

Series Title: Le Storie Del Sole e Dalla Luna
(Stories of the Sun and the Moon)
Book III: Chiaro di Luna e Sole
(Moonlight and Sunshine)
Chapter Number: One
“Immortal Tale”
Author: D. Sanders

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“I just don’t get that one. If he wasn’t so gifted with my gardens, I’d swear he’d be one of yours Yoru.” Sol said as he sat with his Brother and Endymion on a rock outcropping watching the daily hustle and bustle of life in the country order they all preferred to visit most.

“What makes you say that?” Endymion asked looking the young sun priest, newly out of his novice robes working dutifully in the earth. Weeding a stubborn herb garden with meticulous care. He was quite a lovely youth, sun bleached and streaked light brown almost blond hair, large hazel eyes and a nose still dusted with freckles the sunlight never let fade from his nose. He was as pretty and fresh as the earth he tilled with long graceful fingers.

“Nineteen and still a bloody virgin, he’s so shy it cripples him socially and he’s been fixated on the same boy for years and he won’t say anything. He drives me crazy to the point I want to shake some confidence into him.” Sol never did have much patience where love was concerned. Mane chuckled.

“He does sound like one of mine. I have one I’d swear was yours too. See that large handsome brute over there with the eye patch? He’s had a dozen lovers looking for his match, I’ve never seen any of mine go through as many heartbreaks as he has looking for love. He keeps confusing affection with love and hurts himself repeatedly.”

“I’ll be damned. That’s the boy mine makes eyes at whenever he comes into a room. I just wish I could lock them both up in a room together to force mine to actually SAY something to him.”

“So do it.” Endymion grinned impishly and both Mane and Sol reeled.

“And have mother down our necks for interfering in mortal lives? Are you crazy?” Sol said aghast at the thought.

“No, I’m just saying arrange a way they can at least meet longer than in just passing. We’re not making their choices for them, just giving a little push in the right direction.” Endymion smiled and Mane scratched his chin.

"He's technically right, that's not really interfering, it's just making sure they at least run across each other's paths." Mane said and Sol threw up his hands.

"Leave me out of your match-making. My boy is all yours, I don't understand this business and I have no desire too. Just get him to lose his virginity sometime before he dies and I'll be happy. I will never understand terminal shyness from mortals." Sol flopped back on the rock on his back with a sigh and Endymion leaned over and pinched his nose.

"You do understand it, you just don't like it, you're too straight forward." Endymion was once again correct. Mane just chuckled at his brother's expense. Sol just leveled them both an irritated look.

Sudden shouts erupted in the garden as a wild cart drawn by a spooked horse came careening into the gardens; people began leaping out of the way. The young solar priest scrambled to get to his feet, he'd been on his knees all morning and they tripped him up as he tried to get out of the way. He escaped a serious injury, but the cart did manage to knock him clear off his feet.

The large lunar priest raced to his side and began feeling around for broken bones. "Brother Danya are you injured?" He asked concerned, he was the order's resident healer and he took to his calling well.

"Nay, I just caught my shoulder Brother Adrik." Came the soft timid voice an involuntary blush creeping up his cheeks.

"Let me see." Adrik, oblivious to the blush pulled open golden robes to begin inspecting a shoulder already growing purple. "Ouch. Nothing broken, but this I can see already hurts." Adrik said digging into his belt pouch and he began rubbing a thick pungent cream into the abused shoulder.

"I know it stinks, but it will dull the pain and keep this monster of a bruise at bay." Adrik said gingerly working the salve into sun tanned and freckled skin. "You've got sun-spots everywhere don't you?" Adrik chuckled noticing the hundreds of freckles dotting Danya's skin.

"A-a-ye." Danya's voice cracked, he wanted to be anywhere but here. Adrik was far too close and noticing far too much. He'd had a crush on the young healer since he'd first discovered the joys and sorrows of puberty. Now several years later, that crush was well cemented and Danya was too timid to say anything and he knew from observation, Adrik liked the more outward personality types.

He'd watched forlornly as Adrik went through several failed relationships, wishing every time that he was the one that could ease Adrik's heartbreaks in those times when yet another lover was lost.

He'd known Adrik most of his life and all of his life spent in the order after he'd been brought to the temples as a small boy. Adrik had been a few years his senior, so while they never shared classes growing up, there had been a few moments where their paths had crossed and Danya admired his healing touch and skills greatly. He remembered the horrible day Adrik had lost the sight in his left eye, which had left a nasty scar and that now lay hidden under a leather patch.

Danya was out in the orchard when he'd spied Adrik and his friends climbing one of the trees when Adrik slipped and fell. The branches had pierced his eye and left the gash across the lid. It had been a ten-year-old, Danya that had held a weeping Adrik while his friends raced to get help. That had been the day Danya remembered losing his heart to Adrik all those years ago.

While he wept with pain, he wasn't angry. Adrik's temper and ire was slow to burn, Danya remembered vividly Adrik saying that 'all things happened for a reason and that some lessons cost more than others'. For a thirteen-year-old boy who had just lost an eye, he had been remarkably calm about the whole thing.

Danya admired that in Adrik immensely. He was a pillar of inner strength that Danya wished he could emulate and always failed miserably at gaining.

Danya flinched as Adrik touched an extremely sensitive point on the bruise. "Sorry, Danya. This hit you really hard; I'm surprised you didn't break anything. I don't want you working for at least a few days, no lifting anything. But do move your arm as much as you can so it doesn't stiffen up on you. If you think this hurts now, tonight it's going to be on fire." Adrik said as he tied a compress saturated in the smelly ointment on Danya's shoulder then pulled Danya's robe back up over his shoulder.

Danya only nodded as brother Gavril knelt beside Danya and laid a hand on his good arm. "Yes, take it easy, a few inches more and we could have lost you. Don't worry about helping with the blessings tonight over the cups; just take care of yourself tonight. It's high time we gave you respite from that duty anyway, you're long past the age now." Gavril said meaning to be kind but he only managed to horrify Danya in front of Adrik.

Adrik for his part gave no outward appearance of shock at the words, but indeed they registered like a sledgehammer. Danya was still a virgin? A sun-priest at his age never having indulged just for the pleasure of the moment, the concept was

almost foreign. He could see the mortification in Danya's eyes and Adrik only smiled and adjusted the robe on Danya's shoulders. "This will certainly put a damper on your evening Danya. I'm sorry I cannot do more for you." Adrik spoke softly, surely Danya had someone by now he was going to offer his cup to, and he was far too lovely not to have at least a dozen admirers just waiting for the offer.

"I had no plans for after the blessings. Thank you both." Danya said almost near tears as he hurried off mortally embarrassed. Adrik reached over and slapped Gavril on the back of the head.

"What was that for?" Gavril asked rubbing his skull.

"You boob. You embarrassed him."

"How? Everyone knows Danya is a virgin still."

"Not everyone, I certainly didn't. Could you not see it troubles him?"

"Everything troubles Danya. He's fine in the garden, take him out of it and you might as well have a statue, they talk more."

Adrik slapped Gavril again. "He's shy, last I looked that's not criminal. By Mane's crown, I'll never understand boorish Solars! He should have been a lunar, he's got a lunar temperament." Adrik grumbled heading off shaking his head.

"See! I told you! Even your boy agrees with me!" Sol laughed as Mane and Endymion watched Adrik stalk off until he was out of sight.

"That didn't go well at all. Poor little Danya, how embarrassing." Endymion sighed and Mane nodded.

"He's off crying in his room now. I do hate when my favorite night of the year sees someone alone in heartbreak." Mane stated scratching his chin.

"So what do you suggest? I'm all ears if you have ideas." Sol said knowing that look on his brother's face meant he was considering meddling.

"It's too soon for pushing them into each other's beds. This could very well be just what they both need, but rushing things will do them no service. Adrik was definitely interested, I picked that much up off him." Endymion said and Mane nodded.

"He's always been more than a little interested in Danya in just a purely physical sense. He's not had the opportunity to get to know Danya beyond pleasantries and that's the problem." Mane began pacing in thought.

"Well then we get them together somehow where they can talk uninterrupted. My Danya is hurting, my little garden sprite deserves a little happiness."

Endymion smiled. "See you do understand love when it suits you too."

Sol glared and Endymion just chuckled. "Well we have a perfect excuse in the injury to get Adrik to pay a room visit." Sol said turning his eyes to his brother.

"Try getting him there. He always has a queue of virgins offering him cups tonight." Mane said and Endymion cleared his throat.

"It takes a flower to draw bees. Danya is definitely a rose in bloom, allow me to go have a chat with the drone?" Endymion grinned and Mane nodded.

"If you think you can do it without mother catching on, go right ahead beloved." Mane winked and Endymion stood.

"I can be creative. I'm just going to have a chat." Endymion said skipping off to Adrik's healing rooms where the youth was currently banging things around in annoyance.

Endymion slipped into the room and closed the door. Adrik whirled around to see the door shut and nobody in the room, but he suddenly smelled nothing but lunar glories in full bloom. It was a heady, sweet fragrance that was overwhelming and Adrik's jaw dropped as a figure slowly materialized in the room. The exact likeness of the ancient statue that still stood in the mess hall marking the spot where Brother Endys had been reborn into Endymion centuries before.

"Your eyes do not deceive you. Sit, I would like to talk to you." Endymion said in a dual voice that sent shivers down Adrik's spine. He immediately fell into a chair.

Endymion smiled and perched himself on the edge of the cluttered desk in the room. "My Lord Endymion! How may I serve you?" Adrik asked in shock.

"I am not here for me, but for you. I am breaking rules and meddling in mortal affairs. Well not so much meddling as offering some unsolicited advice." Endymion winked, a wreath of lunar glories appearing in his hands.

"I will tell you a story. Of a time when I was mortal." Endymion began placing the wreath on his head.

"This night was always a night I feared in my mortal youth. I will not lie and say I did not realize I was beautiful. I was. Did I have vanity? No, I hated my face because it brought unwanted attentions. I had love for only Mane even then and the only man I wanted to drink from my cup was that of my God and my beloved mentor. But there were others that would have forced upon me the loss of my virginity had I not been protected by my Mentor and Mane." Endymion began turning to look at Adrik.

"I was rather shy of nature at times, often blind to the machinations of the minds of others. When Mane spoke to me, my world came alive with wonder and gave me confidence in my own self and my choices in life. Sometimes it just takes the person you love looking at you to give you confidence to do things you wouldn't normally do." Endymion said cryptically with a smile.

"Why are you telling me this?" Adrik asked and Endymion just grinned.

"I can't tell you everything mortal. Just urging you to open your eyes and perhaps in awareness you may be Mane's confidence to your own Endys' needs." Endymion winked and shimmered as he faded.

Adrik was dumbstruck, what was Endymion trying to tell him? Someone needed him? Someone loved him? That struck a chord and Adrik got up to pace in thought. Who loved him? Adrik pondered Endymion's words when a single sentence made Adrik pause, the answer was crystal clear suddenly, who did he know that was shy and lacked confidence, who did he know that was sweet natured and kind and shockingly introverted... Danya.

"Oh Danya, I had no idea. No wonder you fled in practically tears this afternoon. I should have hit Gavril harder." Adrik sighed but smiled. He always did think Danya was quite easy on the eyes but never had a chance to actually talk with the youth much.

"Perhaps it's time I make some time to get to know you better." Adrik said grabbing his salves to go pay an unexpected visit on a certain handsome youth probably in very poor spirits. "Besides if you get me out of tonight's moon festivities and save me from attentions I don't want, I'll be your slave." Adrik chuckled as he closed his rooms and went in search of Danya's.

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Danya was in miserable spirits, his whole body hurt from the impact of the cart now and his shoulder was on fire just like Adrik had said it would be as he tried to get comfortable against some pillows propped up in his bed. He thought working on some of his sketches of the various plants he was growing in boxes all over his small room would have helped take his mind off his pain, both physical and mental, but just holding his stick of charcoal was painful so his sketches lay abandoned around him as the music from the festival outside drifted in his open windows. He felt utterly alone and dejected when a firm knock on his door jarred him from his senses. “Come in.” He called out softly, too tired to try and get up and answer the door, Danya’s eyes widened in shock when a familiar and handsome dark-haired head poked around the edge of the door.

“Don’t get up. I’ve come to see how you’re fairing.” Adrik said setting his bag on the corner of the bed and dragging a chair over to the bedside where Danya lay looking like he’d been run over by a wild cart. Appropriate considering the situation.

“Thank you. I am most sore like you said I would be.” Danya answered, modestly trying to pull the blanket over his bare torso. He had taken off his robes and was wearing nothing more than loose trousers. He flinched with every movement and his hand could barely grasp the blanket.

“I thought as much.” Adrik said noticing the lack of grip in Danya’s hand. He frowned taking that hand in his and turning it palm upward. “Flex your fingers for me. Does it hurt?”

“Yes.” Danya said flushing again involuntarily. Adrik had never been in his room before.

“I don’t like to hear that at all. You might have a pinched nerve. Scoot over here and let me look at that shoulder again.” Adrik ordered as he stood. Danya slipped his legs out of bed and sat perched on the edge and almost fainted dead away when Adrik crawled into bed to sit behind him removing the now useless slave compress and running tender fingers over abused muscle. He gently lifted and moved Danya’s arm testing range of motion and when Danya flinched, he took it in a different direction.

"Definitely something pinched in here." Adrik hummed as he reached for his bag and pulled out a better smelling, but no less potent concoction.

"Mavryn's Weed." Danya said softly recognizing the aroma.

"Aye, and some Fever's Bane and Willow root for the pain. Good nose." Adrik chuckled, Mavryn's Weed as not a common growing plant.

"I've found that Stinnus Leaves if boiled into a pulp and then dried and powdered have higher concentrations of the chemical acetyl derivative of salicylic acid which is what fever's bane is basically. Stinnus leaves are easier to come by and yield more per volume." Danya said absently and Adrik paused, interest immediately piqued.

"Really?"

"Aye. I've been researching medicinal alternatives as my course of higher studies."

"I'm about to beg to look at your notes Danya." Adrik was like a child with a new toy suddenly as he rubbed the ointment into Danya's shoulder and testing range of motion again. That nerve was still pinched and Adrik began pressing pressure points, finding the culprit in Danya's neck when he crumpled like a leaf in pain.

"Sorry! Sorry! But I found that nerve giving you woes. The impact jarred your shoulder into your neck. This is only going to hurt a minute I promise." Adrik said taking Danya's head in his hands and giving a quick jerk, making a popping noise in Danya's neck.

Danya made the loudest sound Adrik had ever heard him utter as he whimpered. Still quiet in comparison to some of his other patients, but to get Danya to cry out it really must have been hurting him more than he'd been letting on.

"I'm sorry, I know that hurt, but move your arm now, it shouldn't be catching as much."

"I just want to die at the moment." Danya whimpered but moved his arm anyway. "Thank you, that does move better now, and my fingers aren't tingling anymore."

"Good. Now let's get you comfortable or a close approximation thereof." Adrik smiled as he moved off the bed again and fluffed Danya's pillows for him before he helped settle him back in bed. Adrik pulled the light cover over Danya's legs before he settled back into the chair he'd dragged over toward the bed.

"Now then, healer duties seen to for the moment, I'm bringing myself and my own natural curiosity out to play. What do I, your humble apothecary, need in order to bribe you with to get look at your research notes my fine botanist?" Adrik smiled winsomely and Danya bashfully returned the smile.

"There on the desk, that green journal contains my finished notes. The Red one are experiments I'm working on, and the blue one is a list of plants I've only broken down into chemical components." Danya said, his shyness fleeing for the moment as he spoke about something he was passionate about. Adrik got up to retrieve the books and cringed.

"What is this nightmare of a plant on your desk?" He asked looking at the hellish spiked plant.

Danya laughed softly. "Careful, don't touch the spines, it's as poisonous as a toadstool."

"Charming."

"Quite. See that jar beside it?"

"The one with the dead grasshoppers in it?" Adrik asked his stomach churning almost.

"Use those tongs beside it and drop one of those onto the head of that plant and watch." Danya smiled and watched Adrik comply. The moment the grasshopper touched the bloom it snapped shut like a poacher's mantrap and Adrik jumped clear out of his skin.

"WOW! By Mane's crown! That is positively gruesome! What plant eats flesh?"

"That one does. Fascinating isn't it?" Danya chuckled watching Adrik's skin crawl.

"Where on earth did that come from?" Adrik asked fascinated as he watched the plant slowly swallow the insect.

"Those visiting Brothers we had last year from the Order near the western desert brought it with them. It's good for nothing medicinal but it sure is a wonder."

"You have a decidedly morbid sense of delight Danya. But I can see the fascination in it." Adrik smiled as he finished collecting the books off the desk and took up his seat again. Flipping open the green journal first.

Each page started with a highly detailed and immaculate sketch of the plant itself, each part labeled in small concise script. Next to it was a listing of the chemical breakdown of the plant and the best way to achieve the purest compounds. Boiling, stewing, simple drying or fresh use and below that was the common uses for said compounds from fevers, to hives, to upset stomachs to even cleaning solutions. Adrik was enthralled.

"Danya, this is perhaps the best and most concise dictionary of botanical properties and applications I've ever seen. And I've read every scroll in our archive on medicinal properties we have. There are things in here I've never heard of, let alone seen. By Mane's crown! You've found a compound for plague sores!"

"It doesn't cure them and I've never applied them in anything but theory based on what we did have in the archive records. Its just conjecture based on properties and chemical compositions." Danya replied, the reticence gone replaced by keen intellect on common shared interest and subject matter.

"It would work. Your conjecture is based on proven facts. I've been making a similar compound, but with your addition of waxweed and it's skin wound uses, on top of the drying properties of the Anges seeds and the infection reducing Sol's Breath this would really work. Danya! Your mind is incredible! I must have a copy of this, please. You have no idea what a wonder and joy this is to me just thinking how many lives you can save!"

Danya blushed with the compliment. "I will make you a copy if you wish and in future as I make my finished notes, I'll make two. I'm so glad these can be of use."

"Not just of use Danya, you've just saved hundreds of lives for years to come. There needs to be copies done by the scribes. This book should be sent to all orders. There is nothing even in the Capitol Archives that comes even remotely close to this sort of immaculate detail and composition and I'm serious. You are perhaps the most brilliant chemical botanist I've ever had the joy of reading in my studies. This is laid out like a dictionary; any apothecary can just look up the sickness or ailment, find the list of ingredients and make the compound. I don't know how many times I've had a patient suffering for days while I searched through dozens of mismatched scrolls on various symptoms trying to come up with mixtures to help. With this book at hand, the symptoms are all laid out with mixtures already measured and in most cases variations and alternatives. You've saved me and any healer literally days and days of research." Adrik was utterly amazed that quiet little Danya had done something so wonderfully incredible.

"I never knew it could be so helpful."

"Ah Danya, bless you and your modesty. Aye, more than helpful I am positively in love with your mind and I will become your shadow if I must just to peek over your shoulder and spy on your new experiments." Adrik laughed and Danya smiled.

"I tend to make this room rather smelly. You might want to wait to peek until the fumes dissipate."

"Your neighbors must love you." Adrik chuckled knowing himself how pungent some concoctions were to make.

"Hardly." Danya chuckled, coming alive with confidence as they discussed his research.

"Why don't you work in my rooms? I have a room set aside for potions and such. Well ventilated and keeps the smell from killing my patients when in residence. Not to mention the ease it will give me to spy on your progress." Adrik grinned wagging his eyebrows.

Danya laughed. "I'd love to, it would make things easier. I'm always worried when I have to leave a fire burning in here and I'm called away."

"Done. I'll bring you in a desk. Although I'm going back into healer mode and ordering you not to work for the next few days and give that shoulder a rest. By Mane, I'm shivering now thinking that we could have lost you today and that beautiful mind. Avoid dangerous wild carts in future."

"I'll try." Danya smiled sweetly and Adrik was struck again at how beautiful he was to look upon when he wasn't trying to hide his face and look away in shyness. Danya was transformed and alive. Endymion's words echoed in Adrik's head and he said a silent thank you for the advice.

"You'd better or I'll be forced to lock you away in safety." Adrik winked as sudden noises from next door brought the debilitating shyness back over Danya like a suffocating shroud. The Lover's in the next room were rather loud and the walls rather thin. Having been lost in conversation Adrik had forgotten that outside the Lover's Moon was in full force and there were probably hundreds of couples now wandering off to enjoy each other's company. Danya looked sad and lonely and suddenly vulnerable.

Adrik coughed trying to lighten the mood. "I was so enjoying myself here with you I forgot all about tonight. I do want to apologize for Gavril's words earlier. They were quite insensitive and I'm sorry."

"Don't be." Danya replied softly.

"Can't help it. I like you a great deal Danya, I always have. I remember quite clearly how strong you were for me when I lost my eye. Most ten-year-olds would have panicked and fled, but you stayed by my side until help arrived and I appreciate that very much. The least I can do is stand by yours when you need strength. What you do or don't do is nobody's business but your own and I for one admire you for being true to yourself." Adrik said reaching out to squeeze Danya's hand. Danya squeezed back lightly a few tears slipping past long dark eyelashes.

"I'm just a coward."

"No, you're shy, there's a difference." Adrik said reaching over to lift Danya's chin so their eyes would meet. "There is nothing wrong with you, please believe that. Not everyone is born with great confidence; it needs nurturing in order to grow. I see someone before me who has not had the nurturing of the soul that is required. I pray I can give you a little of what you need Danya. I hope you will let me at least try."

Danya shivered and Adrik was suddenly lost in large hazel eyes that shimmered with tears. Nothing in the world had ever been more beautiful to Adrik's eyes than the young man before him. So lost, so talented, so lovely, Adrik wanted to wrap around him and hold on for all he was worth. For the first time Adrik felt more than just attraction, his heart ached for this person right down to his core. This was what he'd been looking for his whole life, a soul to care about deeply, to connect to, to share with, to grow with. There was no denying they were highly compatible intellectually and that just added to the already swelling feelings in Adrik's chest. Adrik leaned forward and placed a gentle kiss on Danya's brow. "Such a beautiful person inside and out you are and I have been so utterly blind." Adrik sighed resting his forehead against Danya's, their eyes bare inches from each other.

"Adrik, I..." Danya stumbled, a secret long kept oft times took on a life of it's own and demanded to remain kept.

"I know, I can see it in your eyes Danya. I've been a fool, a blind, oblivious, impetuous, twittering oaf. What wonders to be found that were right here under my nose all this time. I'd give anything right at this moment to be honored with your cup, I am more than infatuated with you."

Danya blushed a bright red and tears welled in his eyes as he broke down and allowed Adrik to pull him lightly into his arms.

"Adrik, I... I've always, it breaks my heart to see you hurt. So long have I wanted to comfort you, I admire you so much your strength and kindness. It makes my heart ache when you are alone. But I was just some little nobody and you always have so many admirers, I thought... I couldn't, you wouldn't want somebody like me."

Adrik smiled into Danya's hair. He was such a tender soul. "Ah Danya. What a joy you are to my spirit and you are far from nobody. You spark my mind as well as my heart. I want you very much suddenly. To the point I'm feeling positively possessive in wanting to horde you all to myself. May I kiss you?"

Danya nodded against Adrik's chest and Adrik leaned back and brought his lips tenderly against Danya's. Heaven held less appeal at that moment than Danya's trembling joy as Adrik slowly drank in the most meaningful kiss he'd ever experienced. His soul was suddenly ablaze with love and desire. The moment was gone far too soon as Adrik broke the kiss before it went too far. Danya was still injured and Adrik ran a loving hand over Danya's shoulder.

"That was beautiful and before I hurt you I should stop. However, if you don't mind, I'd like to stay here a while and hold you if I may."

"I'd like that very much." Danya said wiping his eyes and smiling sweetly.

Adrik stood and blew out the candles in the room and shed his outer robes as he crawled into bed beside Danya and settled him carefully against his bare chest, holding him lightly as not to agitate his sensitive shoulder. Danya seemed to melt against him, his body fitting perfectly against him. It was sublime comfort as they lay there together in silence, Adrik's fingers trailing up and down Danya's arm that lay against his waist. When they drifted off to sleep together neither would recall, but waking up still in each other's arms brought smiles unbidden to both faces.

"I could get very used to waking up beside you." Adrik smiled smoothing Danya's hair back from his face. Danya smiled brightly.

"Aye. I have never slept so wonderfully before." Danya replied as Adrik leaned over and brushed a gentle kiss against Danya's lips.

"Neither have I love. Neither have I." Adrik said in kind as he gently moved to inspect Danya's shoulder. "How is it this morning?"

"Stiff, but not nearly as painful as before." Danya answered truthfully as once again Adrik began moving his arm around.

"Good. Just a day or two and you should feel if not look right as rain. That bruise will linger a while." Adrik said crawling out of bed to pull his robe on. "Care to join me for breakfast love?"

Danya nodded, getting up to pull his own robe on for the day. Adrik took his hand and entwined their fingers as they made their way together down stairs to mess.

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Several curious eyes turned toward the pair as they entered the mess and Adrik steered Danya to a seat and they sat side by side. Adrik taking it upon himself to reach for the various bowls on the table to help Danya fix his plate so he didn't aggravate his shoulder. Danya's appreciative smiles were bright and warm and it was obvious in Adrik's eyes he was more than smitten with the young botanist.

Several whispered conversations began out of their earshot and speculations began. Even though neither of them was wearing red which stated quite clearly they hadn't been intimate physically, their behavior and body language toward each other was very much as if intimacy of a deeper nature had indeed transpired between them.

Danya seemed like an entirely different person that morning seeing as normally he ate alone off in a corner efficiently and then immediately went to work. This morning he was attentive and cheerful and whatever Adrik was grinning and talking about had Danya's full attention. When Adrik leaned over and made a private whispered comment in Danya's ear and Danya actually laughed as he blushed and hid his face with his hands and Adrik grinned devilishly at the reaction everyone paused. Something was definitely going on between the two of them.

Most of the older Priests smiled and just continued on with their own meals. The younger brothers were having mixed reactions. Adrik was always a popular conquest. Tall, excessively intelligent, witty, gregarious, handsome and perfectly fit and trim, he was a healer that always practiced what he preached where eating healthy and exercising was concerned. He was the picture of vivacious and virile male youth and health. His dark sable, near black hair hung in thick waves down his back which he usually braided or pulled back into a tail at the nape of his neck to keep out of his way while he worked. His remaining good eye was a crystal clear sky blue and his smile was bright and kind and animated his entire face. The patch over his bad eye added a mysterious and roguish look about him that just added to his overall physical appeal. Seeing him with the pretty but timid and mousy Danya was a shock to most.

Adrik tended to gravitate to outgoing and bold personalities, Danya was the extreme opposite of all the others Adrik had ever been attached to previously, some speculated another failed romance considering Adrik's track record, others

that knew Danya from working with him speculated a good match for the healer and one that would more than likely last, which was what everyone knew Adrik wanted more than anything.

There were others though harboring sparks of jealousy, Adrik had been suspiciously absent from the festivities the night before and several cups that would have been offered had not been given and several other invitations from would be lovers vying for the healer's attentions went undelivered. Danya was receiving some cold looks that neither he or Adrik noticed wrapped up in their own conversation over breakfast.

One person did notice, the head Priest Lukyan was watching the pair favorably where he sat over his own breakfast. The aged Lunar had said many prayers on Adrik's behalf. Seeing him seek a soul to love and never connecting the way every lunar wished to connect to another was something Lukyan understood well. He leaned over to his own soul connection, together nearly sixty years and he grinned. "That is a good match. I foresee vows eventually." He muttered and Father Jovan nodded, his smile wrinkled face cheerful.

"Aye. They have much in common in their interests. Danya was my best student in chemistry even Adrik didn't do that well and he is no slouch either. Adrik focused more on known applications for medical uses and Danya was far more experimental with theory and trying new things just for the sake of discovery. That pair, if nothing else, is a marriage of like minds." Jovan said watching his favorite pupils in heavy discussion, Adrik was making a diagram of sorts with grapes on the table and Danya kept tossing in his two cents with a few stray bits of toast crusts. Jovan recognized the chemical symbols they were constructing and for a moment was drawn into the conversation from across the room seeing a complex symbol form on the table that looked like a variation of potassium nitrates.

"What are they making?" Lukyan asked and Jovan chuckled.

"Some vile concoction that I'm sure Adrik will make you drink eventually." Jovan chuckled and Lukyan shivered.

"I don't want to know anymore. Chemists and healers, you all make me feel dumb and assault my taste buds with potions."

"Hardly dumb beloved and we fill you full of medicine to keep you around as long as we can." Jovan patted Lukyan's hand as he noticed a group of young solar brothers nearby talking hushed and animated.

"Always the way. There is always someone who seeks discordance with harmony." Lukyan sighed having had years of experience under his belt. He was grateful to no longer be young at times.

"Adrik is popular, Danya is not. He's just usurped everyone's favorite conquest, there will be many roughed feathers." Jovan stated simple fact.

"Let's hope they weather the hen pecking and I'm not forced to dole out punishments."

"If it's meant to be, they will. You'll have to dole out punishments, that's a given love. It happens every time Adrik fancies a new one."

"Bugger." Was Lukyan's only reply as he settled back into his seat and rubbed his eyes, he detested when people acted like idiots out of jealousy.

"Ah that's BRILLIANT!" Adrik exclaimed rather loudly and excitedly and began waving at father Jovan at the head table. "Father, you've got to come see this!" Adrik beamed and Jovan thrilled to be invited into what had looked like a stimulating discourse hurried over to get a better look at the breakfast food chemical model.

Jovan eyed the symbols on the table and collapsed into an empty bench. "What an unorthodox combination, but there is nothing there I can see that will conflict. Amazing."

"It's all Danya's idea father, I would have never thought of combining these like this. I can't find a single flaw in this and if this works like it should, this could actually help restore lost cartilage to joints while at the same time easing the arthritic pain and slow the deterioration." Adrik was almost dancing with joy as he leaned over the table with Jovan.

"I was teasing Lukyan not five minutes ago that you were making some vile concoction for him to drink when I caught sight of the potassium strain. Looks like I was right." Jovan laughed his eyes following the series of symbols over and over with delight.

"Danya, you never cease to amaze me child with your mind's clarity and originality. I'm glad to see you two working together, you were always my two best pupils you make your teacher proud of you."

"Thank you Father." Danya smiled and blushed with the compliment and Adrik just lightly touched his cheek with the backs of his fingers.

"You're amazing love, absolutely amazing. Father Jovan has he shown you his research notes? This is nothing compared to some of the things he's done and come up with. I think I spent hours last night enthralled with his notes. He's just saved hundreds if not thousands of lives for years to come. I'm going to insist on the scribes making copies to send to all the orders immediately."

"I knew you were working on medicinal alternatives and standards, I had no idea how much you've accomplished." Jovan smiled and Danya looked almost guilty.

"I really didn't think it would be all that useful. But then my calling isn't in the healing arts; I was just seeing plants broken down into properties, sub-properties and the elemental table. It was all simply clinical analysis to me - basic conjecture and theory only. It was Adrik who made me see the potential of the research through a healer's eyes. I am suddenly inspired to work harder." Danya smiled up at Adrik who leaned over and planted a rather large kiss on stunned lips.

"Beautiful, you work hard enough and you're still under orders not to work for a few days still. Unless of course we're playing with our food and not eating it like children over studies." Adrik grinned picking up one of the grapes off the diagram and popping it into his mouth.

"Ah, that's right. How is your arm this morning Danya dear?" Jovan asked hearing of the incident the previous day.

"Sore, but manageable. I'll live, I have a good healer taking care of me." Danya smiled up at Adrik adoringly. Adrik was lost and falling in love all over again as he ran a hand over Danya's hair.

"Taking care of you will never be a chore my lovely." Adrik replied and Jovan smiled. This was more than a marriage of like-minds; there was sincere affection and love in abundance fueling the partnership. He agreed silently with Lukyan's earlier observation, the vows would not be long in coming. Adrik had finally found his perfect match, and Danya was coming alive and blossoming into his own with Adrik's encouragement and support.

"Well, then. I shall inform my beloved to prepare his pallet for assault later and I will leave you two to enjoy the day shall I?" Jovan stood with a wink and Danya smiled charmingly and Adrik returned the wink.

"Tell father Lukyan he has until tomorrow before I will have this ready for him to ingest. I do intend on being just slightly lazy today myself with my favorite patient at the moment." Adrik smiled sitting back down and taking Danya's hand in his.

"Have a wonderful day dears." Jovan chuckled to himself as he returned to his own breakfast.

"Well?" Lukyan asked as curious as a cat.

"That was a vile potion for your joints that will work wonders if Danya's calculations are correct and I've never known that child to ever be wrong and yes you old nanny-goat, they are indeed more than smitten with each other. Adrik reminded me of you when we first met. He's well and truly in love with Danya, as Danya is with him. This is a very good match."

Lukyan just smiled, nodded and finished his breakfast.

"That's so beautiful." Endymion sighed were he was sitting on the statue in the mess, Mane leaning up against it beside him nodding agreement.

"Aye. Indeed all it took was getting them to talk and the rest sorted itself out all on it's own." Mane replied, watching the couple finish their breakfast.

"Look at my lovely little sprite this morning. Still a bloody virgin, but I don't think that is going to last much longer considering the looks of that boy beside him. What did you say to him Endymion?" Sol cackled as he sauntered into the room himself.

"Nothing really. Just told him about Endys and how sometimes confidence needs to be nurtured in order to bloom. I told him to open his eyes basically. That's all." Endymion said grinning as a cough came from behind them.

All three simultaneously froze and uttered, "Good morning Mother" in unison.

"I'll not scold because you really didn't meddle much and this pair was meant to be eventually. But honestly you three are a test to my patience." The Goddess mother rolled her eyes and Endymion just grinned.

"Deny it's romantic mother and look at their path, look at all the good things they will achieve together now." Endymion said and the Mother Goddess nodded.

"Many lives will be saved yes and sooner rather than later, just refrain from pushing mortals too much, no matter how frustrated they make you." She said and vanished without further discourse.

"I didn't push! I just suggested." Endymion grinned with a chuckle as he stood and stretched. "I'm tired, Yoru you exhausted me last night and I am off to rest." Endymion stated and vanished just as quickly as the goddess Mother.

Mane just grinned and waggled his eyebrows at his brother. "You bastard, rub it in why don't you. I'm the one with the promiscuous following and reputation, but you have the great sex holiday. I want a sex festival holiday damn it." Sol grumbled as Mane vanished leaving only his laughter behind.

Sol made a rather rude gesture to empty air as he walked the mess and settled beside Danya proudly. He just adored his little sprite and that smile was wonderful to see at last.

After breakfast as the pair stood to leave Danya moved to walk around a cluster of solar when one turned and slammed Danya's shoulder with his. "That was deliberate you little shit!" Sol growled as Danya crumpled in pain. Adrik had had his back turned and was immediately by Danya's side.

"Danya! What happened?" Adrik asked concerned as Danya fought crying in pain.

"I'm sorry Brother Danya, I didn't see you there." The culprit half-heartedly apologized.

"You little liar! Oh please Father, let me smack him or put spiders in his bed or something!" Sol hated having his hands tied when he wanted to punish idiots.

"It's alright Brother Kara. It was an accident." Danya whimpered as Adrik helped him back to his feet and glared at the young Solar.

"Come on love, Let's get out of here so I can look at this properly." Adrik steered Danya out of the mess, tossing an accusatory look over his shoulder. He was no fool, he knew Brother Kara well considering Kara had been shamelessly flirting with him for weeks and was having a hard time taking 'no' for an answer. The look in his eyes spoke volumes as he smiled at Adrik; that had definitely not been an accident.

"Honestly, what does he see in Danya? Danya can't put two words together without stumbling over his tongue in fright and what could they possibly have to discuss? Adrik will get bored quickly with that no doubt. And really, Danya's still a virgin, there's going to be little fun there for Adrik. That is if Danya will ever give it up willingly. It's the morning after a lover's moon and as always, Danya is

still no closer to wearing red. I swear he should have taken lunar vows he's so afraid of his own body. Not that there's much there. All those freckles, I'd not want someone to see me naked either." Kara complained, teased, belittled and laughed insultingly to his cronies who agreed with him.

"Be glad I can't give you hives, warts, and plague sores you little bastard." Sol growled angrily. "You're just jealous that Danya's pretty on the inside and outside and you've just got it on the surface and that healer lunar has been shutting your advances down for weeks. Goodness, why are so many of my priests and followers vain, narcissistic, cruel hearted little prigs? Don't answer that mom, I know, because I am, but still, I'm not that bad anymore! I learned, eventually. Damn it. I'm begging here Father, just a nice fat hairy wart on the end of his nose for a while?" Sol turned his eyes upward and as usual, his father was blissfully silent and ignoring his son's request for punishment.

Adrik hurried Danya to his vast rooms that doubled as his infirmary and workrooms. Adrik had private quarters in the back and that's where he directed Danya to sit on the large bed while he rummaged for his salves. "Danya, I'm sorry. Kara is..."

"He likes you, it's alright." Danya replied quietly and resigned and Adrik knelt at Danya's knees and placed a hand on Danya's cheek.

"No, it's not alright. I finally find what I've been looking for and I'll be damned if I let jealousy hurt him out of spite. Danya believe me, I love you very much, and I've made many mistakes before looking for a love like I feel when I look at you. Those mistakes have consequences that I'm afraid will reflect on you. Unlike Kara, I have no desire for meaningless liaisons, I never have. For a long time I confused love with affection and that just seemed to make every one think I was open to casual partnerships. Kara is one of those people and I've said 'no' more times than I can count but he still tries. Whatever he does or says, trust that I love you and I would never do anything to hurt you. I am a lunar for a reason, I believed with my whole being that there was one perfect person out there for me, and I finally found him. You." Adrik said honestly and Danya's joyful tears rolled down his sun-speckled cheeks.

"I love you too Adrik. With all my heart." He replied softly sniffing.

"I know you do love. Your eyes speak to me in ways that make me weak in the knees with joy. You're a treasure to me and I would speak vows with you this very minute to prove it if I could. I love you that very much."

Danya lost his composure entirely and broke down in happiness sobbing. Adrik collected him in a tender embrace and kissed his moist cheeks. "I can't tell you

how happy that makes me to hear Adrik. I would return your vows with all my heart. You are all I have ever wanted." Danya sobbed and laughed simultaneously with joy.

"When you are healed, would you walk the aisle and share vows with me?" Adrik asked formally cupping Danya's cheeks in his hands.

"Aye, I will with all my heart and soul." Danya answered with eyes shining and a smile so full of love and affection it was blindingly bright. Adrik's heart soared as he devoured Danya's lips in a jubilant kiss.

Adrik didn't allow himself to get too swept away in the moment; they had come back to his rooms for a reason. He smiled as he broke the kiss and leaned back. "Now then, let me see that beautiful shoulder." Adrik said tugging Danya's belt lightly until his robes slipped off his slender torso.

"Not so beautiful at the moment. Unless of course you like purple and chartreuse mottled skin." Danya said flinching at the nasty bruise that looked horrific this morning as it spread like a spider down part of his chest and arm.

"I don't like it on anyone, least of all you. This is perhaps the nastiest bruise I've ever seen. No wonder you're still so tender. He didn't jar it too badly did he?" Adrik asked gingerly rubbing in ointments to dull the pain and help reduce further spreading.

"No, just hard enough to hurt not damage anything further. I can still move somewhat normally. So long as I don't have to lift my arm higher than my chest."

"But you can lift it that high, that's what is important. It just smarts correct?"

"Aye, I can lift it if I have to, I just have absolutely no desire to at the moment. Whatever you did to my neck last night fixed whatever was keeping me from moving it at all."

"Your fingers are fine?"

"Aye. Just fine."

"Elbow?"

Danya laughed. "Elbow fine too. You are utterly charming when you're concerned. No wonder you have so many admirers. I should have gotten hurt more often."

"Bite your tongue beloved." Adrik pinched Danya's nose as he sat back wiping his hands on a towel to rid himself of excess ointment. "Although, you sitting there half nude in my bed is quite nice." Adrik winked as he got up to put his salves and ointments away in the cupboard he'd retrieved them from.

"Well you were half nude in mine last night, I suppose this is what they would call a fair turn." Danya's eyes crinkled when he smiled and Adrik chuckled as he returned to Danya's side.

"True. Now then my lovely, I seem to have a day free now and I am at your beck and call. What would you like to do today?"

"Oh goodness I don't know. I thought I'd be working today, I don't tend to take much leisure time for myself, I'm at a loss."

"Can you play chess?"

"In theory yes. I've never actually played before, just watched a time or two."

"Love, your theory all by itself scares me with its brilliance. You're probably going to destroy me but I won't go down without a fight at least. Want to play?"

"Why not." Danya grinned as he left his robe behind on the bed and padded over to the table in just his summer trousers as Adrik set up the board.

It was a warm early summer day and Adrik's outer robe joined Danya's on the bed as they sat together in just light trousers, sharing cool juice as they concentrated on the board between them.

Adrik mused to himself as he watched Danya, he had the adorable habit of poking a little of his tongue out of his teeth when he was lost in thought and he was caught up watching Danya and losing miserably when a tiny knock came to the open door and both heads turned to see a boy of about six standing there looking dejected and holding a sickly looking plant in a pot.

"Father Danya, they said you were here. It's sick can you help me?" The child asked and once again Adrik noticed a transformed Danya. He smiled brightly and patted his lap.

"Aye, come here Osanna and let me see." Danya said and the small boy crawled up on Danya's lap and set the pot down on the table.

"What's wrong with it?" He asked miserably and Danya patted his hair.

"Nothing that can't be fixed dearest. Remember what I told you about too much water and not enough sun?"

The boy nodded.

"See the yellow in the leaves, that means you're watering it too much dearest. Just a little every other day. You've been filling it every day haven't you?"

The boy nodded again.

"Don't water it for a few days, then remember only a little bit every other day after that. Make sure you put it where it gets sun all day. You've had this inside haven't you?"

Again the boy nodded and Danya chuckled. "Ah, dearest you're so like me at the same age. I always wanted my flowers inside too. But they need sunshine blossom to grow. Make sure you keep it on the windowsill at the very least and remember not to give it too much water. It will be fine in a few days, I promise, if you do as I say." Danya said kissing the lad's brow and handing him back the pot.

"If you can make this one bloom, I've got some new bulbs for you to try too, I just got them a few days ago. Such pretty bearded irises, the purple ones you said you liked."

"Really?" The boy beamed and Danya smiled and nodded.

"Aye. So take care of them like I tell you and you'll have a beautiful garden all your own."

"I will father Danya, thank you!" The boy scampered off clutching his pot excited and Danya turned to see Adrik leaning back in his chair highly amused.

"You are wonderful with children."

"I adore the little ones. I teach first and second years, Osanna was so like me at the same age. The joy of making something grow with your own hands with care is something that thrills early and stays with you all your life. His excitement is infectious." Danya smiled and Adrik nodded.

"So I can see. And it's still your turn." Adrik nodded at the board and Danya moved his piece.

"Checkmate I believe." Danya winked with a grin.

"Aw hell I didn't even see that!" Adrik grumbled and Danya only laughed.

"Pay more attention to the game and not to me then."

"Can't help it beautiful, you're a distraction." Adrik chuckled setting up the board again.

Danya just smiled and as winner, made the first move in the new game.

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Sol, curious by nature and anxious to see his favorite sprite happy materialized beside the pair still bent over their game. “Chess? You’re playing chess? What new lovers play chess?” Sol asked a blissfully unaware couple. When Sol noticed the bruise that had been hidden under robes earlier.

“Well sunshine, I suppose that’s probably the reason you two aren’t playing properly.” Sol asked running fingers over the bruise and Danya shivered.

“You cold?” Adrik asked and Danya shook his head.

“Nay, just the opposite. I felt really warm all of a sudden and for a minute I didn’t ache at all.” Danya said and Sol grinned.

“You’re not going to ache at all in a second my little sprite. A gift from me to you, I may not be able to punish mortals for being idiots, but I can reward them for being perfect little flowers in my garden.” Sol whispered in Danya’s ear and laid a kiss on Danya’s abused shoulder.

Danya shivered again, his eyes suddenly rolling back in his head in sheer ecstasy as Adrik sat there with his jaw in the vicinity of his chest as the bruise began to glow with a golden shine and then literally melt away. Danya began to crumple out of his chair and Adrik dove to catch him, his fingers immediately probing a warm to the touch shoulder that held no trace of injury. “By Mane’s Crown!”

“By Sol’s you boob.” Sol chuckled taking up the chair Danya had fallen out of.

“Danya, talk to me what happened?” Adrik asked as Danya’s eyes fluttered open and he smiled.

“A gift, I’ve been kissed by Sol, It felt like I was on fire all over. Oh thank you my Lord.” Danya spoke to the empty air and Sol just grinned down at him.

“You’re welcome sunshine. Now go play with your man.” Sol winked as Danya laughed almost giddy and threw his arms around Adrik’s neck.

“I don’t know why or how he healed me, but he did and I feel suddenly wonderful.”

Adrik smiled. "After a kiss from a god, do you think perhaps you'd deign to kiss a mere mortal?"

"Oh Aye." Danya almost purred as he wrapped his arms around Adrik's neck and melted into a deep passionate kiss.

"Oh that is so much better than those half hearted smooches earlier. Eat him up boy!" Sol cheered, as Adrik wasted no time in taking advantage of the sudden gift.

It helped that when Sol kissed, he left hunger in his wake. Danya would be feeling more than a little aroused anyway, Adrik was about to get very lucky from a very receptive little sun priest. Danya was a sun priest for a reason, he may have the tendencies of monogamy that were a lunar trait, but buried within was the fire of passion that just needed to be set free and awakened.

Adrik was in for a lifetime with a lover who would never leave him unsatisfied in the bedroom, or whatever other room a sun priest or sun follower decided was the perfect spot for an impromptu tryst.

Sol propped his chin in his hand, he wasn't going to miss a second of this first joining of moonlight and sunshine he approved of whole-heartedly. Danya was going to burst into full bloom finally.

Adrik was literally blown away with the passion behind Danya's kiss. Long graceful fingers tracing his scalp as they trailed through his long dark hair as Danya's body molded itself against his and straddled his lap where they were still partially sprawled and sitting on the floor. Adrik groaned into the kiss, totally electrified in every pore as he grasped thin hips in his hands and ran those large healing hands up a smooth back pulling Danya even closer.

He felt Danya's fingers on the strap of his eye patch and those long, deft and gentle fingers pull it away and lips moved briefly from his lips to kiss the scar over his left eye. Adrik shivered, he'd never had anyone remove his patch before and then never cringe at the disfigurement of his lost eye. The lid was fused shut permanently and the ragged scar that started just above his eyebrow and ended at his cheekbone in a diagonal, lightning bolt shaped line was a mark of a lesson in mortality and a folly of his vigorous misspent youth.

"How I wish I could have prevented this beloved. My heart stopped when I saw you fall that day. My heart then lost to you irrevocably when even in your torment, you faced it with such unwavering faith and courage. You are my

inspiration as well as my desire." Danya whispered as he kissed a trail over the scar and Adrik whimpered in soul shuddering joy.

"Danya. You make my soul ache with wonder of you. You are the brightest flower in Sol's garden I am so very blessed with your love."

"Here, Here! But less talking you two, there's time for that after!" Sol cheered, from his perch on the chair beside them.

They hadn't heard Sol, but they certainly reacted as if they had as Adrik grappled Danya against him and plundered his mouth with a gasping, desperate and ignited with passion kiss. Adrik stood pulling Danya up of the floor with him, their tongues and teeth still battling each other and the chess board went flying off the table, the pieces scattered to the four winds as Adrik set Danya on top of it, his hands desperately pulling at light trouser material that was only keeping Adrik from what he wanted. Danya's hands equally busy and furiously at work freeing Adrik from his similar confinements.

"That's my flower!" Sol was giddy with delight as he glowed with feral pleasure.

Pants went flying in the same direction as the chess set and mouths had yet to release each other from sweet torment. From lips to necks to ears whatever patch of skin was nearest received a worshipping of desire as Adrik and Danya hissed and moaned as their swollen erections rubbed together furiously.

Danya arched his back and fell back onto the table, his hands gripping the sides as Adrik brought his lips down a slender tanned and spotted chest and didn't bother teasing as he engulfed Danya's member in a warm moist mouth.

Sol couldn't resist when mortals were this passionate, he had to add to the pleasure and share in it, it was food and fuel for Sol's fire. Sol wrapped around Adrik, his hand melding into the healer's as fingers circled and coaxed the puckering of flesh quivering with willing invitation.

"Feel the flower open his petals for you drone in welcome." Sol whispered lustily in Adrik's ear and their joined hands found purchase and slipped past resistance. Danya's moan of pleasure sent shivers down both mortal and divine spines.

"Feel for the treasure within, reach for it, watch the flower bloom beneath you." Sol urged Adrik's hand movements, pulling stretching touching deep and hidden places that had Danya writhing, moaning and thrashing with passion on the table. Sol's other hand reached around and grasped Adrik's weeping erection, stroking lightly, fueling the drone as well as the flower.

"Feel it build, this is the bounty of my garden young Adrik, the gift you are being given will be unlike anything you have ever known or will ever know. To taste sunshine and honey will make you hunger and you will never be sated long. He is in bloom, your flower. See how beautiful he is? How passionate he is? How he gives himself to you and you alone? This flower, once in season will ever be in season until you fade together in the winter years. He needs to be pollinated drone and that is your duty, he will long for it, need it, it sustains him and drives him. He is my vassal, my perfect flower and we thrive best on passion and fire. Give it to him now." Sol nipped at Adrik's ear as he stroked and fed his light into both new lovers, making their first joining something that neither would ever forget and gifting them both with the fire of a god that would always stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Sol joined with Adrik fully, melting into the young lunar priest as he gripped Danya's hips and thrust himself forward with a groan that came from his soul. He was on fire, burning within like the sun itself was trying to break free from beneath his skin. His desire was to the point of insane obsession, the all encompassing need, want, power and fulfillment of soul was driving their motions as Adrik almost violently made love to the youth spread before him on the table.

Danya's cries and moans were not of pain, but of the same need and want as his ankles locked together behind Adrik's hips and he added force to every thrust and his hands, grasping Adrik's forearms were white knuckled where he clung to his lover. "Adrik! Adrik! Yes!" Danya thrashed wildly, every fiber of his body on fire and climbing to a pinnacle rapidly.

Adrik couldn't speak and could only fight for breath as he moaned and sobbed with pleasure as Danya shuddered violently beneath him, releasing his pleasure with a cry that went straight to Adrik's soul and squeezed just as the muscles within Danya's body constricted almost painfully, pulling Adrik over the abyss with him and both bodies heaved in near convulsions of ecstasy before Adrik literally collapsed on top of Danya, his heart pounding in his ears and his body utterly spent and heaving to breathe.

Sol stepped from Adrik's body and smiled. "My gift to you both. You will always burn like that for each other. Thank you my loves for such a wonderful feast for my soul." Sol smiled kissing them both fondly as he vanished sated and full.

They spent several long moments, clinging to each other and fighting to regain normal heart rates and breathing when Danya burst in to a joyful, bubbling and effervescent laughter, his arms wrapping around Adrik's shoulders where Adrik lay half on the table, his feet still on the floor.

Adrik smiled into the nape of Danya's neck as he laughed. "Danya, you are indescribable." Adrik purred at a loss to put a name to the intimacy they had just shared.

"That was more than worth the wait. Sol's fire burns, I feel him in and around us and every where, Adrik can you feel it too?"

"Aye. I felt consumed. I've heard of Sol doing this, I always thought it was a myth."

"Nay, not a myth but not common either. He's given us the gift of his blessing."

"Not to mention, I think he was part of that as more than just a spectator." Adrik chuckled trying to stand on knees that had turned to rubber.

"Aye. He was melded with you, I felt it all over, he is the king of drones after all." Danya grinned as he sat up and wrapped his arms around Adrik who was half sitting and leaning on the table exhausted still between Danya's legs.

"Had I not felt it, I would have never believed it. Mane doesn't do that, I've never had a god take over my body before." Adrik was almost torn on how to react. Danya just ran loving hands up his chest, resting his chin on Adrik's shoulder.

"Not take it over, just share it with you. Your actions were entirely your own beloved. Sol sups from passion, you obviously had a wellspring Sol found to his liking. I know I found it to mine." Danya grinned and Adrik smiled and turned to kiss the end of Danya's nose.

"So you like me do you?"

"Very much. I do hope you plan on making a habit of this." Danya grinned; no longer shy and his eyes sparkled with knowing and loving.

"Beloved, you can rest assured of that. Once will never be enough, you took everything I've ever known before and showed me how much it paled drastically in comparison. You're intoxicating and if I had a scrap of energy left, you'd be in trouble."

Danya laughed as Adrik turned to face him. Danya hooked his ankles behind Adrik's knees and his arms wound themselves around Adrik's shoulders as they shared a long lingering kiss.

It was in this intimate moment the door opened and Adrik was caught with his bare backside in full view but thankfully he was blocking Danya's modesty with his body.

"Well, well, well. What do we have here?" Kara asked masking his shock with sarcasm.

"Knocking is usually considered polite when coming to someone's private quarters Brother Kara. Obviously what we have here is also private."

"You wound me Adrik dear. I thought we had..."

"Stop right there, Kara. We had nothing, we never did and I am not going to have this conversation with you, again, when I am standing naked and baring you my backside and I am quite busy with my beloved. Thank you, please leave."

"Beloved? Shy, scared little Danya? Please Adrik, he's just a new fancy that will fade like all the others. I can offer you so much more."

Danya just sighed He did not doubt Adrik, but he could feel Adrik's temperature rising in anger. Adrik whirled around, stalked forward, physically loomed over Kara forcing him to step backwards and out of the door. "I said get out!" Adrik shouted, slamming the door and bolting it in Kara's stunned face as he stared at the scar that was uncovered on Adrik's eye.

"Oh dear." Danya muttered still sitting on the table as Adrik growled and flopped into bed.

"That little... I'm sorry Danya." Adrik's arm covered his eyes. Danya slipped silently off the table and crawled into bed with Adrik, making Adrik rest his head on his lap as he finger combed long hair in comfort.

"Not your fault dearest. Don't let him make you angry, I'm not upset at his words. I am shy and timid; he said nothing that isn't truth. You just don't see them as faults, others do." Danya smiled and Adrik reached up and stroked Danya's cheek.

"What a way to ruin a moment. I'm sorry."

"Nothing is ruined beloved. Like either of us have the energy for more? Hardly." Danya grinned and Adrik chuckled.

"You do have a point. Care to nap a while with me?"

"A nap sounds perfect, we have an hour or two until mid-day mess and I am hungry too."

"Aye, like a bear famished. A nap will stave it off a while." Adrik grinned as he wrapped around Danya and pulled a light sheet over them while they rested and recovered.

Kara was furious. He had not expected to find them together in an extremely compromising position and evidently by the state of Adrik, already finished with whatever activities had transpired just prior to Kara's arrival. The sheer powerful and masculine athletic build of Adrik was one of the things Kara liked best about the young healer, and he'd just seen more than he'd expected to and he was livid that Danya of all people was the one being given the attention of that body.

Danya was a little nobody! Never sociable, never forward, getting him to talk was like pulling teeth unless it was to his insipid plants or the smallest of children. He was thin, baked brown all the time from being in the sun, and covered in those annoying freckles that should have faded from his youth. He was scared of his own shadow! How could Adrik like something so, uninteresting? Further more how on earth did Danya manage to come out of his shell long enough for Adrik to even notice? It just didn't make sense.

Adrik was even without his eye patch, and no one ever saw him without it... ever. Kara had to admit that was probably for good reason, his injury was rather gruesome when not hidden behind leather and he was rather glad Adrik chose to wear the patch, he was far more handsome with it than without it. But his mind wandered off that train of thought and back to Danya.

How dare the little pipsqueak waltz in and take something Kara had been working for weeks to obtain! Everyone knew Adrik was off limits because Kara was interested, surely Danya knew that too. It was common knowledge that whomever Kara fancied, Kara won. He was beautiful after all, long blond hair, stunning creamy complexion, turquoise colored eyes, a lithe body that knew how to please a partner, he was the epitome of the sun god's vassal. Danya was the dirt in the garden in comparison to the rose that Kara knew he was.

Sol was wandering the halls when he spied Kara as he stalked down the hall in the living dormitories of the resident priests, Sol frowned, he knew that fire of jealousy, and he followed. When Kara spied Danya's door slightly ajar and a wicked, vindictive grin spread across Kara's face as he quickly slipped inside and shut the door behind him. He'd show Danya not to cross him in the future.

Sol followed him inside, growing more irate with each passing moment. A wart was now no longer a fitting punishment, Kara was trespassing and Sol knew nothing good was going to come of this moment.

"Goodness, your rooms are just as mousy as you are." Kara said in disdain noticing the minimalistic personal touches and nothing but organized little piles of notes and various pots with plants of bizarre shapes and sizes scattered throughout the room acting like paper weights occasionally and overflowing on the windowsill. There were no pretty little trinkets, no colorful hangings or trappings. Just books, scrolls and plants, Danya's robes were folded neatly in a trunk at the foot of his bed, a pair of muddy boots were sitting on the hearth next to a box of Iris bulbs that looked freshly cultivated and nothing else.

Kara walked over to the desk and flipped through a few of the pages he spied there. "What does Adrik see in you? Do you have no other interests other than botany and chemistry? How boring." Kara asked seeing nothing but sketches and diagrams.

"Don't do it Kara, you're going to regret it." Sol warned silently, watching from the hearth.

"Here, I'll give you something to fill your spare time when Adrik grows bored with you then shall I?" Kara chuckled picking up the inkwell off the desk and upending it over the papers. Making sure each of the three journals sitting there were totally saturated. Sol flinched, all the years and years worth of work he'd sent for his little Danya to do, destroyed in moment's fit of jealousy. As Kara set the ink well down again, he spied the strange plant on the corner of the desk.

"Ugly plant for an ugly boy, how... fitting." Kara sneered, reaching out to touch the strange looking bloom that looked like fine hairs growing from a wicked mouth shaped bloom.

Kara would discover quickly as his fingers brushed the center and the bloom snapped closed that those hairs were needle sharp razor thorns that bit into his flesh and burned. Kara yowled with pain and ripped his hand free, dragging the needles down his fore and middle fingers, which bled and burned like fire. The plant toppled off the desk and the pot smashed on the floor, and Kara left a small blood trail as he fled the room clutching his throbbing hand to his chest.

"Oh father, that was a brutal punishment indeed." Sol shook his head, knowing full well Kara had just destroyed the cure to the acidic toxins that were now dissolving the flesh in his hand. Kara, if he didn't get help soon, would not only lose the fingers the trap's needles infected, but his entire hand would follow in a

few hours and then his life would be lost as the toxin's spread throughout his body and literally began to dissolve him from the inside out. It would be an excruciatingly painful death; Sidra's Trap was the most poisonous and vicious plant in all of Sol's gardens. For every action, there was either reward or punishment. The deaths in the future that could have been saved were now on Kara's hands for destroying Danya's work and had brought forth a severe punishment from the hand of the Heavenly Father. He, who saw all, who knew all, and He, who wielded the scythe of justice, had taken a mighty swing.

Adrik awoke to gentle nibbles against his earlobe and he smiled as he rolled over to face a smiling and pleasantly rested and playful Danya. "You're in bright spirits my lovely." Adrik said pulling Danya closer.

"Aye, I feel wonderful and you are decidedly irresistible when you look so serene in sleep." Danya chuckled nuzzling close under Adrik's chin.

"I've awakened something I think I will reap wonderful benefits from in future."

"Oh aye dearest. You said yourself 'once was never going to be enough' did you not?" Danya spoke as he simultaneously nipped at Adrik's throat. Adrik shivered.

"So I did." Adrik chuckled and rolled over to pin Danya against the mattress.

"However, my little sprite, I believe we should go obtain some food first or we will have poor energy later."

"Here, I must agree sadly. As much as I want to play with you, I am ravenous." Danya replied as Adrik's stomach joined in the conversation in favor of food. Danya laughed as they both rolled out of bed and hunted for discarded robes before heading out to mess as the last call bell for mid-day meals rang in the courtyard and they hurried their steps before all the food was gone and they'd have to wait until the dinner hour.

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“Higher Callings”
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There was good natured teasing from fellows who noticed the pair in the mess eating like there was no tomorrow and the slightly rumpled look and glow they carried about them made it clear that they had sometime between breakfast and mid-day become even more intimately attached to one another. They weren't precisely trying to keep it a secret either. On more than one occasion, Adrik's body language and stealing of random kisses obliterated any doubts people may have harbored that morning. Danya and Adrik were in love and it showed in every movement, every glance and every gesture.

The change in Danya was the most dramatic. Gone was the shy wallflower that tended to hide away in his shell, he was vivacious and alive in the sphere of Adrik's attention. He laughed openly, smiled brightly, spoke with animated gestures and just looked like the happiest youth in the world. He brought out in Adrik all his best qualities. He was witty, gregarious, protective and attentive. He simply seemed to hang on every word Danya uttered and he responded in kind, a true give and take partnership. There was no one who saw them at the meal that doubted Adrik had finally found the person he'd been looking for, for so long. He'd never looked so fulfilled in his life and it was Danya who made Adrik's eyes shine with an emotion that could never be mistaken for anything but love. It went beyond mere affection; this bond that was suddenly so evident went much deeper and clear down to both of their souls.

Jovan walked over grinning and hiding something behind his back. He brought out two red rose wreath crowns and set them on the table. "I do believe that this is tradition today? Or do my old eyes deceive me?"

Adrik chuckled and picked up Danya's wreath and placed it on his head and then settled his own on his brow. "No, you old astute old goat." Adrik grinned and Danya only flushed a little.

"I'm not blind lads nor have I forgotten what it's like to be newly matched. I am quite pleased to see you both so happy."

"Thank you Father Jovan." Danya smiled and Jovan just patted his cheek.

"Danya, you're like sons to me. My best pupils and my dear friends of course I am happy for you both." Jovan winked and smiled fondly. "I daresay I think I

should round up a few volunteers, I have a sneaky suspicion Adrik here is going to be creating a vacant room in the dorms with speed.”

Adrik chuckled. “Aye, that would be appreciated. I’ve no intention of sleeping alone anymore.” Adrik winked and Danya blushed but laughed.

“I must admit I have no desire to sleep alone anymore either. Helping me move would be most appreciated, I don’t have much.”

“You never did dear other than books and your indoor jungle and those get heavy. I’ll go round up a few sturdy brothers and meet you both in Danya’s rooms say in a quarter hour?”

“We’ll see you there.” Adrik replied as both he and Danya hurried to finish their meal and loaded a basket with fruit and cheese and some light peach wine for later.

They detoured back to Adrik’s rooms to drop off the basket and met Father Jovan in the corridor as they headed toward Danya’s room. “What is the door doing open? I’m sure I closed it earlier.” Danya asked and then froze the moment he walked in the door and burst into tears when he spied his desk and the ink that had ruined all his research.

“Who would do this?” He sobbed falling to his knees as Adrik raced to his side in comfort. His eyes furious, he had his suspicions.

“These weren’t your journals were they?” Jovan asked horrified at the thought. After hearing Adrik’s commentary earlier of their value and knowing Danya’s keen intellect, the thought of losing something so precious was staggering.

“Father Jovan Look out! Stop!” Danya shouted as father Jovan almost stepped on the plant on the floor. Danya dove toward the plant and gingerly used the tongs on the floor to pick it up and drop it in a waste bin.

“There’s blood on this, By Sol’s Crown! We have to find who touched this immediately. They’ll die!” Danya said horrified, forgetting his heartbreak immediately and thinking only of the toxins that were killing whomever had touched the Sidra’s Trap.

“There’s blood on the door too.” Father Fletcher, Adrik’s year mate and best friend stated from the open door, walking in on the scene almost as it had began.

"Follow it, find him. Whatever you do, DO NOT touch his wounds; the acid will transfer skin to skin. Wrap it up so it can't spread to anything else and bring him to the infirmary! Adrik, we'll need a benzene wash to neutralize the acid, and a glycol benzene sodium nitrate you must inject into his blood stream immediately. Oh Sol, I pray we're not too late!" Danya cried as he abandoned his rooms and out paced Adrik on swift feet back to the healer's rooms and dashed straight into the workroom. Sol who had remained in Danya's room, smiled in approval as he followed. This was so like his sprite, to instantly forget his own pain when his compassion, even toward one who has wronged him, awakened to one who needed his help.

Danya and Adrik flew into efficient action as they rolled up sleeves and began mixing the ingredients Danya's keen mind remembered as the anti-toxin to Sidra's Trap. "I need Rose water!" Danya looked frantically through Adrik's stores.

"I don't have any." Adrik replied just as frantically getting the injection mix ready. He felt Danya grab the wreath crown off his head and then his own.

"Then I'll make some! The skin infection will be serious. If there is any bone showing love, the only way to stop the spread of the toxin is to amputate above the line of infection. If it's in the bone it will kill him in a matter of hours!" Danya said boiling water and pulling off rose petals from their wreaths and tossing them into to water to boil.

"Holy hell, that bad?"

"Aye. Sidra's Trap toxin works like stomach acid. It injects into its prey and dissolves it from the inside out. It eats away flesh in a matter of minutes and whomever touched it is in excruciating pain right now, oh Sol please, I beg you my lord, let us have discovered this in time." Danya fought breaking down into tears as he pulled ingredients off shelves and prepared a basin filled with the wash that would stop the spread of infection in the wound itself.

"ADRIK! HURRY!" Came Fletcher's frantic voice as he carried his burden into the infirmary. Father Jovan and Father Lukyan right on his heels.

Father Fletcher had done as instructed and a spare robe was wrapped around Kara's hand and arm. The delirious Kara lay moaning in pain as Adrik hurried in with a needle and Danya carried the basin.

Adrik first injected the mix into Kara's arm above where the robe was wrapped around Kara's arm as Danya used tongs to pull away the material.

Danya let out a choked sob at the state of Kara's arm as he literally plunged it into the basin, which bubbled immediately as it neutralized the acid. "Oh Kara." Danya whimpered, using another pair of tongs and dipping a strip of clean binding into the wash to apply the mix to the spot on his face where he had apparently touched his face with his bad hand. A whole section of his cheek was open and festering. The wash bubbled white as he dabbed carefully.

Adrik moved to look at the arm and hissed. "By Mane's crown! Danya, you know best here. How bad is this?"

"Bad. The hand is beyond saving and I'd rather err on the side of caution, I don't know how far up the bone it's traveled."

"Can I cut to see?"

"Aye, do not touch it with your skin whatever you do until the wash stops bubbling." Danya said still working on Kara's cheek. Everyone else huddled off to the side in silence and horror watching the two work with amazing efficiency.

Adrik nodded and pulled over a tray with his instruments and gingerly cut apart the skin of Kara's forearm. "Oh this doesn't look good. Danya, confirm my theory, this is the line of contamination here?" Adrik asked pointing with his blade.

Danya leaned over and was surprisingly rock steady in such a gruesome setting. "Yes, see that greenish tinge? That's the toxin level. You're correct."

"Damn. One time I did not want to be right. I'll have to amputate to the elbow. This is going to be ugly. Fletcher, please get me all the final term healer students, I'm going to need assistants now. Danya, can I give him ether? He's too close to consciousness for this." Adrik turned to Danya as Fletcher raced out to get help.

"Aye. It won't cause a conflict with the anti-toxin. He'll need another course of injections every half-hour; the infection is at least two hours old if not more. Look how dark his blood is, it's coagulating, and we need to thin it and get the toxin in his blood stream purged. You'll need to look at his cheek too. It's just surface infection, a secondary toxic burn, he must have touched his face with his hand, it's not deep but the skin here is dead and needs to be cleaned and cut."

"Valeri is a wonder with the knife, he's got better depth perception than I do, I'll leave that to him. I need to get him prepared for surgery; I need to cut these robes off. Father Jovan, do you still have those metal tipped gloves we used in class when working with acidic compounds?"

"Aye! Good thinking lad, I'll go get them." Jovan hurried off to get the gloves as Danya helped Adrik cut the robes off Kara just as five students in blue and yellow burst into the room.

Danya made sure to stress the dangers again as everyone moved Kara to a table and immediately went to work, pulling on the gloves Jovan passed around to everyone hastily.

Now that Danya was no longer needed, his expertise in making the anti-toxin was really all he could offer, he was not trained as a healer, and he broke down in tears as Lukyan gathered the youth in his arms as he wept bitterly.

Sol was beside them both, stroking Danya's hair when Mane appeared. "I've heard. How is your Danya?"

"Suffering. He's blaming himself now. He's thinking if he hadn't had that plant, Kara would be alright."

"Poor child. Such a tender heart." Mane said sitting beside his brother and looking at the youth sobbing in his head priest's arms.

"Too tender at times. Adrik will not allow him to fall too deeply into despair, but right now he is busy himself. They are a remarkable team. Even I was amazed at how seamlessly they work together."

"Adrik is one of my brightest, the most talented healer I've seen in many years. He and Danya will leave a legacy behind them." Mane began as the ink stained books appeared in his hands.

"What Danya began, Adrik will corroborate in application and clinical live trials. Danya's chemical analysis of botanical properties and their uses and Adrik's footnotes from his healer's perspective and application will be used by so many others far into the future. This cannot be lost, do you agree my brother?"

"Aye." Sol said laying his hand on top of Mane's. Their combined power erased time, and brought the pages back to where they had been before Kara had destroyed them.

"By my light, I protect these pages and all that have yet to be written. May this record stand the long test of time in reward to my vassal who does my bidding." Mane began.

"By my light, I protect these pages and all that have yet to be written. May this record stand the long test of time in reward to my vassal who does my bidding." Sol repeated, sealing their protections on the journals that lay shining with their marks on the covers.

The symbol of the sun in gilded gold appeared on each cover and beside it, a silver moon shimmered. The brother's seals would never be broken. No hand would mar its pages, time would not age them, and fire would not burn them. They would far outlast the hands of the brilliant creators. Mane held them in his lap as they waited and watched over the scene.

Adrik and the others worked for hours making sure all the toxin was purged, Danya making several clean solutions of the anti-toxin that the students and Adrik applied with critical precision to Kara's wounds. Adrik amputated Kara's arm cleanly at the elbow and took great care making sure the infection was purged from the area before injecting more of the blood agent anti-toxin and sewing the wound closed.

Valeri was just a meticulous on Kara's face. Carefully cutting away the dead flesh and cleaning the area before he took up the needle to close the area, wrapping it in clean padding coated with the anti-toxin just to be safe.

Brody, who had been in charge of keeping Kara sedated and keeping a check on his vitals sighed. "He's weak, but stable. I don't want to give him anymore ether."

"Don't we're almost done now. You all did fine work, as your teacher you make me very proud." Adrik said with heartfelt meaning. His final term students had outdone themselves in this trial by fire. None of them had ever seen anything remotely like this before and it had been an emotional and mental roller coaster for them all.

"We couldn't have done it without Danya. I've never seen such a violent toxin. It's Danya who saved him, our skills would have been useless without his anti-toxin." Valeri said sinking onto a stool nearby as Tomas and Gage who had just assisted the others during the surgery moved Kara to a bed and cleared away the used instruments to be sterilized.

"Aye." Adrik smiled with more than pride as his eyes roamed the room. Lukyan was sitting dozing in a chair as Jovan looked to be taking notes. Danya was nowhere to be seen. "Where's Danya?"

Jovan set down his quill and rubbed his eyes. "He went to the temple to say a prayer and to attend to Kara's arm properly. He will offer it to Sol's Fire safely so it cannot contaminate anything else. Fletcher went with him, he's not alone, don't worry Adrik. He needed this, he is blaming himself."

"This is not Danya's fault!" Adrik growled, he was tired and his temper and emotional state worn to a thread.

"We all know this Adrik. Kara had no business in Danya's rooms, he touched what he shouldn't have and paid a dear price. He surely would have perished if not for Danya's intervention, but from my experience with Danya and what you are learning Adrik is that Danya has ever been overly compassionate and self sacrificing and he is only thinking right now that if he had not taken the gift from the western order brothers of that plant, Kara would not have suffered. Fletcher is a superior counselor and Danya could not be in better hands while he comes down from his emotional torment to see clearly again. We just need to wait until Danya composes himself." Jovan said and Adrik nodded sinking into a chair.

"Is there anything we can do to help Father Jovan?" Brody asked and the others with him nodding agreement.

"Nothing at the moment. While you all were busy and while Danya was still occupied with work, Fletcher conscripted a dozen or more brothers and all of Danya's belongings are moved. I am troubled though; Fletcher said the journals were gone when he'd returned to Danya's rooms. Nothing else had been tampered with, it was as if they simply vanished." Jovan sighed; his eyes were tired and troubled.

"Perhaps that's best. They were ruined, seeing them again in that state will only cause Danya more pain." Adrik fought crying himself as he stood to go wash and change his robes.

He tossed clean robes to his students in the process, they all looked like a battle had taken place. "At least we have plenty of beds in here. Why don't we all just take shifts? Kara will need to be monitored continually for at least the next twenty-four hours. I'll take the first shift; since there is no way in hell I'd get any rest right now. Go clean up; get something to eat too, then just pull up a spare bed and sleep. I'll wake one of you when I'm about to fall over and I'll have a rotational shift list written up for you to work off of." Adrik said as his students scuffled about quietly under his direction.

Adrik was about to flop into a chair when the door opened and Danya walked in solemnly with Fletcher. Adrik was across the floor and crushing Danya in an embrace immediately. Danya just clung back and cried into Adrik's chest. "It's

not your fault beloved. It's not. Please believe that." Adrik did cry now seeing the state of Danya's face. Eyes swollen and red-rimmed from crying and extreme emotional pain still raping his soul.

Fletcher just patted Adrik's arm. "He knows. Just hold him a while." Fletcher said quietly as he sat at the table with Jovan, setting a basket of cold meats, cheese, and bread on the table with a few bottles of lager and stout. "I know you're all hungry right now. The kitchen is bringing more and will make sure all meals are brought to you all here while we wait." He added passing the basket around to the hungry students staying utterly silent as they watched their teacher and Danya still standing by the door, unmoved and just holding each other tightly.

Fletcher shared a sad smile with Jovan. Adrik had always been his best of friends and his heart had fallen in love immediately with Danya after seeing the smile he'd put on Adrik's face. He knew Adrik better than anyone, Danya was everything Adrik had ever needed or wanted, his friend had finally found his soul mate and Fletcher's heart broke for them both, a time which should have been filled with joy and discovery for them was now marred with jealousy and pain. Thankfully, the love they shared would only make them stronger as they walked through this nightmare together.

Sol and Mane shared a silent look and nodded to each other. It was time to make their appearance. The room was suddenly filled with their presence, as the brothers appeared side-by-side at the hearth. Everyone, lunar and solar alike took collective shuddering breaths and fell to their knees, a pillow appearing underneath Lukyan's and Mane just smiled and winked, he remembered another dear vassal with aching joints, he wouldn't make his beloved children unduly suffer.

"We are pleased with all of you and your efforts tonight." Mane began smiling proudly from where he stood.

"Moonlight and Sunshine working together is what pleases us most. You are the brightest and best of our vassal's and we are most proud." Sol continued as together he and Mane walked to each Priest and Novice in turn and kissed every brow, stopping before Adrik and Danya.

"Danya, my dearest flower. All your life long, you have pleased me in all that you accomplish. Your heart knows no limits, your mind knows no obstacles, your spirit holds no taint. Believe my child that what happened here was the will of our father, a lesson learned, a deed punished. Free your heart of guilt my little Danya. You are my vassal of a much higher calling, you do my bidding and you make me most proud of you." Sol said bending over to place a long, loving kiss on Danya's forehead.

Mane stood before Adrik and his eyes danced. "Adrik, your greatest virtue is your constancy. You are the Willow that bends in the face of the storm, the foundation rock that supports the hearth, the wisdom that knows that true knowledge is not what you already know, but what you have yet to learn. Your faith is unshakable, your mind limitless, your skills invaluable, and your love unconditional. I have watched you seek your heart in fruitless wandering in sadness. I have seen you grasp it at last with profound joy." Mane smiled as he laid a gentle hand to Adrik's cheek and he placed a soft kiss on Adrik's brow.

Sol reached down to take Danya's left hand, making him rise. Mane did the same with Adrik. Both Gods holding the left hand of their vassals, facing each other, God to mortal, mortal to God.

"Adrik, speak your vows to my vassal." Sol ordered and Adrik swallowed hard, but smiled.

"Danya, you are my soul, you are my joy, you are my sunshine that warms my heart. I vow to love you, protect you, grow with you and share with you all that I have and all that I am." Adrik spoke and Danya cried, but smiled through his years.

"Danya, speak your vows to my vassal." Mane said and Danya's voice was clear even as he cried.

"Adrik, you are my soul, you are my joy, you are my moonlight that shines when the darkness threatens my heart. I vow to love you, protect you, grow with you and share with you all that I have and all that I am."

"I give to you my vassal of the sun with my blessings. Protect him well." Sol said handing Danya's left hand to Mane who placed a silver band etched with the phases of the moon on Danya's finger.

"I give to you my vassal of the moon with my blessings. Protect him well." Mane repeated and Sol took Adrik's hand and placed upon his finger a band of gold, a blazing sun patterned into the metal. Then both Gods placed Adrik and Danya's hands together.

"Let your work continue and let it never end until you come home to us in your winter years. You do our bidding, this is our will and we charge you to honor us by using the gifts you have both been blessed with to their fullest measures." Mane began as the journals appeared in his hands and he and Sol held them together.

"We return to you what was lost. A reward to our children who have pleased us, and we have placed upon them our seals of protection. Danya, we charge you to continue to discover the wonders of my gardens and in your discoveries we charge you Adrik to use them, refine them and teach them. A union of souls and a union of minds will leave a legacy that will benefit all the children of the Sun and the Moon." Sol said handing the books back to Danya who wept with joy as he clutched them to his chest and Adrik wrapped his arms around him shaking with relief and euphoria.

"Thank you my Lords. I vow I will do as you bid me, always." Adrik said and Sol nodded and Mane smiled proudly.

"Aye. Oh my lords I am overjoyed. I promise I will never stop. Thank you, oh thank you so much." Danya wept openly his voice cracking with emotion. Sol reached out and touched his cheek.

"My precious flower, you are ever welcome." Sol said smiling fondly before he turned and both he and Mane vanished as quickly as they had appeared.

It was like a huge vacuum had swept through the room and the silence was deafening until Fletcher broke the moment and tackled both Danya and Adrik in a fierce and jubilant hug. "Had I not seen it, I'd have never believed it! Congratulations!" Fletcher laughed and began to dance, pulling Adrik and Danya into an impromptu jig. Danya laughed gaily and Adrik spun him around the room as the students joined Fletcher in the sudden merry-making. Lukyan, returning to his seat, suddenly had a lover sitting in his lap.

"I suddenly feel twenty again." Jovan chuckled, placing a large sloppy kiss on his life long lover.

"In spirit aye. I hope you don't want me acting it again." Lukyan laughed and Jovan smiled.

"Oh goodness no. I far prefer you mellowed with age like fine wine." Jovan winked, removing himself from Lukyan's lap before his weight affected joints. Lukyan pulled him back down.

"You stay put, I haven't had you here in far too long my lovely. I'm not that old yet where I still don't think you're still the best looking of the bunch." Lukyan winked and they sat like that together as they watched the others suddenly spring to life with cheer and dance around the room.

"You lying old goat." Jovan laughed and Lukyan just grinned and got an affectionate kiss for his efforts. He still knew how to make Jovan melt, even after sixty years.

Mane chuckled where he and Sol watched from the corner of the room. "Those two have always amused me."

"I love how they think we actually left. Mortals are so damn easy. I always feel like an idiot with all the pomp and circumstance and pretty speeches. I'm always making it up as I go along."

"Hey, if we talked to them, like we talk to each other they'd never take us seriously. I'd rather bedazzle them with words then have to constantly marvel them with theatrics all the time."

"You're the king of theatrics. You get off on making grand entrances."

"Like you don't? I don't think so Yoake. You're my twin, we do have a few things in common."

"Okay, you win there. I think they need more wine."

"Not too much, they need to stay sober remember."

"Kara will be fine, but you're right." Sol said waving his hand as a large keg of apple cider appeared on the table making Jovan jump out of his skin and Mane laughed as he added a feast around it, expanding the bounty that had already been in the basket Fletcher brought earlier. Fresh meats, fruit, cheese, steaming breads and pastries covered the surface of the table.

"Now I think we can leave them to celebrate properly." Mane said as he bid his brother goodnight and vanished.

Sol only lingered a few moments longer before he too left the festivities light hearted.

Danya and Adrik settled off in a corner together as the gravity and realization dawned on them and they shared a wonderful kiss before admiring the rings on their fingers. Rings were not normally exchanged and the significance of the rings and what they symbolized, not to mention were in fact gifts from their gods made them both stare at them in awe. Adrik's ring was Danya to him; he could see the sunlight Danya brought to his life every time he looked at it. It was the same for Danya. His ring was comfort, it was strength, it was a piece of Adrik that would be with him no matter where he was, his light in the darkness.

"I can't believe it, I really can't." Danya finally said, watching the light bounce and reflect of the facets of the moon on his ring.

"Aye, it's surreal. It was only yesterday I discovered you for what you were and fell in love with you. It seems so much longer doesn't it?"

"Aye. It does. It has been a whirlwind and my head is lost somewhere in the stars right now." Danya said as he cuddled up close to Adrik where they shared a small couch against the wall. Close to where Kara was still sleeping.

"Mine too. I don't know whether to laugh or cry or sing or weep."

"I think we've done them all today." Danya said his eyes resting on Kara.

"He will suffer most for this, in the temple, when I was saying prayers, Sol showed me what happened in a vision. I am torn how to feel. Angry? Yes. Anger I feel that he would be so cruel to me when I had not wronged him. I am also forgiving knowing that it was his desire for you that caused the jealousy in Kara in the first place. You are very desirable, in all ways, I cannot be angry with someone feeling the same things that I feel for you. And such pity I feel for what he will face now. He will have to learn how to do everything again with his left hand and only that hand. Not to mention the scars that will linger on his beautiful face and body, Kara had always prized his beauty, and he will not see that he can still be beautiful in other ways. He will have to learn to see beneath the surface and he will have many trials to face before he heals."

"Aye. I do not envy him his journey. But all things happen for a reason. Some lessons cost more than others." Adrik said and Danya smiled.

"You said that to me once before."

"I did?"

"Aye, the day you lost your eye. I have never forgotten it and it is so very true. Mane was right; you are ever constant in your beliefs beloved. I hope to be worthy of you."

"Just be you Danya. I don't want you to try to worthy. I just want your love."

"And you will always have it." Danya said as he accepted a tender kiss from Adrik.

"I don't mean to intrude, but the students are dropping like flies. I am sending them to bed. Lukyan and Jovan have been passed out for about an hour now." Fletcher grinned pulling up a stool.

"Aye, it's near midnight. We all need rest. I'll keep first watch until I just can't stay awake."

"You need rest too, not to mention this is technically your wedding night. I'll keep first watch. I know enough to wake you if Kara stirs. Both of you go to bed, that's an order from your friend and your emotional counselor." Fletcher said and Adrik chuckled.

"Alright, thank you." Adrik smiled as he stood. Danya leaned forward and hugged Fletcher's shoulders.

"Thank you for everything earlier. Your support is more than appreciated." Danya said and Fletcher just smiled and hugged back tightly.

"That's my calling. Thank you for making my best friend so happy at last." Fletcher kissed Danya's cheek with brotherly affection as Adrik took Danya's hand as they disappeared into their private quarters off the infirmary.

They were asleep almost before their heads hit the pillows.

Series Title: Le Storie Del Sole e Dalla Luna
(Stories of the Sun and the Moon)
Book III: Chiaro di Luna e Sole
(Moonlight and Sunshine)
Chapter Number: Six
“The Shared Path”
Author: D. Sanders

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Adrik awoke just a few hours later, he never slept well when he had a patient in the infirmary, and his need to constantly be aware of their state of health always induced a state of cat napping in him. An hour or two of heavy deep sleep, he'd awake in an instant with the nagging urge to get up and check on them.

Danya was fast asleep, his small frame almost lost in the thick mattress where he lay on his side, securely snuggled into his pillow and blankets. Adrik smiled fondly at him where he lay illuminated in a patch of moonlight as if Mane himself was watching over Danya in his sleep. Adrik gently kissed a sleeping cheek as he carefully crawled out of bed as to not wake up his new spouse and he tip toed across the room, pulling on his robe as he went and then carefully closed the door behind him with a soft click as he entered the infirmary and walked over to where Fletcher was reading Danya's journals on the low sofa by Kara's side.

“You never can keep away can you? Not even with a beautiful new spouse in your bed.” Fletcher chuckled, his voice hushed in tones.

“You heal hearts and minds, you leave bodies to me. Besides, Danya's sleeping I'd just wake him up, you know me.” Adrik said sitting on the stool and checking Kara's pulse. “No change?”

“None, just sleeping still.”

“Pulse is stronger than it was, thank goodness Danya knew what to give him, he was far too close to death than I care for.” Adrik said taking a small blood sample and studying it, it looked almost normal, but not quite enough for Adrik's liking so he prepared another injection and administered it carefully before joining Fletcher on the sofa.

“He was close, and I've been reading these journals. I am amazed; I might have actually liked Chemistry more had we had books like these to work from. Danya is brilliant.”

“Don't let Jovan hear you say you hated Chemistry, he'll make you take it again.”

“I barely passed the first time.” Fletcher chuckled.

"You copied my notes all the time. Had Danya been in our class I'd have copied his." Adrik grinned flipping open the red journal to look at the works still in progress.

"If he'd have let you. You have an frightfully honest spouse, he'd have made you do your own work." Fletcher teased and Adrik laughed.

"Aye. You're right there." Adrik chuckled toying with the ring on his finger.

"I'm thrilled for you Adrik, he's exactly what you needed." Fletcher said patting Adrik's arm as he stood and stretched. "And I am off to find a spare bed. Goodnight."

"Thank you. Sleep well."

"Probably like the dead, I'm bloody knackered." Fletcher said through a yawn as he flopped down on a spare bed and was lightly snoring a few minutes later.

Adrik lost himself in Danya's journals listening to the sounds of sleep around him while he read and kept vigil on his patient.

Danya awoke with the sun as it slowly crept over the horizon. It was still exceedingly early, but judging from the coolness of the sheets beside him, Adrik had already been up a long time. Danya sleepily wandered out into the infirmary to find Adrik absorbed in his journals and everyone else still fast asleep.

"What are you doing up beloved?" Adrik asked softly setting the book down as Danya curled up against him on the couch.

"Finding my wayward spouse." Danya yawned as he cuddled up beside Adrik still groggy with sleep.

"Found him you have. I was just about to wake Brody to take a shift and come back to bed myself, you're still half asleep, go on back to bed and I'll be there in a minute or two." Adrik kissed Danya's brow as Danya just yawned and nodded and wandered back to bed. Adrik was touched that Danya had come out just to be near him, this was indeed the kind of love he'd always dreamed of having.

Adrik gently nudged Brody awake who got up looking quite rested and began his shift without complaint. Adrik went back to bed and curled up against a warm body and went back to sleep.

It was much later that morning, when father Jovan woke them to the smell of fresh coffee and what smelled like fresh bacon, eggs, ham and bread wafting in from the outer rooms.

"Breakfast you two, come eat while it's still hot. Everyone's up, there's still no changes." Jovan smiled as Danya and Adrik slowly came to wakefulness and joined the others around the large table in the infirmary to share the morning meal.

Everyone was chattering around the table when Danya froze, the toast in his hand falling to the table as he stood. "Kara!" He exclaimed and Adrik and Fletcher rushed over to Kara who was lying there silently, just looking at everyone his eyes wide open.

Fletcher took his hand. "Kara, are you aware? Do you know where you are?" Fletcher asked, trying to get Kara's attention while Adrik checked his pulse and vitals.

Kara didn't say anything; it was like he was still asleep with just his eyes open until Danya walked into his field of vision. His eyes narrowed and his pulse under Adrik's hand quickened.

"Hate you." Kara hissed, his voice strained and frantic.

Danya sighed as he stood at the foot of the bed.

"Hate you! Your fault! Get out!"

"Think what you will Kara, I am sorry you were hurt." Danya said moving back to the table with Father Jovan.

"GET OUT! GET OUT!" Kara wailed and Fletcher grabbed Kara's chin and forced him to make eye contact.

"Kara, stop this. Danya saved your life; you would have died had he not known the cure to the toxins in your body. It is not his fault you hurt yourself. You entered his rooms and violated them of your own free will. He did not make you touch the plant that wounded you and you cannot tell a man to leave his own home in which you are a guest and being tended. Brother Kara you shame yourself as a priest of Sol." Fletcher said, knowing the best way to heal Kara was not to be tender, but honest. Danya cringed at the harshness of Fletcher's words.

"Adrik! Help me!" Kara whimpered and Adrik stood and crossed the floor back to Danya and stood behind him, a hand on his shoulder.

It was Fletcher who answered before Adrik could. "He did help you. Would you ask a man to aide you further when you have been more than cruel to his spouse?"

Kara's eyes went wide and threw accusatory and rage filled looks at Danya where Adrik stood behind him, a hand resting gently on his shoulder, noticing the golden ring on Adrik's finger and the silver one on Danya's as Danya laid his hand atop Adrik's. "You took everything from me! I hate you! I HATE YOU! Get out! GET OUT!"

"KARA!" Fletcher smacked a hysterical Kara into stunned silence. Both Adrik and Danya winced but remained silent. Fletcher knew his calling well; they would not interfere when he was working. "As your counselor, I will keep you sedated if you cannot hold your misplaced anger. If there is blame here, it lies firmly on your own shoulders Kara. You made your choices, and by Sol's own words, were punished by the Father for your actions. Yet, Danya chose to save you, even after you destroyed what meant most to him in this world next to Adrik. Adrik chose to save you, even though you had been cruel to the one he loved. Would you dishonor them further for showing you forgiveness and kindness? Are you or are you not a Priest of Sol, sworn to love and honor your brothers and those who would come to you in need?"

Kara turned rage filled eyes to Fletcher and Fletcher stared back without flinching, without bending. "Look at me! I'm mutilated!"

"No. You have lost a limb and will carry a scar on your cheek. You are far from mutilated and again I stress that your injuries are purely the result of your own choices. I will not allow you to shirk accepting responsibility for your own actions. That would be a disservice to not only Adrik and Danya, but to you and the brotherhood of the order."

"Leave me alone!" Kara spat and Fletcher nodded.

"As you wish." Fletcher said standing and moving back to the table to his breakfast. He indicated that everyone should sit back down and basically ignore Kara.

Danya wanted to cry, it seemed so cruel and he ached to comfort. "Danya, just eat. He asked to be left alone, so ALONE we will leave him." Fletcher said

passing a basket of pastries over to Adrik, carrying on as if Kara was not in the room fuming.

Adrik whispered, "Are you sure?"

"Aye. Leave Minds to me and I'll leave you bodies. This won't last long trust me, it's a battle of wills, I will win." Fletcher answered solemnly and Adrik only nodded and carried on as Fletcher, who knew best, instructed. It indeed lasted only a minute or two.

"STOP! STOP!" Kara began to sob and Fletcher walked back over and took up his chair, but did not offer comfort. It was too soon.

"Are you ready to accept? Or are you and I just going to argue more?"

"You're cruel!" Kara sobbed and Fletcher nodded.

"Aye. How does it feel? This is how you made Adrik and Danya feel being cruel to them. One must recognize the effects of a behavior to fully appreciate the depth. The world does not and never has revolved around you and your desires Kara. You must grow up and see that there are people around you who feel, who love, who anger and who fear too. It is not about what you want Kara, it is about what we ALL want. Your selfishness and jealousy has cost you dearly, and we can sympathize with your pain and struggle to heal. We will not however allow you to place blame on others. Do you understand?"

Kara nodded as he wept hysterically.

"Good." Fletcher said handing Kara a scrap of cloth to wipe his eyes with his good hand and when his strength faltered, Fletcher did it for him. "Now, then. The next step toward healing is remorse. Is there something you wish to say to Danya?"

"I'm sorry." Kara whimpered pathetically, his voice almost lost in his weeping. Danya moved to sit on the edge of the bed beside Kara.

"I had already forgiven you Kara. But thank you." Danya said tenderly tearing up himself as Kara broke down like a frightened child.

Adrik brought over a bowl of oatmeal and set it on the table next to Kara.

"Enough for the moment. You need to eat Kara, you need to gain strength, we almost lost you last night and I don't want you to weaken further. Please try to eat." Adrik said handing the spoon to Fletcher who placed it in Kara's left hand.

"Take control. This will only be a weakness and handicap if you allow it to be." Fletcher said as Adrik helped prop Kara into a semi sitting position and moved the unique shaped table over in front of Kara in bed. It was designed for patients forced to remain in bed for ease in eating without trying to balance a tray in their laps.

Adrik had specifically chosen oatmeal because it would not fall off the utensil as Kara tried to adjust using a hand he was unaccustomed to using to eat with.

Danya brought over a large glass of orange fruit juice and set it near his left hand on the table. "Sol's fruit not only tastes divine, it is full of vitamins and nutrients that will help too." Danya smiled tenderly before stepping back, he felt Adrik step up behind him and lay a loving hand against the small of Danya's back.

"Thank you." Kara said taking the glass and draining it almost entirely. "I am quite thirsty."

"With all the benzene we used on you, I'm not surprised. There's plenty more." Adrik said moving to fill the glass again from the pitcher off the main table. Kara's eyes fixated on the ring on Adrik's hand as he poured.

"A beautiful ring. Sol's light shines eternal." Kara said quietly, a meek sadness falling over the once vibrant, bold and vivacious youth.

"Aye. Thank you." Adrik said moving back to Danya's side.

"May I see yours?" Kara asked and Danya nodded and held out his hand for Kara to see.

"Mane's protection. These were not crafted by mortal hands."

"Nay, they were not. Adrik and I were wed unexpectedly by Mane and Sol last night." Danya said quietly.

"I thought I dreamed that. I must have heard it in my sleep." Kara said soberly, looking into his meal and not at Danya, picking up his spoon and finishing his meal and juice silently.

Adrik and Danya merely stayed quiet and stood beside the bed, Adrik's arm draped loosely about Danya's waist.

"Perhaps, and sleep again you should when you are finished eating. You need much rest still. I can see how tired you are Kara." Fletcher said taking away the

nearly empty bowl and glass. Kara said nothing else and just lay back down, looking spiritually broken.

"Now the healing can begin." Fletcher said draping a blanket over Kara while everyone else returned to their duties.

"Just drink it you old goat." Jovan said handing the glass to Lukyan.

"Trust me, this time it won't taste so bad. Danya spent hours making a flavor mixture to mask the taste but not conflict with the active ingredients." Adrik said as Danya came out of the workroom and wiping off his hands.

"It should taste like apples. I hope." Danya grinned coming to sit beside Adrik at the table.

Lukyan just steeled his resolve and drank his medicine. He had to admit over the past week it was working remarkably well, it just tasted foul. It was better this time, he could still taste the chemicals, but the apple flavor addition did kill the taste a little, but only a little. "I'd refuse to take this if it wasn't working so well on my joints. It still tastes like urine mixed with cider." Lukyan shivered setting down the empty glass.

"I'll add more flavor next time. I'll keep trying father." Danya said taking the empty glass away and rinsing it in the washbasin.

Adrik chuckled; Danya was very creative when it came to trying different alternatives. He'd already managed to make a mixture for the cold symptom reducer that even children wouldn't turn their noses up against just in time for winter cold season. Adrik had tested it on himself and it tasted like cherries now instead of bitter herbs. The past six months had flown by and when both were not teaching their respective classes, they were in the workrooms experimenting on several projects.

Adrik hardly recognized his private rooms anymore. Danya had swept into his life like a pleasant garden sprite and there was greenery on every available surface in their private rooms. It looked like an indoor jungle and smelled divine. Not to mention, evenings had become a predictable series of sensual events. The moment Adrik returned from his patients for the night, he had to wonder when and where Danya was going to surprise him with a physical manifestation of affection.

Having a sun priest for a lover had definite benefits, they were remarkably creative lovers and practically insatiable once they got started. Adrik didn't think there was a surface left in the entire infirmary that he hadn't made love to Danya on or under within the past six months.

Lukyan and Jovan bid the pair goodnight and Adrik chuckled when warm hands appeared over his shoulders and slid down his chest. The door was barely closed before Adrik found himself with his robe open still sitting in the chair and Danya, naked in his lap, kissing him for all he was worth and practically impaling himself on Adrik's instantly responsive sex. Sun priests were definitely amazing lovers, Adrik wasn't about to complain in the slightest and just groaned in pleasure.

They didn't see the door open and then quickly shut again. "They're, um. Busy." Fletcher said blushing and rubbing his neck.

"Oh not again! Out in the middle of the infirmary again?" Kara asked, but grinned as he cracked open the door to take a look.

"Yup." Fletcher coughed as Adrik let out a particularly loud moan.

"Wow, Danya really is quite flexible. Look at that, unbelievable! We've got to try this Fletch."

"Kara, shut the door for goodness sakes."

"Oh hell no, I'm taking notes. That's hot stuff. Look!" Kara laughed and Fletcher just shook his head. Some things about Kara were never going to change, He had mellowed and he was no where near as vain and self centered as he had been, his hatefulness gone, but sun priests were sun priests for a reason and a handful in the bedroom, even missing an arm hadn't slowed Kara down in the slightest and somewhere along the line he and Fletcher had become more than counselor and patient, but lovers.

"Kara I am not look-oh-my! By Mane's Crown!" Fletcher gasped at the view when curiosity got the better of him.

"I know. We are so trying that later love." Kara grinned and Fletcher could only nod dumbly, guiltily enthralled as he watched Adrik and Danya with morbid fascination.

Kara grinned up at his lover, Fletcher was a wonderful man, who didn't let Kara act like a petulant, spoiled brat and called him on it when he was being rotten and also supported him when he was having doubts about his self-worth. Kara had never thought he'd ever truly fall in love with someone, but he had

unexpectedly with his sexually repressed Lunar Counselor and he just thrilled making Fletcher's toes curl at night. Fletcher wasn't so bad reciprocating those curling toes either, what he lacked in experience, he certainly made up for with stamina and power. Kara teased "Come on you great Bull. We'll come back later and I am suddenly in the mood." Kara pulled Fletcher back to their shared rooms; they never made it back until morning.

"We've got four more requests for copies of the Apothecary Manuals and maybe a dozen more requests from orders who already have the book asking if there have been additions produced." Kara said reading the mail sitting on the table. I just shipped off all the page additions to the orders that have the book already, I'll get these copies finished and include the additions and add them to the update list. I have scribes working around the clock in shifts now, we can't keep up and our paper shipment from the capitol is delayed due to weather." Kara sighed, rubbing that spot between his eyes again. Adrik walked over and massaged temples.

"I told you to take a break Kara. Your eyes are not what they used to be and these headaches won't stop if you refuse to use enough light to work." Adrik said as Danya came in with a glass of water and some small pebble shaped white stones.

"What are those?" Kara asked curious.

"I found a way to compress the headache powder into these little tablet cakes. Just swallow them whole, no more dissolving Adrik's nasty powder in water and then chugging it as fast as you can so you don't taste it." Danya grinned as Kara gratefully swallowed the little stones.

Fletcher stamped snow off his boots as he entered the infirmary common room and frowned. "Headache again?" He asked hanging up his coat before coming over to the table.

"Aye love. My eyes aren't what they used to be. Oh to be twenty again."

"Goodness, Kara you talk like you're ancient." Danya rolled his eyes, grabbing the mulled wine off the hearth where it had been warming.

"He just doesn't like turning forty, he has issues." Fletcher teased, having had similar issues a few years earlier when he had turned forty.

"I'll give you issues." Kara grumbled sorting through the files he kept regarding the production of books and updates.

Fletcher just laughed as the group settled around the table sharing a bottle of wine and friendship, making Kara put his files away for the night and take a break and celebrate his fortieth birthing day.

"Welcome first terms to Apothecary theory and application, I am Father Parrish and I am about to introduce you to the text that will become your life long counterpart. Brother Pavel, please pass out the texts." The elder Priest said to his classroom full of older teenagers, training to become healers. Brother Pavel passed out to everyone a crisp, green covered leather bound books off a cart that groaned under the weight of the rather large books.

"I want you to protect your books, these volumes contain sixty years worth of research that has revolutionized our field. Father Danya and Father Adrik spent their entire adult lives making our jobs easier. I had the joy of meeting them when I was a student myself years ago. I trained under Father Adrik before coming to the capitol to teach here. I was in his last class before he passed and what a loss to the healing community it was, father Danya passed not long after but they have left a legacy that will continue to push the envelope of discovery for years and years to come." Father Parrish continued as he paced the aisles looking at all the fresh new faces this term.

"Father Danya was perhaps the most brilliant chemical botanist I've ever met. You'll note that these same books are used in advanced chemistry and I urge you all to make sure to associate with those brilliant students. Their work goes hand in hand with yours. Father Danya's experimentation with botanical compounds and elements and Father Adrik's application and usage refinement of those discoveries Father Danya made have saved hundreds of thousands of lives over the years and as you become familiar with your books you will see why rather quickly. Before you lies the remedies for countless ailments from the common cold, to Sidra's Trap anti-toxin serum." Father Parrish tapped a student's book where it sat on the desk.

"This is life and death and treat it as such." Parrish said and the student nodded.

"It's got the seal of Mane and Sol!" One student said in awe and Parrish nodded.

"Aye. I heard from an eyewitness of the event itself. Father Fletcher, whose text on mental health counseling you will study in your second term, told me how Mane and Sol appeared when these books were no more than simple personal

journals that had almost been lost. They restored the journals and bade Adrik and Danya to continue their research and laid their dual protections on the original books. All copies carry the seals in honor of the originals. These are not impervious to fire or food stains like the originals, these are just copies. So mind your books lads, these texts are not cheap to replace!" Parrish chuckled as he pointed to a student who had his hand raised.

"I heard Mane and Sol also married Danya and Adrik that night too, is that true?"

"Aye, they were married too. But this is class time, not romance gossip time." Father Parrish winked at the young lunar novice; lunar's were such incurable romantics.

The student smiled and blushed as Parrish continued his lecture. "So I have stressed the importance this book will have for you literally for the rest of your careers as healers. I myself have been a healer for forty years, and I was just your age when I received my first copy. I have had to replace mine four times I've worn them out with use. We now share a path with those that came before us. Father Adrik and Father Danya forged that path for us and it is up to us to make sure it continues to grow. I will expect you all to do your very best, and do not be afraid to question the norm. Father Adrik once told me that 'the only bad question is the one not asked' he was correct. True knowledge lies not in what you already know, but what you have yet to learn. We as healers must never stop learning, lives count on us every day, we help them, by expanding our minds and taking nothing for granted." Father Parrish said as he sat at his desk at the front of the room.

"Now then, open your books to chapter one and read. There will be a test at the end of the hour on common colds and the variations of treatments available. You may all begin."

End