

LOVE'S LANDSCAPES



Don't Read in the Closet 2014

PLAYING WITH TWO-EDGED SWORDS

Roger Grace

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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

PLAYING WITH TWO-EDGED SWORDS

By Roger Grace

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love's Landscapes* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love's Landscapes?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Photo Description

Two young adult males in Victorian era clothing lean against each other on a wall. At least one is wearing a sword, and he appears to have Latin blood. There seems to be an attraction between the two men in the picture.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

We find our moments when we can, though they are few and far between. We mask attraction in enmity as we play this dangerous game. But have we played too long? The line has blurred and tempers flare. We grow impatient with the world we live in. Can we reclaim the knife-edged balance we once relied upon, or will we stumble, fall, and either destroy each other or out ourselves and lose everything?

Sincerely,

Wart

Story Info

Genre: alternate history, fantasy

Tags: mage/sorcerers, aristocracy, spies, students, first time, adventure

Word Count: 11,370

Author's Note

This story is set in an alternate Victorian era London where magic adds some convenience that earth prime didn't have during that time. While I tried to keep as much as possible with the time, magic changes mindsets and, while homosexuality is still condemned, there is a small minority of about fifteen percent who hold a more enlightened view on it, mainly those who practice magic.

The magic in this story is based on elemental affinity. It takes the elemental nature from the Furies of Calderon by Jim Butcher and Elemental Assassin by Jennifer Estep. The practitioners of magic usually have only one major affinity and a couple of lesser affinities. Rarer are those with two major affinities and rarer still is three major affinities. Fire Affinity, like Rafael has, favor offensive attacks and speed in the sword work, while the Ice, Water, and Earth Affinities of Michael favor a strong and calm defense, wearing down the opponent in the sword work.

As two virgins before they met, it is relatively safe for them to not use condoms as STDs wouldn't be a problem for them. The story is also set in a time before AIDS. So, please, when having sex, protect yourselves.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Wart Hill for providing a great prompt that caught my eye and called to me to write this story. I also would like to thank the M/M Romance Group at Goodreads for hosting this event and supporting the creation of these stories of which I am honored to include my first story to be published. The support group for the Love's Landscape event was a forum that I could go to for encouragement and support when I needed it. I also have to thank my family and my church for all the emotional and other support provided to me by them. I also couldn't have done this without the help of an old friend, Kevin (aka Kysen1), who beta read the entire story and provided helpful suggestions, some of which I implemented. All that is good in the story is with the help of the people mentioned; the errors are only mine. The family reacting so well is in honor of my family, who accepted me as I am when I finally came out.

PLAYING WITH TWO-EDGED SWORDS

By Roger Grace

Prologue

Rafael and Michael were on a hike during the Annual Winter Excursion from their school. They were off alone on this hike, by Ullswater Lake in the Lake District. Scanning the horizon, they were startled by the growing cloud cover. The clouds were thick and dark gray, and the wind was howling its fury.

“Looks like a big storm approaching quickly!” Michael whispered his eyes going wide as he started to breathe heavier.

Rafael asked, “Think we can make it to shelter before it hits?”

“No!” Sudden and decisive, Michael looked for anything he could use to rig a temporary shelter. Upon seeing a slight rise in the land, he moved towards it, hoping to get out of the wind.

Rafael said, “I can keep a fire going,” as he followed behind Michael.

Against the slight rise, Michael used his Earth Affinity to scoop out a small tunnel. “In here, now!” After Rafael entered, Michael used his Ice Affinity to block off most of the entrance. “Let us head towards the back, where you can get a fire going and not melt the covering blocking most of the wind.”

Just as the fire got started, the boys heard their teacher, an Air Affinity master, in their heads. “*Where are you? This storm is going to be bad.*”

Michael responded, knowing the teacher would hear. “*I created a cave in a rise of land by Ullswater Lake. Rafael made a fire and we are hunkered down.*”

“Stay there and we will get you after the storm is done!”

As the storm intensified, the cave got colder and the fire couldn't keep them warm. As it got closer to night-time, knowing they could not remain awake all night, Rafael and Michael planned what to do.

“We have our packs with the cold-weather sleeping bags. If we join them together we can share our body heat and keep warm,” Rafael suggested.

“That is probably our best option.”

They climbed into the bags as they settled in for the night. Both in their smallclothes, they huddled together for warmth.

Face to face, breathing on each other, they moved even closer, rubbing each other's bodies. Their lips met. The kiss was short, and both jerked back. Even

that slight contact was sending impulses down their bodies and hardening their eighteen-year-old cocks.

“We cannot do this!” Rafael exclaimed, as he remembered his mother’s strict views on anything related to sex.

“No one needs to know what we did while staying warm. Did it feel good?” Michael asked with a grin, as he leaned closer and kissed Rafael again.

“Mike, stop. I do not want to go to hell.”

“Rafe, we will not go to hell for this. I know your mother was Catholic and instilled her views in you, but the Lord commands us to love as we are created to. And as we got aroused from a little kiss, I would say we are created for this.”

“Just hold me, Mike. Let us stay warm and not fight about this.”

“I will, just do not pull away. Anything that happens will be because we both want it to.”

Cuddled together, they fell asleep.

Michael woke up to their hard cocks bumping into each other through the smallclothes, and Rafael’s lips nibbling on his ear. “I cannot resist anymore. Let us kiss and do whatever we need to do to stay close and warm.”

Mike hesitated. “Are you sure?”

“Yes.” This came out as a breathless sigh.

Michael and Rafael turned their faces towards each other and let their lips slowly meet as they adjusted so that their noses wouldn’t get in the way. The kisses grew in length and intensity. Their hands were all over, stroking and grabbing wherever they could. They reached down and removed their smallclothes so their cocks could be free and touch without a barrier. Rafael tweaked on Michael’s hard nipples, and Michael sucked in his breath and released a groan as his body reacted to the teasing fingers.

Michael’s left hand encircled Rafael’s hard, throbbing dick, lined it up with his own and moved his hand up and down both hard cocks. He kept jerking their cocks until they both came with a passion and fury that neither had ever experienced before. They stayed embraced until they both passed out, spent from their passion and long day.

The next morning, they woke to hear people calling their names. The voices were still a distance away, but closing in. They quickly dressed, and knew instinctively that they would not admit what happened, but would try to hide it.

Michael took down the ice barrier as he called out, "Over here!"

When the group looking for them arrived at the cave, Rafael glared at Michael and growled, "It is your fault entirely. We should have never gone as far as we did."

Michael replied icily, "I did not hear you complaining as we travelled the road together."

Chapter 1

The Sword Finals

Every year, St. John's Academy had their sword trials for the seniors. It was an elimination style tournament. This year's final was about to happen, and the two best swordsmen were Rafael Robinson and Michael Taylor-Cooper.

The two seniors stalked in, pride and anger evident with every gliding step towards the sword circle, Rafael with his tanned skin and fiery Latin eyes flaring, and Michael approaching with an ice storm brewing in his blue eyes. The judges checked their swords over before handing them to the contestants, making sure that the swords weren't weakened from all the battles that had already taken place this weekend.

As etiquette demanded, they bowed to each other, then to the judges. While they waited for the signal to start, they made themselves ready.

The flag dropped. Rafael charged with a fast series of slashes and jabs, only to be coldly blocked by Michael's sure and calm defence. Each pass Rafael made seemed to be a blur to the spectators, but Michael seemed to know exactly where each strike was going to land, as his sword was there to parry each attack. Rafael tried to make a complicated slash too quickly, and when it was blocked, the blade started to vibrate with the shock and left him momentarily numb. Michael tried to take advantage of the all-too-short respite, but couldn't maneuver his bulkier sword quickly enough.

The first round was called, and the two fighters moved to their respective sides of the circle for a brief moment to catch their breath. The looks they directed toward each other would have skewered them both if their glares were daggers.

The flag dropped again, and they started off by circling each other, trying to get a measure of each other before they committed to an attack. Rafael, always the more impatient of the two, got tired of playing cat and mouse. He lunged forward, trying to catch Michael off guard. Michael expected something like this, so he stepped aside as he parried the rapid lunge. The momentum of the attack took Rafael to the edge of the circle before he caught himself just in time and quickly stepped away from the edge. Michael was there with a sudden swipe at Rafael's off-weapon arm. Rafael was just barely able to dodge the attack, but in doing so he got closer to the edge. Michael, seeing this, pressed

his attack. Constantly slashing from one angle or another, he tried to keep Rafael off balance, hoping that Rafael would step out of the circle. The round was called just as Rafael was about to step out of the circle.

As Rafael stalked away, his eyes blazed, looking at nothing but where he was going. His eyes lit up as he saw in his mind what his strategy was going to be. Michael centered with the earth to refill his flagging energy; he also came up with a strategy that could work, but carried great risk.

When the flag dropped, both opponents sprang with new determination in their steps. Rafael, as a Fire Master, attacked with his customary speed and grace, while Michael met him with an equal burst of speed but with strength added. He batted aside Rafael's sword and pinked Rafael on the shoulder. Rafael stood in shock, as Michael had never shown such speed with his sword work before. Michael reacted like a dammed river which burst the dam and flooded the area with speed and strength unmatched.

Michael grinned at Rafael and thanked him for a great battle. Rafael mouthed pleasant praises and congratulations to Michael for winning.

With a whisper, Michael asked, "Meet me in an hour at the orchard shed?"

"I will be there," Rafael replied softly.

The hour past and gone, Rafael quietly slipped into the shed hoping Michael was still there. "Mike," he softly hissed.

"Right here," Michael replied from a secluded, shadowed corner.

"Sorry. I got held up by my father, wanting to know how I could lose to you."

They leaned together and shared a quick kiss, knowing that all too soon they would have to separate and be what the world wanted them to be. Their tongues duelled with passion, each trying to go deeper into each other.

"Oh, God, I need you, Mike," Rafael moaned.

"Yes, I need you also, Rafe," Michael agreed with a deep groan.

Their fevered hands were grabbing everywhere, trying to unfasten everything so they could touch each other all over without the obstacles of clothing.

Then there was a great, loud series of barks closing in, and they broke apart and got themselves composed, hoping to appear innocent when whoever was with the dogs showed up.

Soon the dogs were scratching at the door, and Mike recognized the whine of his hound Alistair. Only one person other than he could have led this pack, his father. Edmund Taylor-Cooper, The Earl of Umbria, Dean of the practitioners of Fire Affinity. "Michael, open this door now!" the earl bellowed.

With a silent sigh, Michael did as he was commanded.

When the earl entered the shed and saw Rafael in there also, he said, "Excellent, I can deliver messages to the both of you here. Michael, you are to be under the tutelage of Richard Robinson, the Earl of Blakesley, Dean of the practitioners of Ice Affinity. Rafael, you are to be under my tutelage. I know you will both be a credit to your practices. And, yes, Michael, Earl Blakesley knows that you also have Water and Earth Affinities, and will arrange for lessons to hone those abilities also."

"I am sure we will all see more of each other, so it would help if you settled whatever differences you may have," the earl suggested as he left.

Michael and Rafael shook hands and left, knowing that it would get harder to hide what they had as often as they were likely to be thrown together.

Chapter 2

Going for Sword Master Training

Michael and Rafael, as the top two finalists in the school senior tournament, were guaranteed acceptance in the sword master training if they decided to take it. Both knew that, as latter sons in the aristocracy after the heir and a spare, they would need to find a way to support themselves or rely on their elder brothers to support them. Being sword masters would give them independence and would not be seen as being unworthy of their rank.

Michael and Rafael sat on Michael's bed as they planned what they would do about the possibility of them both being sword masters.

"So, are we going to do this, Rafe?" Michael asked.

"I think we would be fools not to, Mike."

"Especially if we train for rival schools—then we can meet at competitions and no one would think it strange that we got together to supervise our trainees at the competition and at any hotels for out-of-London competitions," Michael added.

They asked both of their affinities masters for time off for this purpose, as they knew they could not handle both the training with their masters and the sword masters training. After securing the release from training, they returned to Michael's room to fill out the forms.

The forms they had to fill out were on the desk next to Michael's bed. As one, they went to the desk to take up their forms and started filling them out. Both used the fountain pens that were graduation gifts. They took care that what they wrote was legible and in good form. They waited for the ink to dry, then took them to the foyer to be posted.

Their confirmation and training schedules arrived the next morning. They got together to see what, if any, matches they had in the schedules. They shared Advanced Footwork and Basic Training Tactics, but most of the other courses involved using their affinities to affect the outcome of matches.

The time for the intense training to be sword masters arrived. They both left from their families' London townhouses. Their carriages arrived within seconds of each other, and they walked into the training yard together. The early morning lessons were the more physically demanding ones of Advanced

Footwork and Basic Training Tactics. Both of these had to be completed before the heat of day could make the students and instructors tired and sloppy. It was well known that if errors were not caught early, it was hard to retrain the students correctly. Michael and Rafael were in a group together with six other people, all under a fastidious older woman who ran them through their paces hard and with an attitude of calm perfection and precision. Everyone was making errors, as was to be expected on the first day of training. By the end of the hour-long course, they were all sweating and had only completed one full run through the exercise, as each time an error was detected; she stopped the group and had them start from the beginning.

The Basic Training Tactic had them in separate groups, and was just as challenging as their earlier training. They had to pair up with a partner and take turns trying to teach each other basic moves like blocking, parrying, and simple thrusts, and the one being taught had to pretend they didn't know the moves. Then, the leaders of the class brought in young trainees and showed the class how to train the trainees in the basics.

Then, it was time for a lunch break. After lunch, they were to train with masters of their affinities for tactics that could only be used in training exercises for the class or in sanctioned competitions and exhibitions against other people who could use affinities. Rafael had it easier, because he only had one affinity to learn to use—fire. The first thing he was taught was never to use fire as an attack, only as a defence, unless he was fighting to defend his life. One bonus of Fire Affinity was that it lent quickness to his reflexes and steps. Also, he could make a small shield of fire like a buckler, easy enough for an attacker to avoid but able to protect a vulnerable spot. Rafael was taught how to make this precise and small enough that it could be used, because fire wanted to expand, and keeping it controlled was the first thing to learn when using it in combat.

Michael, with his Affinities of Ice, Water and Earth, had to learn how to decide which one was the best affinity to use for a given situation. The main benefit he got from any of the affinities was Earth's greater strength and endurance. Water, as a healing element, could slow the bleeding from any wounds he received. Ice was a great shield maker, but he couldn't ice up the ground or floor, as a slip with an open sword blade in hand could have fatal consequences.

As the courses progressed, the different affinity classes were brought together so that the students could experience what the other affinities could

and could not do legally, and they were also shown what they could do when their life was at risk. They were also taught what, if any, counters you could do. Ice and water shields were good blocks for fire attack, as long as you didn't make the shield too close to yourself, as the steam created could injure you.

During the six months of intensive training, Michael and Rafael only managed a few stolen kisses, quick and tender. They started to snipe at each other, not personal attacks, but geared toward their combat style. Michael was called a plodding turtle of a defender, while Rafael was chastened for his quick, little, nipping attacks. It was clear that they were two of the best in the class, even if their styles were markedly different. They were usually called on to demonstrate the different styles when the classes joined together. What made them so good was that, even though they had their preferred combat style, they could and did use the other combat styles almost as well. In their affinities classes, they were the preferred sparring partner when trying to learn how to fight different styles than their classes' usual style.

Upon graduation from the sword master training, they were both offered trainer positions at two of the most highly-regarded training schools, Rafael at the Blazing Blades School and Michael at the Frozen Fortress School. Michael and Rafael were also told that they could not take any more time away from their affinities training, so they let the masters of the schools know that they could only work mornings or afternoons, but not both.

Chapter 3

Training Sword Students While Learning Advanced Affinity Techniques

Michael and Rafael thought that they were lucky when their sword school owners decided that they would serve best in the morning, leaving the afternoon devoted to advanced affinity lessons with the earls. They quickly learned otherwise. Sword training started promptly at dawn, which meant they had to be up and ready to leave the estate a half hour before dawn. And the earls usually kept them at their studies well into the late evening. The only good part about this was that by the time they went to bed, they were tired enough to easily fall asleep.

The earls and the school owners also knew that, even as they worked the young men hard. They also had to give them breaks so that they could recover from the stress that both activities caused. They got together and planned when they would ease up on Michael and Rafael. The bosses tried to arrange it so that the workers could arrange for little excursions away from London and their bosses. They were also, to the delight of the earls, both quick to master the affinity lessons set before them. The earls and the sword school owners were so pleased with Michael and Rafael's work and teaching that they decided to give them a week off after their second month.

Michael, as one of the more youthful men at the school, usually was the one chosen to train the more advanced students on how to counter the quickness of fire or air styles of swordsmanship. And Rafael, somehow, had enough defensive knowledge that he shared with the Master the duty of teaching the advanced students ways to beat the more stable and defensive styles of earth, ice, and water.

When the youths found out, they both decided to go to the hunting lodges their respective fathers had in the forests around the Norfolk area. They left early on Saturday, having made plans to meet up that night at a bonfire. When they arrived at the lodges, they unpacked their clothes, knowing that local servants had already provisioned the lodges. They each had a short staff of a housekeeper/cook and a butler/valet. The servants at the lodges had a soft spot for these two boys and knew how to keep a secret. They each, having had a light supper and being provided with spiced hard cider, rode to the village bonfire where they shared a log. Snuggling together on the log, they made plans for the coming week and basked in the warmth of the fire.

Rafael asked, "Where do we go tonight?"

Michael shrugged and produced a long and short straw. "We go to the cabin of the one holding the long straw." He arranged the straws behind his back and set them so that the same length stuck out from his fist. Bringing the fist with the straws forward, he said, "You choose one, Rafe." Rafael pulled one out, and they compared the lengths. Rafael's straw was longer.

They took their horses back to Rafael's lodge. Having determined beforehand that the person whose lodge they were at was the one who would top and determine what happened, Rafael led Michael to the bedroom.

"Strip for me, Michael!" Rafael commanded.

"Yes."

As Rafael watched Michael strip, it brought on a rush of lust and heat. His dick was getting nice and hard in the confines of his breeches. Michael's cock was also hard and when released, stuck out and pointed at Rafael.

"Come to me!" Rafael ordered, as he started removing his clothes.

Michael stalked towards Rafael. Even knowing that Rafael got to call the shots, Michael was still an alpha, and let Rafael know it. Rafael was feeling heady that he could take charge over Michael, who was usually the more aggressive of the two.

"Kneel and kiss my balls!" Rafael growled out.

Feeling a little puckish, Michael replied, "Yes sir!"

"Work your mouth and tongue over them, boy!" Rafael's voice got husky and lower. "Show me how much you want me!"

Michael heated up with this command and started to work the testicles; he licked them with his tongue and worked to get both of the balls in his mouth at the same time. Michael moaned with pleasure as he finally succeeded and started sucking on them as his tongue teased the base of Rafael's cock.

"You are such a horny little boy. So wanting and needing my cock! Beg for it, Mike!"

"Give me your cock, Rafe! I need it so bad. You are making me into a horny little whore for it, please," Michael begged his voice raw with emotion.

"Suck my cock and surrender to me and your need," Rafael demanded.

With a sigh of pleasure, Michael replied, "Yes," before his mouth covered the head of Rafael's penis. Licking and blowing warm air over the cockhead, Michael started pleasuring Rafael. With each suck, Michael tried going deeper down the shaft. He got about two-thirds of the cock in his mouth when it hit the back of his throat and triggered a gag reflex. Easing back a bit, Michael looked up and begged forgiveness with his eyes.

"Just relax and be patient and try again in a bit. It is all right, Michael."

Michael worked on the shaft for a bit as his body calmed down from the gagging. Thinking of how it felt when Rafael was able to get all of Michael's cock in his mouth and throat. Pulling off of Rafael's penis, Michael said, "I want to make you feel so good, but I never have done this before."

"If you cannot deep throat me, it will not change how I feel. I am so proud of you doing this."

"I want to try again, but if I cannot, I will just have to practice more."

Michael dove back onto Rafael's cock and, working slowly until it was halfway in and then taking a deep breath, he drove his mouth forward and felt Rafael's cock enter his throat. Michael hummed as he sucked and had to back up a few times so he could breathe.

Rafael, feeling the tension building in his balls, backed out and ordered Michael onto the bed with his ass up and spread. Rafael used oil to prepare Michael, slicked his index finger and slid it into the tight firm hole. Michael tensed up and moaned as he was invaded for the first time.

"Relax, Michael. It will feel so good in a bit. Just ride it out until then."

Rafael's finger slid deeper into the chute and soon found Michael's prostate. Michael writhed and moaned while the finger massaged the nub that shot off such waves of pleasure into him. He didn't even notice that two more fingers entered him, loosening him up even more. "Fuck me, Rafe! I do not want to wait anymore. Just do it." Rafael's fingers slid out, leaving Michael feeling empty. "Fill me, Rafe," he growled. Michael felt Rafael's cock at his hole, massaging and teasing it with light caresses. "Now," Michael moaned with impatience.

Rafael slowly slid his cock in, knowing that even with the prep work; Michael would need time to adjust. He held still when just his head entered the hole, and he heard Michael suck in his breath as he grew accustomed to the thickness of Rafael's cock. Soon, Michael was begging for more. Rafael pushed

in slowly and always checked with Michael if he should continue going deeper. When all of Rafael's cock was buried in Michael's chute, Rafael picked up the pace of his thrusting. Both of them were panting hard and flush with arousal.

Michael groaned, "I am going to shoot soon."

Rafael growled, "So am I. Wait for me to cum."

Thrusting frantically, Rafael soon was shooting his cum into Michael, exploding like a dam had burst. Feeling Rafael shooting cum into him, Michael's spunk erupted out of him. They both rode their orgasms until they collapsed, sated and exhausted.

A little while later, they got up, removed the cum-filled sheets, and fell asleep on the bare mattress.

For the rest of the week, they took turns hosting and taking the lead. During the days, they rode and hunted, and the nights were spent pleasuring each other. During their rides, they planned the next stage of insults and slights to cover up their feelings for one another.

Sooner than they wanted, their idyll was over and they returned to London and their popinjay pecking insults and social snubbing. Now they started to get a bit more personal, with hints of bad habits but nothing sexual in nature.

Chapter 4

Visitor from France

While Rafael was with his tutor, the Earl of Umbria, Edmund Taylor-Cooper, there was an interruption. Both knew that it had to be something fairly serious if it caused the lessons to be interrupted. Both men looking up to see Greaves, the butler, announce that a high-level visitor from France had arrived and needed to see the earl immediately.

“Who is it?” asked the earl curiously.

“His card says Lucien De Vries,” Greaves replied gravely.

“Show him in.”

“Very well, my Lord.”

Lucien had an interesting mix of features; he had a swarthy Mediterranean skin tone but pale blond hair of Scandinavian heritage. The De Vries family's monopolies in trade made them very rich and well-travelled. He clearly inherited the best features from his family's ancestry.

“Earl of Umbria, my father tenders his respects through me,” Lucien said with a European flair. “And I tender my respect as a Fire Affinity practitioner to another.”

“What can I do for you, Mr. De Vries?”

“I could use some additional training while I am here for a few months.”

“I do not have the time, but Rafael, who is my most promising practitioner, can help you.”

“Really, what level control does he have? I mean, if he does not have pinpoint accuracy, he will not be of any help.”

Rafael was getting tired of being judged and overlooked by Lucien, so he created a pinprick of flame half an inch from Lucien's nose tip. “Is that accurate enough? It is right where I wanted it—if I was very spiteful; I could have done that right on the tip of your aquiline nose.”

“I see you have a temper as well as some control in placement. Maybe, I could learn from you.”

“Oh I could teach you, but whether you learn is up to you and how much you put into listening to my instructions.”

Edmund chided Rafael with a mild rebuke. “Behave.”

Rafael said, “Sorry, Lucien. I should have behaved better and not replied to your nettling remarks.”

“That is all right. Father always says that I can be a right brat and spoiled rotten.”

No kidding, Rafael thought.

“Rafael, do all in your power to satisfy Lucien’s requests, as long as they are legal and appropriate usage of the affinity.”

“Yes, Dean.”

Lucien made a few more diplomatic overtures to the earl as Rafael gathered his supplies and made ready to leave.

Before Rafael left, he gave Lucien his card, saying, “Contact me and I will work with you.”

Three days later, Lucien visited Rafael at his father’s estate.

“I am ready for lessons. When can I start?”

“Let us go to a workroom, and you can show me what you know.”

“When?” Lucien asked.

“Now,” Rafael replied. Rafael motioned for Lucien to follow him and led him to the back of the house to a shielded workroom for fire magic. “Go on in.” Lucien and Rafael entered the workroom.

“Lucien, can you show me what you are capable of so I can determine what your level of proficiency is?”

Lucien went through the twelve apprentice cantrips and displayed six of the nine journeymen tricks. He flubbed the other three tricks, getting close but just falling short. He also displayed rudimentary understanding of triggered spells. Lucien could create a trigger that would go off when anything touched the trigger item, but couldn’t set one up for a specific species or type of object.

“Okay, we can work on the three tricks, but without specific permission I cannot teach you any more about triggers,” Rafael told Lucien. “I have two hours now if you have the time, and we can go over how to make your flame fill only a certain area.”

“That will be fine,” Lucien replied.

“Okay. You will find a tumbler on the table. Bring it over here and place it on the wooden bench.”

Lucien did that.

“Now, try to fill the tumbler with flame but do not allow anything to spill out or over. And yes, the only way to accomplish this is to practice until you can do it. I will set a spell that will detect where the flame is and sound an alarm if it is outside the tumbler. Begin.”

Lucien tried and tried. For the first hour and a half, Lucien kept hearing the alarm as the flame escaped his control and expanded beyond where he wanted it. He was getting closer to what was requested, but the fire would always flare up beyond his willed limits. Snapping at Rafael, Lucien demanded, “Show me what I am doing wrong.”

“You are forgetting fire’s nature of expansion and trying to squelch the fire down in the tumbler. You should be working *with* the nature of fire. Fill it only halfway and let the fire expand to fill the tumbler. With the lesser amount of energy you use, it will not expand beyond the tumbler. But you want to be careful that you do not provide too little energy. If you do that it will not expand enough to fill the glass. When it does fill the vessel completely, you will hear a bell chime. Try again.”

“Why did you not tell me before this?” Lucien demanded.

“Would you have appreciated and learned this lesson if I gave it to you so easily?”

“I have to go meet with someone else now,” Lucien said, after getting the bell to chime six times in a row.

After Lucien left, he headed towards a gambling den that catered to a lower class of people. He was going to be buying up the debt of the head valet to the Crown Prince. Then, he would have a good source for information to keep his family in wealth and power. Lucien loved to be able to blackmail people to do what he wanted.

After he secured the debt of almost seventy-five pounds that the valet had incurred, Lucien met with the unfortunate gambler. Lucien told the valet, Ethan Jarvis, that he would either spy for Lucien or he would have to call in the markers. Ethan reluctantly agreed to spy for Lucien.

Two weeks later, after Lucien produced a document that seemed to be legitimate and signed by Edmund Taylor-Cooper, Rafael taught Lucien more about triggers. One thing Rafael taught him was that to target a certain individual, the trigger had to be able to detect a certain thing that differentiated the target from others around him.

Rafael kept the document with him and, when he got to his father's estate, stored it in his private desk, locked up and secured in a secret drawer.

Chapter 5

An Exhibition and a Meeting with Royalty

A month after the lessons about triggers, Rafael and Michael attended a competition at a royal preserve near York. Rafael and Michael were to be the featured performers in an exhibition of swordsmanship. They both travelled in their school's coaches with the students they were chaperoning.

There were five separate schools entered in the competition and each could only bring five students and one instructor. The judges were from the royal knights.

Each student was ranked within their school group and they would each battle the four other students who had their same rank. It was clear that the competition would be between the Blazing Blades and the Frozen Fortress. After the four lowest ranks had their battles, both the Blazing Blades and the Frozen Fortress teams had two first place and two second place standings in the tiers. Whoever scored higher this round would win the competition, and then it would be time for the exhibitions. *Rafael and Michael had a side wager on the outcome of the competition: the loser would wait in the winner's room, naked and on the bed for the winner to claim.* It came down to which top student won when they battled against each other, because they both won all of their other matches. The student from the Blazing Blades had a quickness that overwhelmed the defences of the Frozen Fortress' student. With three quick lunges, the Frozen Fortress student was pinked three times by the Blazing Blades student.

Then, it was time for the exhibition. All of the students, along with many others, had heard rumours of the great abilities of the two featured swordsmen, and everyone wanted to know if those rumours were true.

Michael and Rafael entered the ring on opposite sides. They saluted each other with their swords before the flag fell to start the match. As this was an exhibition, they were expected to use their affinities to affect the outcome, but had to use them carefully. While a slight injury was okay, crippling or lethal damage wasn't. Michael advanced slowly with a languid grace, while Rafael pranced forward like a stag. Already calling up his ice shield, Michael got set in place for his defence. Rafael was within a few feet of Michael when he started a cheetah-like lunge with his sword, trying to get through the defences before

they could be set up. The ice shield blocked the lunge even as it was melted by the now blazing blade. As the ice shield melted, Michael converted the water into a whirling shield which would deflect the sword thrusts away and quench the fire on Rafael's blade. Michael used his Earth Affinity to grab at Rafael's feet and hold him in place for just long enough to break Rafael's momentum. Not enough to cause him to trip, but just enough that it would affect his speed. Michael saw an opening and thrust hard at Rafael's sword arm, but a fire buckler sprang up to stop Michael's blade. There were a lot of excellent thrusts and feints in this exhibition, and then a slight miscalculation on Rafael's part caused him to overextend himself, and allowed Michael to use Rafael's forward momentum to carry him out of the ring.

When Rafael got back into the ring, he slid Michael an extra key to his room and said that he would be expecting him in two hours. Michael, upon exiting the ring, was slipped a note from a page. Walking to where he could place his sword down for safekeeping, he scanned the note and saw that Crown Prince Edward had requested Michael's presence at Michael's earliest convenience. He managed a quick wash up and change, then Michael hurried to the royal suites at the hotel. Edward greeted him and sent most of his servants off on errands, keeping just Ethan Jarvis and two of his bodyguards in the room.

"Thank you for coming, Michael. I want you to consider becoming a special trade attaché to the new King of France, Henry. I believe that you are related to him."

"Yes, we are cousins. His mother is my father's sister."

"We need to see if Henry will rescind the royal monopoly granted to the De Vries family for trade with British merchants. The De Vries are making a fortune and hardly paying enough for our merchants doing business in France to stay afloat. This means our revenues are down, so our markets are being stagnated. You are the only one with the rank and charm to convince Henry to do this. Please say you will help me."

"I will, my Prince." Michael said.

"Good. You can disguise it as a trip to visit your aunt."

"I will need a couple of weeks to get it arranged. What can I tell my family and friends?"

"We are afraid that you will only be able to tell them that you need to go but not why. We hope this will not inconvenience you or your loved ones."

“Very well, I need to leave soon to pay off a wager.”

Michael hurried to Rafael's room to get ready for their chance to spend some secret time away from the pressures of society and be themselves, to let the obligations and requirements fall away, so that they could be lovers and not antagonists.

When Michael entered Rafael's room, he quickly stripped and staged himself on the bed for Rafael's viewing pleasure. He played with his cock to get it hard and ready for whatever Rafael wanted to do with or to it.

About ten minutes later, Rafael entered the room to see Michael naked in all his pale glory, waiting for him on the bed. Michael's cock was standing at attention, just begging to be devoured. Rafael didn't even bother removing his clothes. He just went to the bed, grabbed Michael's cock at the base and kissed then sucked the head in his hot, moist mouth. Michael moaned with pleasure at the feelings coursing through his body.

“Suck me harder, Rafe!” Michael commanded, even as he begged with his pale blue eyes darkening with arousal.

Pulling off Michael's penis, Rafael responded, “Mike, you know that as the winner of the bet I have control tonight. Just relax and let me take charge of this.”

Rafael smiled and his eyes grew a deeper shade of hazel as he breathed over Michael's cock then swallowed it into his mouth.

“Oh God, yes!” Michael exclaimed, before he started to whimper and moan and lost the ability to speak.

Rafael sucked the entire dick into his mouth and throat. His head was bobbing up and down on the cock as he lifted up enough to let him breathe every few seconds. The throaty moans and whimpers incited him to make this last a while so he could give Michael the pleasure he deserved. Michael felt Rafael's tongue all over his cock. Lasting for about ten minutes, Michael started shooting into Rafael's mouth and throat. After Rafael swallowed all of the cum, he stripped and had Michael spread his legs so they could fuck facing each other.

Rafael got the lube and teased Michael's taint and lubed both Michael's hole and his own cock. Trying to get Michael ready for the rest of the night, Rafael slid a finger into Michael's hole and slowly stretched and opened the entrance until he could insert another finger. He kept stretching the opening

until Michael could easily take three fingers in it. Michael moaned and pleaded for Rafael to fuck him. Soon Rafael's fingers left Michael's ass and his cock teased its way in until he found Michael's prostate and then started thrusting in and out faster and harder. The only sounds Michael could make were moans and yips of pleasure as Rafael made love to him and started kissing him in time to every thrust. "Love you, Mike," Rafael kept repeating, as his cock opened and explored Michael's ass. Soon enough, both men felt their balls tighten and tingle as they got ready to cum.

"On three, Mike. We will cum on the count of three!" Rafael demanded.

"Yes!" Michael moaned out.

"One," Rafael counted with a deep thrust into Michael. "Two," he continued, as he pulled out for just a bit. "Three!" he growled, as he plunged his cock all the way in and exploded his cum into Michael. Michael came at the same time. They fell onto each other, spent with passion. They slept together, and when they got up, Michael told Rafael about having to take a trip to France to visit family there.

Chapter 6

The Plots Advance

Rafael didn't say anything at first, just thought it over and brooded about what it could mean. He was afraid that Michael didn't want to be with him anymore, and this was his way to stage a way of trying to leave without actually leaving the relationship. Rafael let this state worry him until two days before Michael was to leave for his trip. They had arranged to meet to have a last encounter before Michael left for Paris.

"Michael, why are you going to Paris? Why now?" Rafael asked when Michael sat at the table of the private club they had booked.

"Rafael, I wish I could tell you more, but there are good reasons for this trip, and I am taking it on behest of another. Please do not think bad of me that I am constrained from telling you more than this."

"Mike, do you not trust me?"

"Rafe, if it was just me that would be affected by this, I would tell you. But there are others who could be harmed if I did not go, or if I let you know the reasons for the trip. Not that I think you cannot keep a secret, it is just that the more people I tell, the more chance there is for the wrong people to hear about it."

"You are just saying that so you can leave me and let time separate us," Rafael sulked.

"No, Rafe, I assure you I want us to be together, but I have to do this task on my own."

"You are leaving me because you cannot face what society will do to us. If you want to leave me, just do it – do not take this trip."

"I swear on my affinities that I do not want to leave, but I am the best person available to accomplish the task I need to do. And once it is accomplished, I will hurry back to you and tell everyone about us if that is what you want. I love you, Rafe, but I have to do this."

Rafael asked, "Are you running away from our problems by going to visit your aunt, Michael? How can you be so selfish?"

“There is more to this trip than I can tell, but I am not running away. There is more at stake than I am free to tell.”

“Fine,” Rafael snarled, as he left the club. “Do what you have to, but do not expect me to be waiting for you.”

Michael stared blankly at Rafael's disappearing figure and wondered how this happened.

Meanwhile, Ethan Jarvis finally got a chance to meet with Lucien De Vries and let Lucien know about what the Crown Prince had asked Michael to do.

“Tell me again what you heard, Ethan!” Lucien demanded.

“I said that Crown Prince Edward asked Michael to be a trade attaché to Henry to negotiate for the removal of your family's monopoly on British trade. It seems that Michael's aunt is the Queen Mother of France, and Michael will be using a family visit to disguise the fact that this is going to be a diplomatic trip.”

“This is good. If I can prevent this, I will release you from half of your debt to me.”

Ethan shuddered and felt dirty; knowing that what he just did harmed his country and probably would cost people their lives. He hurried back to the palace, and in his room, cried and agonized over it. Ethan felt trapped. He knew he should tell the Crown Prince what he did, but he was too afraid to confess.

Lucien used his other contacts to find out how Michael was travelling to France. When he found out that Michael would be using the dirigible to travel, Lucien arranged to get on that dirigible to set up a trigger spell that would go off when a person with a lower body temperature got to within six inches of the trigger point by the necessary. He already determined that Michael was going to be the only person with Ice Affinity on the dirigible. Lucien paid off his contact and let the man know that he was expected to remain silent.

Rafael tossed and turned this night and the next, agonizing at what he did, but not wanting to back down, his pride too great to appear to be in the wrong. *Why could I not just let him know what was bothering me and wait for him to return? How will I live if we are not together anymore? Too late I realized that I love him and that I would do whatever it took to be with him. Please let him come back safely so I can make up for it.*

His father realized something was bothering Rafael and tried to get Rafael to tell him what was wrong. Even though he appeared to the world to be made of ice and have no feelings, he loved his family dearly, and it pained him to see any one of his children suffering. All Richard could get from Rafael was that he made a mistake and wasn't sure if the person he wronged would forgive him.

Chapter 7

An Explosion and Truths Revealed

Michael was waiting for the dirigible to start loading, his fingers tapping on the arm of the plushy, upholstered chair in the VIP lounge. He rechecked his diplomatic credentials and, putting them away, he remembered Crown Prince Edward using his persuasive talent to convince Michael to become the trade attaché to the new French King, Henri.

'Michael, it has to be you. No one else has the rank, charm, connections, and knowledge to get this done. A bonus is that your aunt is the new King's mother, letting a family visit be a disguise for the diplomatic trip. We cannot let the De Vries monopoly strangle our trade anymore. Still, you will have to be careful. If the De Vries discover who you are before you can present yourself to the King, they will try to prevent you from reaching the King.'

Michael heard the boarding call for the dirigible and, as a VIP, he was allowed to board before the other passengers who didn't have that status. Combing his fingers through his hair, he boarded quickly. He took his assigned seat close to the rear, where he could keep his eyes open and scan for trouble. He checked the porthole by his seat and noticed that a board was nailed over it. He looked around to find a place to sit, where he could gaze out and keep track of travel progress. It looked like the best place was close to the rear exit and the necessary. It had a good-sized window to look out into the sky.

Finally, the dirigible passengers were loaded and it could lift off. The cabin seemed to be about half full. He felt the lift as the air and fire mages worked together to heat the air to provide buoyancy without damaging the dirigible's fabric skin. Waiting for the blimp to start cruising after reaching a suitable altitude, Michael scanned the passengers to see if anyone looked out of place. He heard a whirr as the mechanics for forward propulsion kicked in. He knew from previous dirigible trips that just at the start of the trip were the greatest chance for the dirigible to move unsteadily as the crew made adjustments so that everything would proceed more efficiently.

Waiting for a while, as the dirigible lurched through the adjustments, Michael tried to figure out what was happening with Rafael's and his relationship. Lately, the antagonism they used to cloak their love seemed to get sharper and be more personal. Michael knew that he still needed and wanted

Rafael, yet little things could set them off. He hoped that the time they were apart would make their hearts grow fonder.

Michael stopped reminiscing and moved towards the window so he could view out. As he neared the window, Michael felt a brief tingle of magic flaring up. Instinctively he tried to use ice and water magic to smother the fire he felt blooming by the exit. Unfortunately, the water and ice became steam which burned Michael's body, even as the flames caused by the magic were contained and smothered, leaving only minimal damage to the dirigible as the flight crew fought to bring it down safely.

The landing was rough, but not a crash. It landed on a field close to Dover. The air mages sent out an emergency call for help as there were some injuries sustained, Michael's being the worst.

There was only one water mage/medic on the crew, and his healing abilities were minimal—fine for minor scrapes and bruises and motion sickness, but next to useless with the burns that left Michael unconscious.

When the emergency calls went out, an official sent a message to Edmund Taylor-Cooper, Michael's father. Edmund was instructing Rafael at the time. Edmund blanched at what was sent to his mind by the air mage the official used. Rafael sensed something was wrong and asked what it was. Edmund said that the dirigible Michael was on had an accident near Dover, and Michael was unconscious and not responding to the treatment the onboard medic was providing.

Edmund cut the lesson short, saying he had to make arrangements to get there as fast as possible. Rafael knew that his father, as Michael's teacher, needed to know. So he asked permission to inform his father and said that he knew that his father would help in whatever way he could. Getting the permission, Rafael hurried to his father's estate.

Reaching it, he asked if Greaves could let his father know that Rafael needed to speak to him with great urgency. Waiting in the receiving room for Greaves' return, Rafael started pacing.

Rafael remembered his last words to Michael. *“Are you running away from our problems by going to visit your aunt, Michael? How can you be so selfish?”* And Michael's reply was, *“There is more to this trip than I can tell, but I am not running away. There is more at stake than I am free to tell.”*

Greaves cleared his throat when he returned. “His Lordship will see you in the parlour. Master Robert is also there. Follow me.”

Rafael rolled his eyes at the formality his father, the earl, required. Following Greaves, he hurried through the main hallway to the parlour. Greaves knocked on the parlour door and introduced Rafael with proper solemnity.

“What do you need, Rafael?” the earl enquired.

“I am informing you that your student, Michael Taylor-Cooper, was in an accident on his dirigible flight to Paris to visit his aunt. He is injured and not responding well to the treatment the onboard medic is providing. I do not know the extent of the injuries, but he is near Dover. I need to get there as soon as possible.”

“Why? I thought you could not stand him.”

“Robert, can you keep what is said here confidential? If not, I need to ask you to leave.”

Robert responded, “How serious about this are you?”

“The repercussions, if this got out, would ruin Michael. I do not care what happens to me—I am able to make this decision but Michael is not.”

“I give my oath that what you say here will not be told to anyone without your permission.”

“Father, Robert—Michael and I have been lovers for the last three years, since that trip senior year where the blizzard stranded us. We have acted as enemies to cover up the relationship. If either of you feel the need to disown me for the shame I bring you, so be it. Michael is fighting for his life, and I could never live with myself if I was not there providing whatever comfort I can. I am suspending my part of the misdirection. I love you both, but I have to do this.”

“Of course you do, Rafe,” Robert replied. “I will stand by you, society be damned. I am not going to stop loving my baby brother because society cannot mind its own business and has to judge those who are different harshly.”

The earl said, “Rafael, I do not think anyone ever told you about it because so few people know this, but in this one instance, your love and Fire Affinity can help Michael recover. Part of the problem with healing an ice mage is that their body has a natural body temperature lower than others, and a fair amount of healing energy is wasted bringing their body up to average temperature for humans. If you can use your power to gently raise his temperature, then more energy of both his and any treating medics can be used to cure his body. I was not going to mention this because of the anger you always seemed to have

towards Michael, and doing this is best achieved with someone who has a strong non-blood family connection. We will get you there as fast as possible. You will have to convince Edmund of your sincerity by yourself.”

Chapter 8

Healing and Investigation and Capture

Michael had been transferred to the Saint Arthur Hospital for Burns, as approximately two-thirds of his body was covered in them. Michael's energy was directed towards keeping his body temperature stabilized and fighting off infection. He came in and out of consciousness, until the doctors placed him on drugs to force him to sleep. Michael's family and Rafael had come down together. Rafael was able to speak privately with Michael's father, Edmund.

"Sir, I feel you should know that I have loved Michael for the last three years. I have learned that by using my love and my fire energy to keep Michael's body temperature at the correct level, the healing energy of Michael and his medics can be used to more effectively heal his injuries."

"And how does Michael feel about you, Rafael?" Edmund asked.

"Do I have your word that you will treat Michael no differently until he is fully recovered?"

"You do have my solemn word."

"We have been lovers since that senior trip to Ullswater Lake, and pretended to be antagonistic when in public to prevent society's condemnation. We did have a fight because I was feeling insecure about his trip. He hinted that there was some danger—that if a certain party found out the reason for the trip, that party would act to prevent it."

"Rafael, do you know anyone else who could have created a trigger based on body temperature? I am told that it was a triggered spell. I know of only three people living in this country who could have created it—the mentor who taught me, you and me. My mentor is invalid and cannot leave his home, and I know I did not set it. With the antagonism between you two, I briefly considered it might have been you, but I know even if you hated him you would not blow up a dirigible."

"You mean you did not write a letter telling me that I could teach Lucien more about triggers than he already knew?"

"What are you talking about?"

“I was given a letter, from you, which was signed with your signature, saying I should teach Lucien whatever I could about triggers. I told him before that I would need permission from you to teach him more than he knew.”

“Interesting, because the message I got from Crown Prince Edward stated that Michael was on a mission to see to the end of the De Vries monopoly on British trade. I would say we have a suspect,” Edmund mused. “So we need to get you situated for helping Michael heal while I get the investigators on the right track.”

After two days, Michael's body recovered enough to awaken. He was surprised to see Rafael in the room with him, holding his hands. He gasped out, “Rafe, what if someone sees us?”

“It is okay, Mike. Our families and the staff know and they support us. At least, they know I am in love with you. The only ones who know how you feel about me are our fathers and my oldest brother, Robert. If you want to pretend that you are still straight and want to hide what we are, I will understand and let you. But if our families support us, what society thinks is nothing to me. I will always be where you need me, and will do whatever and face whatever I have to.”

“Rafe, the spell was triggered, set for me especially as the only ice mage on board. The reason I was going I still cannot reveal fully, but it was a diplomatic mission, and if the family it would most hurt found out, they would have done this to stop me no matter who else died.”

“Shhh, your father knows the reason for the trip and is taking care that the investigators know who to look into. In fact, he is due here shortly to update me on the investigation.”

With a knock, Edmund entered to see Michael awake, and he and Rafael were holding on to each other. “Michael, it is so good to see that you are awake and healing well. And that you are with Rafael. So should I set society abuzz with the news of your partnership?”

“You truly don't care that I love Rafael and that this would bring shame to the family?”

“Michael, as your brother-in-law-to-be, Robert said to Rafael and repeated to me, ‘Society be damned if I am going to let anything interfere with me loving my baby brother.’”

“I love you, Rafe. We are in this together and society can damn us to hell for all I care. I nearly died, and all I could think about is being with you and that I nearly drove you away.”

Edmund said, “I think this ended well. We captured Lucien, and he tried using his fire to get away before I stopped him and threatened him. He is being questioned under lock, key, and magical dampeners. They did not need me to direct the inquiry that way. As soon as Edward’s valet heard about the dirigible explosion, he admitted to being blackmailed by De Vries and telling him that you were going on the trip and would be an attaché. According to Edward, after consultation with my sister, Genevieve, and Henry, the rest of the De Vries family has been confined and the monopoly was ended.”

“If you can tell the rest of the family about Rafael and me, I would appreciate it. We will answer questions after I am feeling better.”

Epilogue

Two weeks later

Michael finally was able to leave the Saint Arthur Hospital for Burns. With a suitable entourage of family and friends surrounding him and Rafael, they exited to the cheers of said entourage. The Crown Prince himself was there to commend Michael for his bravery in containing the damage of the dirigible explosion to the detriment of his wellbeing. He also shook hands with Rafael and commended Rafael for taking diligent care of a hero of the realm. The two earls made a joint announcement that they were pleased that their sons were in love with each other and committed to being together, and that Michael and Rafael had the full support and love of their families.

Edmund and Richard smiled even more as they met privately with Michael and Rafael with two pieces of news. First, that Michael and Rafael were going on a cruise on Richard's personal yacht, and second, they were gifted with property from Edmund's vast holdings where they could build a house and farm.

Rafael smiled at Michael as he said, "We played with the two-edged swords of love and hate and survived better than could be hoped for."

The End

Author Bio

I am a forty-five year old gay male who has always dreamed of writing stories to be published. I work for a major fast food chain as a crew trainer. You can always find me reading or active in my church. I have a very supportive family and church that I love. I was blessed with the privilege to write two stories for this event.

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