came up to his cheek.

"I know. I know. It's not your fault. He's done this before, I'll be alright." Quatre said as Trowa picked him up and placed him in bed.

"Never again, I promise Quatre. NEVER again." Trowa said cradling Quatre like a babe to his chest.

Sally rushed in with rags. "Hurry, before he gets welts." She said laying cool rags on the red marks where the cane had struck his tender skin.

"Don't you worry love. None of us will let this happen to you ever again." Sally also promised, as Catherine hurried in with a cup.

"Drink this honey, it's got willow bark in it for the pain." She said doting on Quatre as well.

The room was now full of servants, never again would Quatre's cries go unanswered.

Now that they knew the truth, they had become united under their lord's banner, an army of friends who would never see him wronged again.

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"The boy is unfit. His health and faculties will not be able to maintain Hardwicke Hall. I suggest an allowance to provide for the boy's needs while he still lives and find a suitable and deserving caretaker to maintain the estate." Tatlock urged and Nathaniel growled.

"He is not unfit! Lord Winner, I implore you not to base your son's inheritance on the lies this woman spouts. If he is as ill and as unfit as she says he is, than she'll brook no argument with you seeing for yourself the truth." Nathaniel spoke passionately to the worn figure lying on the bed. "I have held my tongue and my suspicions for years your Lordship, I can no longer in good conscience do so when the boy's future is at stake. And a long future lies ahead of him at that." Nathaniel said as a beautiful woman in her late thirties came into the room.

"I must agree with Mr. Bloom's logic Eduard." She began to speak in a soft French accent. The widow of Eduard's brother, and the owner of the home in which he languished glided gracefully into the room and sat at her brother-in-law's beside before speaking again.

"I have these many years urged you, and begged you to see your son. This may be your last chance. My nephew deserves at least once before you die to see his own father."

"Manon!" Lord Winner barked in a bad humor.

"Nay, do not gainsay me, I am not finished. You have brought this misery on your own shoulders Eduard Winner. My dear late husband for years tried to usher you home to your responsibilities, tried without success to stop this madness; your drinking, your gambling, your debauchery, and your wandering ways. You are not the only person in the world Eduard to have lost a loved one! These seven years I have been without my Simon, do you see me wallowing in despair? Nay you do not. I have grieved, and I have shed many a tear, and it hurts, that much I can understand. But to forsake my child in the process is just not something you do Eduard Winner!" Manon said and held up her hand when Eduard tried to speak again.

"No, you will listen Eduard. You cannot run this time, and you will hear it all until you understand. What would Quaterine think of you and what you are doing to HER son? She is weeping in heaven no doubt over this. When you die, do you think she will welcome you with open arms after what you have done? You have little time Eduard to make things right. You will return home to Hardwicke Hall, you will face your demons, and you will make amends. You are no longer welcome in my home, I will not allow you repose until you make amends." Manon said standing up then turning to Mrs. Tatlock.

"And you... I agree wholeheartedly with Mr. Bloom. You are hiding something, and I too have suspected this for years. I do not know how many times I have asked, begged, and pleaded to be allowed a visit to my own nephew, only to find one excuse after another.

I cannot fathom why a boy so ill can have made it into manhood. He is eighteen as of this springtide or am I mistaken?" Manon Winner asked, her eyes icy and cold.

Mrs. Tatlock steeled her shoulders. "By the doctors I bring in to care for him he lives. And he cannot have visitor's for fear of infection."

"Horse Hockey! That boy is as healthy as an ox. No child so ill can scream so loud!" Nathaniel shouted and Manon turned her attention towards him.

"WHAT?" She demanded and Nathaniel turned to the only person here willing to fight for Quatre.

"These so called doctors, usher every servant from the house during these 'special' treatments. And even in the garden you can hear the boy scream in pain. Then we all lie in bed at night and suffer with him while he sobs. It's inhuman, and it must cease." Nathaniel said and Eduard sat up.

"He's being tortured?" Eduard asked, his voice stricken.

Nathaniel nodded. "I believe so your Lordship. I beg you end this nightmare, and return to your son. I have lived my whole life without mine, and not a day went by I did not pray to God to have him restored to me. My prayers were answered, and my son has found me. And from one father to another, there is no better joy in this life than to look into the face of your grown son and see a man you can respect and be proud to call your own. Don't lose out on that chance your Lordship." Nathaniel pleased and Eduard looked to his sister-in-law.

"He is right Eduard. Simon will never see his Jean as a man; he was only three when Simon passed. Yet those three years, even stricken, I never saw Simon happier. I beg you Eduard, go home." Manon said and Eduard nodded as he began to weep.

"Quatre, forgive me." Eduard sobbed waving everyone away from his bedside while he broke down.

Mrs. Tatlock flew down the stairs while Nathaniel and Manon lingered a moment before leaving Mr. Winner alone.

"You have done, what Simon tried to do for years. Bless you Mr. Bloom." Manon said smiling at the handsome servant.

Nathaniel smiled sadly. "It takes truth to hammer things home to stubborn men." He said just as a ten-year-old boy, came slowly around the corner. His raven locks and bright blue eyes, leaving Nathaniel no doubt, this beautiful child was Manon's son. He walked up to his mother and lost himself in her skirts.

Nathaniel bent down and smiled. "Well young lord, such a handsome young man you are. I can see your mother's influence in you. Are you having a good day sir?" Nathaniel asked and a shy smile poked around Manon's skirt.

"Aye. But my kite is stuck in a tree." He said and Nathaniel chuckled.

"That's easily fixed then lad. Come show me." Nathaniel said holding out his hand for the youngster to take.

Jean looked up at his mother who smiled. "It's all right Mon Petit, This is Mr. Bloom." Manon said smiling her thanks to Nathaniel.

Jean took Nathaniel's hand and skipped alongside him as they headed outside to retrieve a stubborn kite.

Manon smiled, he may have had a dark and gruff exterior, but Nathaniel Bloom was an old softy. Manon was not fooled for a minute; he was all bark and no bite. Not to mention quite a striking and handsome man who was ever so slowly, intriguing her. So she followed in hopes of getting a good view of one Nathaniel Bloom climb a tree.

She knew something good to look at when she saw it, and even at nearly fifty, Nathaniel Bloom was more active and spry than some men half his age.

Okay, now she was more than intrigued, she was practically drooling with sinful thoughts that she had not had since Simon had passed.

Nathaniel Bloom was a wonder. Not only had he managed to convince Eduard to return to his son, he'd sparked something in her she thought gone forever.

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Quatre spent most of that Thursday in bed being fussed over by Trowa and the others. He was heartbroken over the destruction of his sculpture and his back was throbbing from being struck so he lay there in poor spirits until Trowa snuggled up beside him.

"Looks like I'll just have to pose for you again. Or was one night of seeing me naked enough to turn you off forever?" Trowa asked kissing Quatre shoulder.

Quatre smiled and chuckled "One night will NEVER be enough." Quatre said rolling over to face Trowa who was smirking.

"Got you to smile. That's better." Trowa said snatching a kiss in the process.

"I feel better just having you here." Quatre said as a gentle tap came to the door. Duo was there.

"Guess what I found in the stables?" He asked holding his hands behind his back.

Quatre sat up as Duo walked in smiling. "What?" Quatre asked curious what Duo was hiding.

"Here." Duo said setting a basket on the bed that was covered in a small blanket that was moving.

"Mew" came the muffled sound and Quatre pulled the blanket back to see four kittens and mother lying in the basket. The around eight week old kittens bounding out onto the bed after the cover was lifted.

Quatre squealed. "Oh my God! Kittens!!!!" He cried as one scampered up onto his lap. Another into Trowa's the other two deciding to run circles around Quatre in a game of tag and pounce.

Quatre's laughter made the entire room spring to life. "They're adorable!!! You must be a proud mommy." Quatre said, turning his attention momentarily to the mother who rolled onto her back as Quatre stroked her.

"Well, I'll be damned. She never lets anyone but Hilde rub her tummy." Duo said smiling. "But then again, Hilde sneaks her milk and spoils her rotten." Duo said as the mother stretched and decided her babies were safe and thought a nap was in order. Quatre chuckled.

"I was wondering where she'd gone too. She likes to pounce on the pigeons on the window ledge. I thought she was getting fat." Quatre said and again Duo realized just how much of Quatre's world revolved around his window.

"Too fat to pounce when the Tom cat pounces you first." Duo said crudely playing with the all black kitten with the end of his braid.

Trowa had a tiger striped, black and gray fuzz ball asleep in the crook of his arm as he stroked it's belly idly, and Quatre had the black and white spotted kitten and the all white one in his lap, snuggled into his blanket like a nest while both of his hands stroked soft fur.

Quatre sighed smiling. "Have you named them yet?" He asked and Duo shook his head.

"Nope. They're Hilde's runts. She told me to show them to you, and let you decide what you wanted to do with the kittens. She said the kittens are yours if you want them." Duo said and Quatre's eyes went wide.

"Really?" He gasped and Duo nodded.

"Yup, this hair ball already takes up most of my bed thank you very much." Duo said scratching Mother behind the ears.

"I can't take all four, that's too generous. And I think that one has attached itself to Trowa already." Quatre said. However, meaning in fact Trowa had attached himself to the kitten in his arm. Trowa looked up and grinned.

"I had a cat like this one once when I was a boy. Same coloring and everything, my Uncle wouldn't let me keep it in the house, he was allergic. One of the horses in the barn trod on him by accident." Trowa said with a sigh, moving to scratch behind ears.

The spotted kitten moved to join her brother in playing with Duo's braid as the white one mewed and batted at Quatre's hand demanding more attention.

Quatre smiled "Bossy! I'm rubbing already." He said picking her up to kiss her nose.

"I'll keep this one if I may. She's my favorite." Quatre said laughing as the kitten licked his nose.

"She's all yours then. What are you gonna call her?" Duo asked and Quatre shrugged. Then smiled and looked at Trowa.

"I can think of something that fits. Bianca, it means white AND she just happens to be one of my favorite literary heroines." He said with a smirk, his eyes drifting over to the bookcase. Trowa caught the hint and chuckled.

"Well we can't have a Bianca without her Knight Sir Dudley now can we?" Trowa said with a wink.

"Okay, what am I missing here? What book is this?" Duo asked and Trowa grinned.

"I'll let you read it when I'm finished with it. Make sure you have Hilde close by just in case." Trowa said and Duo cackled.

"Oh, I get it. Quatre you have a naughty book stashed in here?"

"It's more than naughty." Quatre said grinning evilly.

"Oh man, how'd you manage to get Tatlock to get it for you?" Duo asked and Quatre looked positively wicked.

"I tucked the titles I wanted into other book lists hiding them in between requests for theology. She never knew what she bought. Tatlock can't read very well, and especially not in Latin. I studied and learned from a book with English translations. So I sent requests in Latin so Tatlock couldn't read it but the man in the book store could, and he sent more things he thought I'd like seeing my tastes after a while." Quatre said laughing.

" BRILLIANT!" Trowa said laughing brightly as his lover's very devious mind and Duo snickered.

"If only she knew, man she'd shit herself." Duo said wiping his eyes as Sally wandered into the room.

"Lunch time boys... OH the kittens!!!!" She said going over to the spotted one right away. "Miss-missed-a-spot, are you being a good girl?" Sally said playing with her favorite Quatre grinned at Duo.

"That looks like three down to me." Quatre said and Duo grinned.

"One to go... oh Caaaaaathy?" Duo called sauntering out of the room, basket in tow with one mama cat, one all black kitten and one shit eating grin on his face.

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The days passed quickly and brightly. Quatre was making almost spectacular progress, and the pain in his muscles began to recede by leaps and bounds as he worked to build them up. A week had passed and Quatre was sitting on the edge of his bed waiting for Trowa to finish his morning chores and join him for breakfast when he decided to try standing up on his own.

Trowa chose just that moment to walk into the room and he had to force himself to stay in the doorway and watch. Knowing Quatre wanted to do this on his own.

All the while he prayed silently for success, Quatre hadn't seen him yet.

He watched Quatre shoo Bianca and Dudley away from his feet as he slid closer to the edge of the bed. And on shaky but firm legs, Quatre stood.

Trowa started to cry. Then he did as Quatre did the unimaginable, he walked.

Or rather he half stumbled, half fell towards the table a few paces away. But he got there under his own power, without falling over. He was sobbing as he fell into the chair at the table Trowa rushed in and scooped him up and swung him around the room.

"YOU DID IT!" Trowa cried for joy.

"I did! I did! You saw?" Quatre asked laughing and crying and clinging to Trowa's neck.

"I saw all of it! I'm so proud of you." Trowa said setting Quatre on his feet and kissing him firmly.

Quatre laughed. "Let me go, I've got to do it again!" Quatre said and Trowa stepped back a few paces.

"Walk to me." Trowa commanded and Quatre was like a beacon of light as he shuffled across the floor to Trowa.

Gaining another kiss when he reached Trowa's arms.

Once again Trowa stepped back a few more paces.

"Come give me another kiss." Trowa commanded once more and Quatre grinned and with gaining confidence, he walked to Trowa.

They continued this out of Quatre's room and down the hall. Quatre not tiring, only getting stronger, and more assured and steady, his fear had ebbed, and the shaking leaving his limbs as the fear lost its hold on his confidence.

Sally was at the foot of the stairs when she saw Quatre and she squealed with excitement.

Everyone rushed towards the sound and all stood at the bottom of the stairs whooping and hollering encouragements as Quatre followed Trowa to the top of the stairs, walking without any assistance all along the way.

Trowa took Quatre's arm then. "Grab the rail Quatre, and hold onto me. Let's keep going." He said stepping down one level.

Quatre watching his feet gingerly took his first step down.

Success!

More confidence built, Trowa stepped down again, and Quatre followed suit.

They were halfway down the staircase when the door opened, "What's all the SHOUTING IN HERE?!?!!" Tatlock bellowed looking up with a start.

Quatre refused to be defeated and just glared at her. Then he saw who was behind her and gasped.

"Go on Son." Eduard said, leaning on Nathaniel for support in the doorway, his eyes misted with tears and a smile on his face.

Quatre began to cry but took another step. Trowa holding his hand all the way, his own eyes on Nathaniel.

Trowa had never seen anyone with as much pride as his father had right at that moment.

It seemed an eternity before Quatre had reached the ground, Eduard stumbled towards his son and crushed him in an embrace.

"Quatre forgive me. I beg you, give your father another chance?" Eduard rasped and Quatre sobbed nodding.

"Aye father. Welcome home." Quatre said weeping and Eduard began to collapse, both Trowa and Nathaniel moving in before Eduard could bring Quatre down with him.

The coughing fit arrested Lord Winner a moment, before he smiled at his son. "I am glad to be home Quatre. But not nearly so glad as I am to see you." Eduard said as Nathaniel lifted him up.

"To bed with you my Lord. It's been a long journey." He said and Quatre looked stricken.

"Father? Are you ill?" Quatre asked as a beautiful woman appeared with a small boy in the doorway.

"Aye he is Quatre. While he rests, I'll explain." She said and Quatre turned his head and quirked an eyebrow. He's seen a painting of her, but where? The parlor! This was his aunt Manon.

"Wait!" Eduard bellowed as Nathaniel tried to get him to bed.

He first turned to Mrs. Tatlock who looked horrified.

"You, you viperous woman! You are fired; you have twenty-four hours to vacate my home! I charged you to CARE for my son! Not hold him a prisoner in his own home and LIE TO ME about his health!!!!!" Eduard said in a rage. He then turned to Trowa.

"And you! Come here." Eduard Ordered and Trowa stepped forward, only to be crushed in a hug.

"From the bottom of my heart, thank you." Eduard said and Trowa shook his head.

"Do not thank me. I did nothing. Quatre did all the work. I only help him because I care about him. I do not do it for thanks, I do it because I want to." Trowa said and Eduard smiled.

"Then I pray you want to for a long time to come. I can see why your father is so proud of you." Eduard said going into another fit of coughing.

"Bed sir. No argument." Nathaniel said dragging Lord Winner to his bed.

Once Eduard left the room Trowa turned in time to see Tatlock rushing towards Quatre, Trowa dove for her and grabbed her well before she reached him.

"YOU LITTLE UNGRATEFUL CHILD! YOU SHOULD DO AS TOLD! YOU COST ME MY WHOLE LIFE AND NOW MY JOB YOU LITTLE WRETCH!" She screeched and Trowa shook her!

"Listen to yourself!? Had you cared for him as you should have and not fed him lies and made him bedridden on purpose you would never have had this happen. All of this is your doing! And I will undo your harm if it takes me a lifetime!" Trowa said shoving her forcefully into a chair.

"UNGRATEFUL! ALL OF YOU!" She sobbed.

She was mad, utterly mad and out of sorts. She shoved at Trowa and clawed, desperately trying to get to Quatre who was now protected by a wall of servants and his Aunt.

Manon stepped forward. "Mr. Barton, I think this woman needs to be restrained. Eduard is out of sorts so I am taking charge for the moment. I have reason to believe this woman is guilty of far more than Eduard would like to believe. And she does seem quite mad. Letting her leave in this state is not something I feel should be done.

Please lock her in her room, and have someone fetch a physician. I fear the asylum may be in order." Manon said almost vindictive in her manner.

She was seething with anger yet; her voice was soft and gentle.

Trowa liked the way this woman thought. A little justice was in order, even if it was only an empty threat, Mrs. Tatlock didn't know it as she screeched and wailed. The twinkle in Manon's eye was priceless.

With Heero's more than eager help, Mrs. Tatlock was locked into her room.

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Eduard Winner lay sleeping as everyone else sat in the parlor. Quatre's Aunt making sure she noted every horrible atrocity committed against her nephew on paper. She'd see Tatlock pay and the Doctor's who tortured him too for that matter.

She was a firm believer in justice and would not let people like this go unpunished.

Once she was satisfied, she began grilling Trowa for information on a more personal nature.

"If I were to offer you the job of Quatre's permanent caretaker, would you object?" She asked and Trowa coughed.

"Let me answer Trowa." Quatre said slipping his hand into Trowa's.

"Aunt Manon, Trowa's care for me, stems not from servant to master loyalty. This goes much deeper. He cares for me, as I care for him. He's not my servant, he's my lover." Quatre said bluntly and Manon's eyes widened for a moment before she began to laugh.

"Oh deary me. Well then that settles that problem of getting you to stay indefinitely Mr. Barton." She said gasping for air. "Never mind, you two carry on as is then." She said wiping a tear from her eye. "You could have saved me the trouble and told me sooner." She said looking at them both.

"You're not upset about it?" Trowa asked and She shook her head.

"Not in the slightest. Love worked a miracle here in a week. Who am I to judge divine intervention?" She said just as Nathaniel walked into the room.

He didn't look happy.

"Nate?" Manon asked and he shrugged.

"Sleeping, but not well. I fear it's too little too late. It may be a matter of days I fear. I'm sorry Quatre." Nathaniel said sitting next to Manon who lay a comforting arm around his shoulders.

Trowa cocked his head and Manon smiled softly. Quatre sniffled and leaned into Trowa.

"I'm saddened by this yes, but I can tell he's suffering. I pray when it is time, it is peaceful, I only wish I knew him. It is hard to grieve as I should, and I feel guilty about it, but he is such a stranger to me, I only wish I had time to know him as my father, and not some voice I used to hear occasionally through walls." Quatre said wiping his tears.

Manon leaned over and kissed his cheek. "Do not feel guilty Quatre, we do understand how difficult a time you'll have dealing with this. If there is blame to place, it falls upon your father's shoulders, not yours. At least for his final days, you can give him the chance to make amends. And that to him will mean more than anything." Manon comforted and Quatre sighed.

It had been a very long day.

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As expected, Eduard Winner did not last long, consumption had taken it's toll on his body, and three days after his return to Hardwicke Hall, and three days spent basking in the glow of his beautiful son, Eduard Winner peacefully passed and was laid to rest alongside his wife in the garden.

With Trowa's help, Quatre planted Rosebushes on his parent's graves and said a silent prayer that the sorrow in this life was eased and that happiness was granted to them in the afterlife. Quatre's heart forgave completely, and without reservation. He understood why his father had been the way he was, a broken heart that never mended.

He turned into the welcoming and comforting embrace of his beloved, yes; he understood exactly what his father had once felt. And how he would feel if Trowa were taken from him.

"Rest in Peace Father. Take care of him Mama, he needs you." Quatre said wiping his tears as he walked back to the house in Trowa's arms.

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"Trowa hurry up!" Quatre said bouncing around the room, dressed to resplendently in a pale blue waistcoat, vest, and, and trousers that matched his eyes.

"I'm hurrying! We won't be late." Trowa said buttoning his vest. "I have to be there, I'm the best man." Trowa grinned pulling his waistcoat on.

The late summer morning was bright and cheerful as they met an Equally dressed to kill Nathaniel down in the parlor.

All three men climbing into a rose bedecked carriage to head for the church.

"So dad, you nervous?" Trowa asked and Nathaniel groaned.

"I'm too old for this."

"Liar." Trowa said smirking and turning to look at Quatre who looked about ready to piss himself with excitement.

"My first Wedding." Quatre said grinning at Nathaniel and winking as they pulled up at the church.

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"I now pronounce you Husband and Wife. You may kiss the bride." The vicar announced and everyone stood in procession throwing coins and blossoms as Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Bloom walked through the debris to their carriage.

Quatre held Jean's hand as they waved the honeymooner's farewell.

"I just thought of something Quatre." Trowa said leaning over the top of Jean's head to whisper in Quatre's ear.

"What's that?"

"We've just become related." Trowa said with a sick chuckle as the penny dropped and Quatre's jaw along with it.

"Oh no you don't Trowa. She was my Aunt by MARRIAGE. We are NOT cousins now. You almost had me there for a second." Quatre said laughing.

"I did have you there for a second, I thought you were going to shit yourself." Trowa said laughing and taking Jean's other hand. "Let's go home. We have tons of things planned for you Jean while you're with us. Cousin Quatre thought you'd like a chance to build a tree house in the oak in the garden." Trowa said as he and Quatre took on the role of surrogate parents and guardians for a month while Nathaniel and Manon took a tour of the continent for a honeymoon.

"Tree House?! REALLY? Oh Cousin Quatre YES! WHOOPIE!" Jean laughed and Quatre smiled at Trowa.

"Can we play in it too?" Quatre asked wagging his eyebrows.

Trowa coughed. "First walking, now you want to scale trees like Tarzan. What am I going to do with you up there? Hummmmmm?"

"I can think of a few things." Quatre said grinning as they all got into their carriage and headed for home.

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The End