

Duo is an Earl's Son, thus his Rank is a courtesy rank of Baron. He is addressed as "Lord Maxwell" formally. The same rules apply to his title and use of his given name.

Wufei has no "rank" he is a scholar. He is given a courtesy nod as "The Honorable Chang Wufei" on letters and formal correspondence, party invites, etc... since he is part of Trowa's entourage. But that is only in writing on letters and such. Verbally he is Mr. Chang Wufei, even to servants. No titles are given to his name in spoken etiquette.

Eustice Wallingford: is Trowa's direct underling, his title of "Baron" was given to him by Trowa's father and his job is to oversee a part of the Marquis' land and trade. He is in today's world, "Middle Management" fodder. He is a VASSEL LORD of Trowa's after Trowa's father's death. His entire livelihood, his family's titles, privileges and lands belong to Trowa, Wallingford was given them to govern in the name of the Marquis, Trowa is his Boss in other words and has the power to take not only his lands and titles away from him, but his very life should he betray his liege Lord's honor, the Marquis of Barwyke. Trowa would address him formally as "Lord Wallingford". Informally Trowa would call him "Wallingford" to his face. There is no informality from Wallingford to Trowa. Trowa is ALWAYS "My Lord Barton", always, no exceptions if being addressed by Lord Wallingford. Trowa is "his" direct Lord and respect must always be given in the form of the possessive "My Lord". Wallingford must acknowledge that Trowa is his bread and butter and his benefactor, always and with no exceptions to this rule. Unless Trowa says he can drop the surname and just call him "my Lord". The title is NEVER dropped only the more formal use of the surname would denote familiarity between lord and vassal underling. Even if they were the very best of friends, Wallingford would never call him Trowa, it would be disrespectful.

Complicated stuff, and well I think you have the basic idea how generic historical feudal era hierarchy type stuff works for the purposes of this story.

For more Peerage Basics Visit: <http://www.chinet.com/~laura/html/titles01.html>

Quatre's title is a bit trickier, since he is a foreign dignitary of sorts.

In the Muslim world the temporal successors of Muhammad received the title "*caliph*" (literally, "successor"). Later titles for Muslim rulers were *emir* and *sultan*. Other Muslim titles include *sherif*, a hereditary title; *pasha* and *bey*, originally military titles but later given as a civilian nonhereditary honor; and *sheikh*, a title of respect variously given to tribal chiefs, heads of religious orders and colleges, and town mayors.

Quatre's father is a very wealthy Sheikh, Abraham Abu Quatre Raberba Winner. Quatre is his eldest son, Quatre Ibn Abraham Raberba Winner. Abu is "Father of" Ibn is "Son of" these are formal ways of addressing them and it is poor etiquette to dismiss the Abu or Ibn in the surname.

If and or when Quatre becomes a father (of a boy, not a girl) his name will change to reflect this. Up until Quatre was Born Abraham was Abraham Ibn HIS FATHERS NAME, Raberba Winner. After Quatre was born his name changed to "father of".

Technically Quatre has no "rank", he is the eldest son, the "caliph" or heir/successor to his father, and will be "Sheikh" when his father passes. He is however treated basically as a prince by his tribe; he is the next in line after all. He will and should be addressed by his tribe members as Caliph Quatre Ibn Abraham Raberba Winner. Outside of his country, it would be good etiquette to refer to him in the same manner as his tribe or at least give him a close approximation of title, such as "Lord" to address him, to be on the safe side.

Here just go here if you want more than what I told you: <http://www.bartleby.com/65/ti/titles.html>

Whew long ass hereditary peerage notes done and out of the way so lets move to the fic shall we?

“So I will worry just enough and temper the both of you.” Came a third serene yet stern baritone.

Wufei, was the most exotic looking of the trio seated around the table to break their fast. Dressed in bright colors and fine loose silk. His black and fine shoulder length hair pulled loosely into a tail at the nape of his neck. He was a strikingly handsome man, with dark almond eyes that looked to hold a thousand mysteries hidden behind obsidian glass.

Having originally come from a land to the farthest east as a youth, he had traveled most of the known world before finally coming to this land, and choosing to stay for reasons of the heart.

He was a scholar and a very wise man for one so young, at twenty-five he could read and speak not only his own native tongue, but at least twenty others fluently and the same number or more he had a decent working knowledge of, some languages lost for centuries. He was an open page, and soaked in knowledge like a sponge to water.

It made him indispensable to most courts in almost every country Wufei had visited. He chose however a more solitary life, he much preferred learning for his own pleasure, and he had very little patience with people in general.

He was an admired man, respected and revered, but seldom befriended.

Which suited him just fine. He chose his own friends, when he wanted them and not before.

He chose Trowa to befriend because the man was smart, caring, and quiet, a good leader of men, with enough humility to keep him from being an arrogant ruler. However possessing enough pride to not let his good nature get abused. He was a compliment to Wufei's serene tastes, if sometimes Trowa's melancholy nature even tried Wufei's infinite patience. Trowa was, however, a man one would want as a friend and never an enemy. As your foe, you would lose. Wufei knew an ally when he met one.

Duo was the enigma. He possessed all the qualities Wufei would normally despise. He was loud and he was far too gregarious and bright. Happy to a fault, giving to the point of poverty if needed, totally selfless and generous and possessed of a vanity that would, if not taking into account his virtues, would rival a peacock. Vanity without conceit, it was perhaps that feature that originally gave Wufei pause to learn more about him.

Wufei had to admit, it was the sheer beauty of the youth that caught his attention, Duo didn't walk into a room, he exploded into it and shone as bright as the noontday sun even at the darkest of hours. He had long, womanishly long, soft brown hair that he kept neatly braided down his back. His eyes were like no shade Wufei in all his travels had ever seen. Like dusk and twilight, and thoroughly bewitching to any and all who looked into their depths. They sparkled with mischief and humor, and were haunting when sad. Wufei was oft heard to profess they were his favorite feature about Duo. Duo also had tall, reedy build that moved like silk in the breeze. He had a tenor voice that was harsh and bright, but never grating. Duo was unique upon himself, and Wufei had been drawn, against his will, like a moth was to flame.

That had been seven years ago, Wufei had been just eighteen and Duo hardly more than a boy at sixteen, and despite that fact, or maybe because of it, neither man had been apart since the day they had met.

They tempered each other, Duo softened the edges and Wufei held the fabric from coming loose at the seams. It was an unorthodox and wonderful match in both sets of eyes.

Trowa would never admit it, but he was extremely jealous of them for their love. He begrudged them nothing, he loved them both as brothers, it was just sometimes, late at night, when he

could hear Duo laugh quietly behind closed doors as Trowa's insomnia led him to wander the halls at night, he felt the pang of loneliness most keenly in those moments.

They had something he wanted, but had been unable, or maybe unwilling to find for himself.

He, like Wufei, was a solitary man by nature. He detested pageantry and crowds of overly perfumed people. And court was an affront to anyone's olfactory senses.

No amount of perfume could cover the stink of unwashed bodies. Trowa much preferred a good bath. Hot or cold, it did not matter. Doctor's be damned, he hated being dirty. He'd risk ailments to be clean.

Thankfully Wufei concurred and according to his travels, he'd only heard the bathing rumors of causing sickness in this country. Wufei often called this place barbaric, Trowa agreed with him.

So when Trowa was preparing to leave court, it took little convincing and Wufei and Duo headed out with him.

Wufei took charge of the Castle itself. He gutted it completely, washed every surface, twice, and went about making sure it stayed that way.

Duo, the most personable of men naturally, easily won over the local's trust and confidence and became Trowa's unofficial aide. He carried news back and forth, visited the peasant's homes and made sure that charity was taken care of where it was needed most, and he made sure Trowa was as unburdened as possible so he could start trying to organize the land and get it working again.

It was a good and solid friendship, but it didn't stop the occasional bouts of loneliness Trowa felt when he went to his own very cold, very empty bed.

Duo and Wufei exchanged meaningful looks as they watched their friend ignore his meal and stare out at the rain falling beyond the window. They knew he was lonely, tired, and feeling a touch of cabin fever from the rain.

They all were.

"Trowa?" Duo began but was interrupted before he could finish his thought.

"I'll be alright. Don't worry about me. I need to check the south wall, the waves were really big last night, I have to make sure there was no damage." And with that Trowa was gone.

"I can't help worrying about him. He's dying inside." Duo sighed pushing his half eaten plate of food away, his appetite suddenly absent.

"Nothing you or I can do about it. We can just distract him occasionally, it will take finding what he is looking for to cure him of this particular depression."

"He's not so bad if he can't think about his life is what you mean. This rain gives him too much time to think."

"Precisely. Getting outside for a while will help him, leave him be for today."

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Trowa was walking alone the base of the south wall where it met the shoreline. He was drenched to the bone and the surf was deafening as it crashed upon the rocks.

Trowa could find no signs of damage other than one of the gates had been torn off, nothing of any significance. There was not likely going to be a siege upon the castle from such a rocky cove anytime in the foreseeable future. The repairs would be noted and taken care of in more pleasant weather conditions.

Trowa was about to head back toward the stairs leading up to the castle when a bright bit of red fabric stuck to a rock caught his eye. He walked over to inspect the material when he realized it was attached to a young man all but hidden behind the rock.

The fabric was the remains of a shirt that had been torn from the chest and hung limply from the waist of the body floating and trapped between rocks.

Trowa leapt into the pounding surf and took hold of the man, and carried him over to the beach.

He laid him down and began in earnest checking for signs of life. He was blue with cold, as Trowa pushed the water from his lungs. He coughed and sputtered and heaved to breathe. His intensely blue eyes, with pupils dilated to near obscene proportions, opening in sheer terror as he screamed and then fell silently into unconsciousness once more.

Trowa immediately wrapped his sodden cloak around the shivering form, and carried him up the stairs, two and three at a time, bursting into the main hall and making a racket that would wake the dead.

“WUFEI! DUO! HELP ME!”

His friends came running, unaccustomed to Trowa yelling, even when he was angry, they burst into the room, practically on Trowa’s heels.

“Wufei, I think he was in a shipwreck or something. I found him on the beach. Duo, I need anything warm and dry to put him in, and have a room made ready for him please. Wufei help me with him, let’s get these off him, and by GOD, look at all these markings. What are they?”

Duo ran to get help and do as instructed before Trowa had even finished his rambling orders. Wufei in the interim waited for Trowa to finish talking before answering his question and just helped rub circulation back into cold limbs as he studied the body beneath his hands. “Tattoos. They are tattoos.”

“Tat-what? Why haven’t they washed off?” Trowa asked as he cut free the ruined shirt and even worse pants. The clothing, or what was left of it, in a riot of exotic colors in fabrics like Wufei liked to wear. Only there was even less material, and the young man looked nothing like Wufei’s people. He was pale skinned, and golden of hair. His arms from wrist to shoulder had an intricate pattern marked into his skin, and his legs from ankle, and once he was naked it was confirmed the pattern ended at his groin. The same pattern repeated across both pectoral muscles. He was a walking painting - only the markings did not seem to wash off. In fact, the only places his skin was un-adorned was on his face, neck, stomach, posterior, hands, and feet. Every other surface was beautifully and intricately patterned and designed.

“They are tattoo’s, ink has been etched into his skin, it will never wash off.”

“Etched?”

“Yes, it is a quite painful process. Needles, and hammers apply the ink into the skin. His appear to be a form of scripture or traditional charms of sorts. I can make out a few symbols, but I’d need more time to study the language...”

"Enough, Study him later, I do not wish to know the details right now. Look, they are even on his back... he's covered in them, I don't want to think of the pain involved at all." Trowa shuddered involuntarily anyway. Those markings were very close to very sensitive areas on this young man's body. The sheer thought, of needles and hammers being used that close in proximity to his own sex and manhood sent Trowa's anatomy seeking safe haven and drawing up in sympathy.

"He must be of some importance, those sort of markings are not commonplace and look at the gold here on his wrists and ankles. That is pure metal there, no lead compounds in this mixture, see how soft it is and how it is molded to fit perfectly along his body? It's worth a small King's Ransom I'd wager. And that is some of the finest silk I've ever seen, this man is no mere sailor off a ship."

Duo reappeared with blankets and Trowa wasted no time in wrapping the young man tightly, he was shivering terribly, and the hall was drafted against naked skin.

"What's all that stuff on him?" Duo asked catching a glimpse of the tattoos.

"I'll explain later, Come let's get him to bed, we'll discuss what and who he is on the way."

Trowa was already up and carrying the strange, beautiful, and rather delicate of frame young man towards the guest quarters that were being hastily prepared for it's unexpected occupant.

==== TBC ====

CHAPTER TWO

Once they had the newcomer safely tucked away under a mountain of covers and warm Wufei looked unusually happy as he settled himself at a nearby table covered in his books. One of the young man's arms uncovered for Wufei's gleeful eye to study.

"Fascinating. Simply fascinating."

"Thank you for that observation, now care to enlighten Duo and I?" Trowa asked, sitting opposite Wufei and never taking his eyes of the sleeping golden youth.

"Well, if I am right, this young man is from a nomadic tribe I met once on the Dark Continent. You yourself favor their horses." Wufei said and Trowa quirked an eyebrow.

"Really? I thought they never left their lands and only traded?"

"Apparently he is far from home, why we will have to find out when he wakes up."

"Can you speak his language?"

"There are about one-hundred distinct dialects. I don't know yet."

"Then we're back to square one."

"What do those things, those tat-a-things say?" Duo interrupted Trowa and Wufei's conversation as he looked closely at the strangers arm.

"Well, these are an even more ancient dialect, I think they are more symbolic than anything. Perhaps a right of passage of sorts, I can only guess. On my Travels and the tribes I did meet, most of the men had variations of these patterns, I never saw anyone with as many before. I

take that back, once I did, and he was the chief of the tribe. So either this young man is the head of his tribe, or he is very close, a son perhaps.”

“You can get all of that from those pictures?” Trowa asked running a finger down a particular once he thought quite elegant in design.

“Not pictures, this is writing, this symbol here...” Wufei began, showing Trowa the design he had just recently touched then showing the matching symbol in a rather old book he had open on the table “... this means ‘prosperity’. This one next to it here means ‘eternal’. So in context I would hazard to guess this is an incantation wishing for a lifetime of prosperity.”

“See, and people wonder why I stay with you. You come in handy sometimes.” Duo joked getting a not too subtle glare of annoyance in return for his jest.

Duo unperturbed continued. “When you get to those pictures next to his wanker, I bet I can guess what they are gonna say.” The sentence was punctuated by rather suggestive eyebrow waggling.

Trowa began trying to stifle a laugh, it didn’t work, and he was chuckling and trying not to be loud about it.

“For once, even though you were trying to be rude, you’re probably right. Wishes for fruitful loins, and prowess are common.” Wufei was the only man alive in Duo’s opinion able to say that with a totally honest and straight face.

“Maybe I should get me some of those tattoos then?” Duo asked, with a leer on his face that well nigh defied description.

“You don’t need them.” Wufei returned, a slow lazy, half smile gracing his lips.

Trowa lost it entirely and had to excuse himself before he ruined his breeches from laughing too hard.

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For three days, the boy from the sea slept in an almost comatose state. Trowa, Wufei and Duo taking turn keeping a constant vigil by his side. Forcing weak broth and water past pale lips and urging him to swallow the meager provisions to keep his health from deteriorating further.

During this time, Wufei spent hours deciphering the various tattoos, and sitting up in shock when one stubborn marking was translated.

“I don’t believe it!” He gasped out loud and Trowa from a chair by the fire looked up in query.

“I know him!”

This revelation brought Trowa from his chair and Duo to wake up from the low sofa to hear Wufei tell his tale.

“You know him? How?” Duo asked rubbing sleep from his eyes.

“This here on his shoulder, this wasn’t an ancient character, it’s modern writing. It’s his name!”

Wufei looked almost fondly at the sleep youth and smiled a genuine smile of affection. “I always knew he’d grow up to be a fine looking man.”

"What is his name? And please elaborate." Trowa said pulling up a chair beside Wufei, Duo settling at Wufei's feet.

"His name is Quatre Raberba Winner. Remember when I said I had only met one other person with as many tattoos as he? That man was Quatre's father. I didn't recognize Quatre, I knew him long before he had any of these scriptures earned, he was after all, only ten years old. He's changed a lot in eleven years." Wufei began, the smile still on his face as he recalled a long filed away memory.

"When I was fifteen, my father and I journeyed to the desert, to visit the tribes and to study their culture. My father said 'any man who can breed such wonderful, sturdy, magnificent horses in a land where life itself was a struggle had to have knowledge worth learning'. He was right, and so we came to meet with Sheik Abraham Raberba Winner, he welcomed foreigners readily - he was a very progressive tribal leader. He gave us shelter and let us travel with the tribe for a year. It's because Abraham liked foreigners, that his son is so fair of feature. Most people in the desert are very dark in complexion, but Quatre's mother was not a native. She was perhaps the most beautiful woman I have ever seen." Wufei said closing his eyes as if to remember her face.

"She was very kind, very soft spoken, and very doting of her youngest child. Quatre here was very much in her image, and still relegated to the harem since he had not yet reached puberty."

"Harem? Those stories are TRUE?"

"Yes Duo, Quatre's father had fifteen wives and Quatre was the youngest of thirty children."

"Holy shit."

"Duo shut up, let Wufei talk!" Trowa growled wanting very much every detail Wufei could remember.

"Right, where was I? Quatre. I must sadly admit at first he seemed like every other child, an irritation that must be endured. I have learned a little more patience with them since then. I was in my defense only fifteen, and what boy of my age wants a ten-year-old hanging off them? But I digress. My father simply adored Quatre, and rightfully so, when I opened my eyes and actually watched the boy in action. Even at ten, he had a remarkable gift with the horses. Even the most wild of stallions, went silent and still when Quatre approached. If I did not know better I would swear Quatre was part horse, part beast, part other worldly creation. He moved so gracefully, and fast, do not let his size fool you. Although, he is not so small now as he once was. He was a very fey child, now he is quite a nice size, just thin. Again I am going off track. I am talking about the child, and his talents. He is a whirlwind of speed when he needs to be quick on his feet. But his eyes, they are the most intriguing. They captured and held yours when he looked at you, and I found even I had to take a breath and I felt a deep peace settle inside. My father said Quatre had the sixth sense. I would not have believed it had I not seen this child do things that defied description and rationale."

Wufei had to smile fondly. Trowa was sitting like a child, full of wonder at the story being told and it was only going to get better as the tale progressed. Finally the depression clinging to his friend had abated.

"Fascinating. Is there more?" Trowa asked, his eyes not on Wufei, but looking and searching the sleeping face before him.

"Much more. I have only expounded on one talent. His exposure to men other than his father at ten was virtually non-existent. His time was occupied with traditional womanly pursuits as his culture dictated. Boys did not leave their mothers until they reached puberty. His mother loved music, and taught Quatre to play for her. He was equally talented in music as he was with the

horses. His music made my father's final days very peaceful." Wufei paused to wipe a stray tear from his eye and Duo reached up to silently take his hand.

"My father was already showing signs of illness when we left on this journey, and towards the end, when he was too weak to do more than sit with his books, Quatre would join us and play for him since my father professed pleasure at hearing him play. Quatre would play until his fingers would bleed, because he wanted my father to have as much music as he desired. When my father died, Quatre played for his funeral, and wept with me. He is like a brother to me for that. When I left his tribe, Quatre gave me his harp, it's the one in my room you asked about once Trowa."

"You lost touch?" Trowa asked and Wufei nodded.

"Sadly yes. I sent a few letters, but in time, I became involved too much with myself and forgot to honor him, as I should have. Duo brought me back from that dangerous path I was heading down, and by then I no longer knew where the Tribe was. They are nomadic, and hard to track, and I did not pursue a search as I should have."

"Well, if what you say of his nature is true, I doubt he will hold a grudge against you."

"You're right, it's not in Quatre's nature to hold a grudge."

"Cat-rah... Did I say it right?" Trowa asked a sheepish grin on his face trying to form the unfamiliar name.

"Close. Cat-er-ah, soft "C" sound, make the "r" a soft syllable alone, touch it to the roof of your mouth and elongate the name into three syllables."

"Quatre."

"Right."

"I'm not even going to attempt the second name you mentioned, Rabbabababa." Trowa chuckled at his own usually useless grasp of foreign languages.

"Raberba. And no, don't even try to say it Trowa, your simple tongue will butcher it."

"Well, he sounds downright peachy, please tell me he at least has a sense of humor." Duo looked desperate for an ally in amongst his more reserved companions.

"I've no doubt the two of you shall get along famously. Just don't expect a lot of words to be spoken. Quatre's mastery of this language is about a hundred words or less. "Niceties" only I'm afraid unless he's learned more in the past few years." Wufei said turning to look at the topic of conversation.

"The only thing that troubles me about all of this is, WHY he is here. And why you found him in this state. Come on Quatre, wake up so you can tell us little brother."

Wufei gently brushed golden bangs from Quatre's still face and turned and left in a contemplative mood, Duo following close behind.

Leaving Trowa to ponder Wufei's tale and keep vigil throughout the night.

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CHAPTER THREE

Trowa had retired to the low couch by the fire, his eyes shut as he rested and listened to the soft exhalations of sleep from Quatre. Still no changes, when sudden a large gasping intake of air shook the silence of the room, Trowa's eyes snapped open and he watched a panic stricken youth scream and sit bolt upright in absolute terror, his eyes frantically searching the room, and fear of his strange surroundings attack him without mercy. Trowa was by the quaking youth's side immediately, hands held out palm up, on his knees and speaking as non-threateningly as possible.

"Shhhhh, it's all right. You're safe. Do you understand me?"

Silence met Trowa's words, non-recognition, or rather outright distrust and panic, and cold with fear eyes looked onto Trowa's and Trowa felt his very heart chill in a vice like grip of sympathy.

"I will not hurt you, Quatre."

Suddenly those eyes softened and tears began to fall as Quatre began talking and sobbing in frantic words that seemed jumbled and garbled as he tried to back away from Trowa and melt into the stone masonry of the wall behind him.

Wufei thankfully chose that moment to burst into the room, clothed in only his robe. His hair askew and his face masked with worry. He'd heard and followed the scream.

Quatre's face turned to the door, and in one moment, the fear fell away and grief and sadness replaced it as Wufei rushed to his side.

"WUFEI? Chang Wufei?" Quatre asked in disbelief as Wufei reached his side and sat on the edge of the bed. He nodded once, and Quatre fell into his comforting embrace sobbing.

"Shhhhh. Quatre, Quatre what is wrong? Why are you here my friend?" Wufei asked in Quatre's soft and lyrical native tongue.

It took several moments for the sobs to subside before Quatre, still clinging to Wufei in fear, could weakly answer.

And his answer outraged Wufei. He looked at Trowa and Trowa reeled in shock with the look of bloodlust in Wufei's eyes. A look he had never before seen in his friend's visage.

"What did he say?"

"I'll tell you in a moment. First we get him settled. He is more than distraught and rightfully so." Wufei said smoothing away worry lines from Quatre's brow as he still held the weeping youth.

"Quatre, look at me my heart brother. You are safe, this man here is named Trowa Barton, he is the Lord here and he is the one who saved you. He is a good man you may trust him in all matters. He will see you righted, have no fear. We will send word to your father immediately."

"He saved me?"

"Yes, he did. Pulled you from the sea, and cared for you himself."

With those words, Quatre seemed to straighten with infinite pride and regal humility, as he looked at Trowa with utmost respect before shocking both men and climbing out of bed to prostrate himself at Trowa's feet.

"Great One Deliver Me to You. I am in Debt to you. My honor to serve you, my Master, until my life debt is pay back to you."

"Nay, get u..."

"Stop Trowa, do not finish that sentence, you'll dishonor him."

"But..."

"No buts Trowa. His people take life debts very seriously. You DID save his life. You must allow him to satisfy his duty and honor to pay you back. To refuse him would be crushing to his entire family's pride, he'd suicide as to not dishonor his family name. Tread CAREFULLY. Accept him, now!"

"I'll not refuse you, but please, get off the floor. I need not a servant, you will honor me more by being my equal and friend while you honor your debt to my person." Trowa said smiling down at Quatre and holding out his hand.

Quatre looked partially confused.

"You used too much pomp and circumstance Trowa and spoke much too fast for him. He caught about half of what you said. Allow me..." Wufei rolled his eyes and translated the whole of Trowa's meaning.

After Wufei finished speaking Quatre smiled up at Trowa and took his hand.

"Thank you my Master."

"Trowa. Please call me... my name is Trowa."

Confusion.

"He wants you to call him by his name. He is uncomfortable with your manner and the title of 'Master' in his culture makes that title sometimes hard to bear. He understands your need to honor him, but he is a simple man and very kind Quatre. Do him this honor and call him by his name. Trowa."

Quatre nodded towards Wufei and turned back to Trowa.

"Thank you, T -T- wo-wu-wuh-wah" Quatre began, and made a face as he tried twisting his tongue around the unusual name. He was absolutely and utterly charming in his chagrin and frustration.

"Forgive please, hard say name. Towowowa, Torowwa, Torowa."

Trowa laughed and smiled, close enough. "I know, very bad name isn't it? I had to practice to say your name too."

Again, Quatre looked baffled.

"Trowa, you must learn to speak SLOWLY and you have a horrible habit of slurring words. I won't always be around to translate your lazy speech patterns." Wufei grumbled then translated.

Quatre's laugh was divine. "Ah, I see. Then we are, as you say, even?"

Trowa nodded and pulled Quatre up off the floor. "Yes. Even. Now to bed, we will talk in the morning." Trowa said very slowly and Quatre nodded and allowed Trowa and Wufei to direct him back under the covers.

"Wait, please." Quatre asked, smiling with a slight apologetic slant.

"I need know, where I go. Need... what is word? Must..." Frustrated he turned to Wufei and spoke in a language he knew better. Wufei laughed.

"What?" Trowa asked perplexed.

"He needs to know where to go relieve himself? He's about ready to burst." Wufei smiled as he showed Quatre the chamber pot in the corner.

***"For now use this. I'll show you the other places when you are fit to leave this room."
"You want me to... INSIDE? That is most unsanitary!"***

"You are unwell. A Servant will empty this a few times daily. Your cleanliness will not be affronted."

"I will go to a place made for the purpose. I am not so weak I cannot walk to where this place is, I will go outside if need to."

"You will not."

"I will. I am not a boy anymore Chang Wufei, coddle me NOT!"

"What did you say to make him so angry Wufei? What's going on?" Trowa asked perplexed as he watched Quatre cross his arms in defiance.

"He refuses to use the chamber pot."

"It is dirty do that inside! I go to place made to do such things, no dirty cup in room where I sleep!"

"He has a point Wufei, I don't like chamber pots either."

"He's just been dragged in from death, I'll not have him traversing an unfamiliar castle in the middle of the night! Naked no less."

"Not know all you say. But you not Quatre mother! I do out that hole in wall first!"

"Wufei, I really don't think peeing out of his window is a good idea. It's 300 feet to the garterobe from this room. You are coddling a bit too much. If he has the spirit and energy to fight you so hard, I think he has the spirit to walk to talk a piss."

"I give up! Fine." Wufei grumbled taking off his robe, leaving him dressed only in loose silken pants and handing the garment to Quatre. "But cover yourself, you'll shock the servants."

Trowa had to cover a snicker with hand at the look of triumph that spread across Quatre's face as he pulled the robe over his shoulders as he stood slowly.

"Where I go?"

"This way." Trowa offered his arm for support and Quatre took it gratefully.

"I am thank you for much kindness to me. I do no like the cup."

"Neither do I. I understand. And you are welcome" Trowa said as they walked slowly down the corridor lit softly with torches. Quatre's steps were lethargic and slow, but steady enough. Quatre smiled up at him in genuine appreciation.

Having Quatre standing beside him, Trowa realized he wasn't quite so frail as he had seemed in a prone state. He was of a good height comparatively to other men. Trowa was the one out of the norm where his unusual height was concerned.

Quatre was also of a very nice build, he was not robust, but neither was he without definition. He had in Trowa's opinion, a very nice physique. Firm, compact, trim, and any further thoughts along those lines were going to cause Trowa problems. Funnily while Quatre had been asleep, none of these things had even crossed Trowa's mind, he had been concerned for his health, and fascinated by his exotic looks, but having Quatre active and mobile, his reality of being a real live person hit home.

Trowa had never in his life ever dreamed of meeting someone so unique. This was the same way he had felt upon meeting Wufei.

Trowa came to the conclusion he decidedly like foreigners, they absolutely made his whole world come alive with wonder.

It wasn't a very long walk to the room Trowa had built specifically for this purpose. He led Quatre inside and he stopped short in wonder.

There were large marble tiled tubs in the center of the room. Some steaming invitingly, some that smelled divinely fragrant, and a rather large one in the center that had a drainage crevice along its outer edges and in the center a fountain was bubbling merrily. Quatre's eyes went wide with wonder.

"What... all this water! How?"

Trowa smiled, "This is the bathing room. When you want to wash yourself, come here. This tub is kept hot always for washing, this one is for your body if you are sore, and this one here in the center is for rinsing."

"But, is not waste of water?"

"We are not short of water. No this is not a waste, this room uses very little water wastefully."

"Not like Quatre home. Water very little have. I think Quatre will like this room much yes." Quatre said smiling like a child with a new toy. As Trowa led him across the room through another set of doors.

"Here is the room you seek." Several small seats sat along an outer wall. Their purpose obvious if you looked down the hole the seats sat above.

"Still inside, but clean. How so clean and... word for... no smell?"

Trowa pointed to a lever on the wall then pulled it. Water came from a cistern located above their heads and down a channel that flushed any lingering debris away.

"That collects rain water from above, and the hole leads to a pit quite a long way away from here. I studied much about this sort of thing in my youth. I built this room."

"You like go see great ruin city in my land. Before desert come, they have like this, when water not gone from my land. This like what I have seen, only not nice, a ruin place."

"I would love to see it one day, I read about it, it is where I got the idea." Trowa said excusing himself momentarily with a bow so Quatre could do his business.

He heard the water run, and Quatre stepped out a moment later. "You, very smart man. I must say it strong. I very much think I like Torowa home much."

"I'm pleased to hear that." Trowa said leading Quatre back to his room. "Think you can find that room again if you need it?"

"I will find on own. I think if ever you miss Quatre, you know where Quatre be finded again." Quatre laughed brightly as he shed the robe and handed it back to an irate Wufei who sat pouting at the table in Quatre's room.

Quatre leaned over and kissed his cheek before turning to bed. "Thank you, Quatre know Wufei mad. But need that."

"I know, just go to bed. You have not changed, stubborn then, stubborn now." Wufei grumbled pulling on his robe and following Trowa out the door.

"Goodnight Quatre."

"Good Night, Quatre very much wish Torowa, Wufei sleep good." Quatre said crawling into bed and smiling as the door shut behind his benefactors.

"He's quite charming." Trowa said as he and Wufei walked toward the main hall.

"He is, yes. Trowa, we need to talk. Quatre's been kidnapped..."

Trowa stopped and spun to look at Wufei, whose eyes were hard as daggers.

"You know who did this don't you?"

"I know who, I know when, and worse, I know WHY. You will need wine before I tell you. You will be very angry when you hear what I am about to tell you."

Trowa's spirits sank as he and Wufei settled at the main table and began a long night of talk over un-diluted wine.

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Duo narrowly missed a severe head injury thanks to his quick reflexes, even when groggy from very little sleep as he walked into the great hall just as a mug came crashing into the wall and shattered into a thousand shards by his head.

"Satan's BALLS!" Duo shrieked as he ducked just in time. "Damn it Trowa watch it you bastard!" He added dismayed that the ceramic projectile had been far from empty and his white night shirt was now splattered with wine stains.

"I go seeking the reason why my nice warm bed as a missing warm spot and missing occupant and almost have my head removed! What in blue blazes crawled up your ass?" Duo, now fully awake and angry asked as he crossed the room.

"Wallingford." Wufei muttered and Duo pulled up short. Wufei was close to being drunk, he was never drunk, something was wrong.

"Useless Eustice? What's he done?" Duo asked sitting down at the table looking between Trowa and Wufei for an explanation to their obvious distress.

"Something more than heinous, Duo."

"I gathered that Wu. Talk to me. It's about our new friend right? Did he wake up?"

"The long and short of it Duo, is thus. Wallingford as you know, is the liaison for Barwyke's horse trade agreements and contracts. Has been for years. Appointed by and for Trowa's father and now for Trowa. Apparently he's been trading with Quatre's tribe for decades."

"Okay, I follow so far."

Wufei sighed and took a long steadying drink. "Well, you saw Quatre. How would you describe his looks?"

"Pretty... Hell his gorgeous, what does that have to do with...Oh... NO! You're shitting me! Wallingford didn't...No don't tell me, I don't want to know. Wallingford's a disgusting bugger!" Duo said shutting his eyes futilely against mental imagery at it's worst.

"No, Quatre's person is untouched. But Wallingford TRIED. I guess he has tried for years to gain Quatre's favor, since the boy came into his manhood and left the harem. I told you how he was in his youth, I am sickened to think how long Wallingford has been watching Quatre let alone trying to woo him and when Quatre repeatedly told him "No", Wallingford took matters into his own hands. Quatre was ambushed after the trade transfer was complete and had sent his men on ahead with the money and he was left alone to finish signing the documents. Wallingford sent word to Quatre's father that bandits killed his son, sent Sheikh Abraham Quatre's bloodied turban as the only 'evidence' found of his son's disappearance and demise, and before Quatre woke up from the blow to his head, they had already set sail."

"Oh, not good. This is getting ugly. Wallingford didn't think he could take Quatre, enslave him as a personal paramour and keep him hidden forever did he? He probably did, stupid git! But wait a minute... then how did Quatre end up here? I don't get it."

"After he woke up, and Wallingford told him what happened, what he had done, and what he intended for Quatre's future. Quatre said a prayer for deliverance and jumped off ship."

"He did what?"

"Took a leap of faith."

"He's got seven ton brass balls!"

"He has a strong faith."

"Who jumps off a ship, in the middle of the ocean, in the middle of a storm?"

"Apparently Quatre does when faced with such a choice. What would you have done?"

"Don't ask Wufei, I ain't that brave. I'd have sucked it up, no pun intended, until at least land was in sight. I state again, Quatre's got guts."

"He does indeed." Was the soft intonation and only comment from Trowa during the entire verbal exchange.

"Where's Wallingford now?" Duo asked looking askance to Trowa since he had finally deigned to speak.

"Dead wherever he is." Trowa answered with his eyes narrow with fury and hatred. Duo was sorry he asked. Thankfully Wufei took the conversation back over.

"He's due here the end of the month with Trowa's horses anyway, I say let him come and deal with him when he arrives. The less he knows that WE know, the better." Wufei sighed, his eyes pained.

"We're sending word to Quatre's Father right?"

"I'll have parchment for Quatre in the morning to write his letter. He's still weak, but will rest easier if he can inform his father he is alive and well."

"What about you Trowa? You've never had to handle this kind of punishment before. What do you need Wufei and I to do?" Duo asked with genuine concern for his normally gentle natured friend.

"Just be here, I'll be fine. Believe me, this is not going to pain me as much as you think. Call me a weak man, but I cannot forgive this crime. Not only did he commit a despicable act of lust and attempted rape and slavery against Quatre's person, but he also lied to our trade ambassador, who is a leader in his own right. These are my trade agreements he has put into jeopardy, not his own. These charges are bad enough as is to merit a treasonous sentence against him. For his acts against me, and I am secondary in this. I also have a duty to Quatre to see his honor restored and a Duty to Quatre's father to appease his insult. I have no choice, Wallingford has signed his own death sentence by the King's own law. I will let him explain to me his side however, just to dispense any doubts I may have. Which I do not, you did not see or feel Quatre's terror when he woke. I did. I never wish to see that again, I doubt not Quatre has spoken the truth. If Wallingford lies to my person as his liege then even the King would not hesitate in backing my sentence of Justice. Wallingford will hang, and hang himself."

And with that statement, Trowa left the room.

"It's bugging him more than he's letting on Wu."

"Of course it is. You and I would not call any man a friend who could wield death without remorse even for the wicked. But let him act as he feels he must, it is not you or I he will seek to purge himself of this matter."

"What makes you think that? He's never not confided in us before."

"This is different, he has never smiled at us, the way he smiled at Quatre tonight."

"Oh really? You think our Trowa is interested?"

"Not yet, intrigued more than anything."

"Well it's a start. I guess."

“Yes, a start.” Wufei nodded and stood and then sat back down. The room was spinning. “I drank too much.”

“I know. Come on, back to bed you no good drunk.” Wufei snorted at Duo’s jest but nonetheless let Duo support him and guide him in his wine induced haze back to their bed.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Numb, that’s how Trowa felt as he wandered the dimly lit corridors alone. At first he’d been angry, furious that Wallingford would dare do something so atrocious. Then he felt cold, imagining what might had happened had Quatre stayed on board that ship, and then imagining the other gruesome things that could have happened to Quatre as he floated adrift in the sea. The myriad of what ifs and might haves plagued Trowa as he wandered directionless.

As a boy this feeling in his spirit would have seen tears in his eyes, tears that if seen by his father would have left Trowa chastised and beaten. Men didn’t cry, his father made sure Trowa learned how to keep these emotions buried, his face placid, his torment keen, his sorrow limitless.

Pain, sadness, joy, love, any emotion was to be felt in silence. He was a Marquis’ Son, he was a lord, he was a man, and men were strong, especially men of noble breeding, they were better than normal men and were not supposed to feel, and were never allowed to cry.

Trowa’s father would be proud of his son, not even his death made his son cry, Trowa swallowed everything like a bitter pill and walked.

Walked and walked and walked until sheer exhaustion would give him a few hours of restless sleep before facing another day. It was either walk or lay tossing in turning in bed and getting absolutely no sleep at all before dawn came and his duties had to be addressed.

He had let too much anger show earlier, by throwing his wine across the room. So without the father, Trowa chastised himself for letting his emotions slip out of control. He almost hurt Duo in the process and that was unacceptable behavior. He was better than that, or so he was supposed to be, he certainly didn’t feel any better than other men. He wasn’t supposed to feel better than others, he was supposed to know he was better than others.

Or so his father had taught him, and so he tried to believe. All Trowa did know was wrestling with his emotions and his duties was exhausting, and just for one night - he’d like to actually sleep.

Quatre listened as the footfalls came and went outside his door. Bringing an intense pain with every pass they made. Whomever the restless soul was outside, and Quatre had a pretty good inkling to whom this soul belonged, needed help. They were dealing with far too many demons to be able to cope with them alone. The demons and pain they had wrought had been residing in this soul for a very long time, and would take time to be vanquished to a lesser level where they belonged.

And the war against such torment had to begin with the first step before the troubled soul outside could find peace of heart and mind. Quatre steeled his resolve and pulled his sheet around his shoulders, ignoring the residual pain in his own chest these demons left as they touched his own heightened senses.

His perception of others around him was both a gift and a curse. It brought joy of intense being and it brought sorrow of immense regret, one could not exist without the other, the light and the

dark of the emotional spectrum. To feel one, one such as Quatre must feel the other. It was the price he paid for the glory of spirit gained.

But he could help bring a sense of peace to this soul who had forgotten the feeling altogether, so Quatre padded lightly across the room and opened his door and waited for whomever it was wandering this hall in need of comfort.

Trowa was watching his feet as he paced down the hall and was startled when only the sound of his footfalls on stone was broken by a soft voice.

"Torowa. Follow Quatre please." Clad in only his sheet, standing in the doorway to his chambers stood a concerned looking Quatre, just staring compassionately at Trowa.

"It's alright Quatre, go back to bed."

"No. Come with Quatre." Quatre said in what sounded like an order holding out his hand, obviously for Trowa to take. Bewildered Trowa took his hand. "Good, now come." Quatre said pulling lightly and bringing Trowa into his chambers, shutting the door quietly behind them.

He led Trowa over to the low sofa by the dying fire and gently urged Trowa to sit.

"Quatre...I..." Trowa began to speak only to have Quatre lay his fingers on Trowa's lips.

"No. No speak, only listen. Vow no talk until listen all Quatre try say." Quatre said reaching down to pull off Trowa's boots. Trowa nodded his consent.

Once Trowa's boots were off, Quatre set them aside then stood. "You sit here on floor. Front of Quatre. Take off shirt." Too perplexed to argue, Trowa did as instructed and he felt Quatre sit behind him on the sofa as two soft and warm hands began to knead the muscles of his neck and shoulders.

"Close eyes and listen. I feel much sad in Torowa. Much bad things, you feel fault. I know, can feel you bad long time. It how you say, gift Quatre have. I feel many thing, not all can say, I no word to say to make Torowa understand. But I know little thing some time. I know you feel hurt inside... No!" Trowa had tried to respond in denial and as he tensed to turn to face Quatre his muscles were seized in a tight pinch of admonishment.

"I say no you talk. I no done talk. You sit, feel good touch from Quatre hand to make rest and listen Quatre talk."

Trowa turned back around and stayed silent.

"I tell you story. How Quatre people live. All thing have purpose happen. Bad thing happen, make one sad. Good thing happen, make one joy. Joy or Sad must be wash away to make clean for new sad or new joy..." Quatre began in soft and soothing tones. Massaging Trowa's stiff shoulders in rhythmic counterpoint to his tale.

"...If no clean, man can no feel all he need feel. To make tear in eye is make clean. It is wash soul. If no wash, soul become dirty, get heavy, get dark, make hard carry, make pain, make no more joy, make no more sad, only pain, only nothing." Quatre continued quietly as he ran his hands up from Trowa's shoulders into his hair tipping his head back to rest against Quatre's lap in the process. Trowa's eyes were shut, he was listening as Quatre's fingers found his temples and began slow circular movements.

"All things happen for purpose. Bad thing happen, Quatre take from home. I Pray, I wash with many tear. Good thing happen, I come be finded by Torowa. Prayer heard, prayer answer, I

wash joy with tear..." Quatre punctuated this by running the tips of his fingers ever so lightly over Trowa's closed eyelids, circling the eye sockets with a gentle caress.

"...Bad thing happen, must tell long time friend-brother sad things, tell him how Quatre been hurt. Make friend sad, make both sad. Make tear and wash..."

Quatre drew a line down Trowa's cheek to mimic the trails of tears.

"...Good thing happen, new friend save Quatre, show Quatre great wonder room of water in house, make Quatre happy have new friend. Bad Thing, new friend sad, feel angry and bad for Quatre..."

Again Quatre's fingers stroked cheeks and brow in tender tracks as if he were writing his words directly into Trowa's very skin so they would sink in and remain imbedded for all time.

"...Make Quatre sad see New Friend Torowa hurt."

Fingers traced jaw and cheekbones, brushing across trembling lips in the barest of touches.

"...I feel hurt deep in Torowa, more bad happen before for to make new friend Torowa sad. Many bad things come before Quatre in Torowa soul. Sad things stay long time that Torowa no ever make clean. Torowa soul dirty, heavy on Torowa, hard bear, make pain, no wash, must wash with tear. Open eye Torowa, look Quatre."

Trowa opened his eyes and looked straight into endless depths of sea-foam blue, they were so close and they took over his entire range of vision. They were misty with tears, filled with affection, friendship and concern and Trowa was lost and floating suspended in their web of offered comfort.

They captured him with a merciful caress and dove with rapid speed straight into his heart. Trowa took a deep shuddering breath as he felt a sudden overwhelming freedom. Like hands had taken hold of his heart and began rubbing life into it, just like the hands resting on his cheeks, holding his face still, forcing Trowa to look into Quatre's eyes. Life and feeling radiated from Quatre's very core, infusing Trowa, making the numbness begin to fade and tingle.

To breathe free from the restraint of emotional shackles was what Quatre was urging him to do, his eyes spoke clearer than any words ever could. He understood what Wufei had been telling him earlier. Quatre WAS peace and his eyes were truly the most amazing entity of being Trowa had ever seen or been imprisoned by in willing surrender.

Here was a man proven to hold courage beyond measure, faith that was unshakeable, compassion without conditions, and now wisdom beyond his years. This was a real man, the man Trowa wanted to be, wanted to emulate, wanted to believe.

He wanted to believe, he wanted to fly, he wanted to fall into Quatre and never stop.

Quatre's eyes promised safety, promised to catch him if he fell.

Trowa took a leap of faith and let go, not afraid to fall for the first time.

Anguish began to pour from his soul as the floodgates of his emotions broke free. He cried for Quatre, he expelled his anger, he sobbed his frustration, he set free his troubles, and let his past losses be mourned.

Trowa felt an all encompassing warmth surround him as Quatre slid from the sofa to the floor behind where Trowa had been sitting, wrapping his slender and pale arms about Trowa's middle, urging and guiding Trowa's face to turn into his chest.

Quatre's heartbeat was solid beneath his cheek as Trowa continued to weep in Quatre's embrace.

Gentle hands stroked and soothed and did not cast judgment, did not silence, did not demand and did not scold. They only encouraged silently in wordlessly gentle strokes and in lazy patterned passes of fingers against flesh.

No words were spoken because none were needed. The only sounds in the room were those of Trowa's sobs that grew quieter and softer the longer he purged his pent up emotions.

Tears that had been long overdue to be released washed away the stone that had been sitting in Trowa's chest for as long as he could remember.

He felt exhausted as the last few tears trickled down his sodden cheeks, and he sniffed and snuffled his sinuses suddenly full to capacity and needing to be emptied. Only then did Quatre allow words to be spoken as Trowa sat up to scrub his eyes. "I need a..."

Quatre handed him his discarded shirt. "All have, you no need now wear. Use, wash away, then throw away, wash later."

Trowa chuckled and took the shirt and blew his nose. Quatre was right, and it would wash.

"Now, follow Quatre again." Quatre said still clutching the sheet about him as he stood and offered his hand to Trowa.

"Where?" Trowa asked as he accepted Quatre's hand and let Quatre lead him across the room.

"Only here. Trowa sleep now. Much tired, much rest need." Quatre said pulling back the cover and gesturing for Trowa to lay down.

Trowa no longer questioned Quatre, and crawled into bed.

Quatre crawled in beside him. "Lay on front."

Trowa turned onto his stomach, obedient.

Those warm fingers returned and gripped tired muscles. "Sleep, feel rest pleasure from Quatre hands."

They felt absolutely wonderful and Trowa fell into a peaceful, dreamless and liberating sleep in a matter of moments. The day, and indeed his whole life had finally caught up with Trowa in one fell swoop. And the intense exhaustion was unrelenting as it claimed its victim and forced him to sleep.

Quatre smiled as Trowa's breathing deepened and sleep was certain. "You much better now. Not as should be yet, still need Quatre help. Quatre vow always help Torowa when need." Quatre said softly into Trowa's hair as he curled up beside him to find his own slumber for the remainder of the night.

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DEAD END