

Impossible Love

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On a day ninety-two years ago, a young man of cherubic appearance in somewhat odd and unfashionable clothes walked up to the gates of the Duke's palace.

"May I have audience with Lord Dafythe, please?" he called up to the guards stationed on the wall above. "I've come such a very long way to see him."

Ninety-two years later...

Andemyon Lightesblood spent weeks searching the extensive library at the University of Maryesfont's College of Magic for books about wizards who had traveled through time. Everything he found, he read with voracious attention, then consulted his friend Mikha.

"Can such a thing actually be done?" Andemyon asked. "Is there a spell that can send a person into another time? I've read dozens of stories of spells used by wizards of old to view the past, and even enter it, but they might be no more than fairy-tales and not at all true."

"Oh, they are true," answered Mikha. "It has been done, but such spells require the talents of a most powerful magician."

"Could *you* do it, Mikha?"

"I don't know. I've never tried."

Mikha was the most promising magician of his generation and, though very young, already showed some remarkable powers. He was a scholar of arcane spells, which was one of the reasons Andemyon sought

his help. The other reason was that the two had been close friends since Andemyon had first come to the university three years ago. Maryesfont was primarily a place for the education of women, and male students on the campus were few. Both were also students of magic, and it was only natural that they should meet and befriend each other. While Mikha was preparing for his future profession, Andemyon's interest in the subject was intellectual; he was the younger son of the Empire's premiere wizard, Yryd Lightmaster, and the only member of the wizard's family without a spark of magical aptitude. He had grown up amid magicians and their spellcraft, but he could never have asked his family for assistance with *this* problem!

Mikha, on the other hand, would understand why he wanted to do this. Andemyon was sure of that. His friend would listen to whatever he had to say and keep his secrets. Confiding in Mikha was like going to confession, without the penance that followed. Andemyon had come to think of the dark and solemn, abstemious young man as something like a priest—for, like a priest, Mikha was under strict vows of abstinence while he underwent the third purification phase of his mage's training. For seven years, he must remain chaste, never touch a drop of wine nor taste blooded meats, and keep sleepless vigils on certain nights of the year. Unlike a priest, Mikha would be free of these vows once he was tested and confirmed a wizard.

"I'd need to find the right spell," said Mikha. "The college's library is very good, but you won't find such spells here. The Sisters are rather censorious about magic they feel to be contrary to the work of God and Nature. But I wouldn't be surprised if your father has books in his collection that the Sisters don't. We can look when I go to him for my testing this summer. Where is it you want to go, Demy? Or should I say *when*?"

"To Dafythe's court, a century ago. I want to meet him as he was when he first became Duke of the

Northlands, and enter his service just as I did when I was a boy.”

Mikha nodded and his mouth twisted in a small, tight smile. “I will try to perform this spell for you,” he agreed, “but I must say, I don’t like the idea of sending you back to the days when the old Duke was a youth so you can seduce him.”

Andemyon blushed. His friend understood his motives all too well, and the hint of criticism stung. “I won’t seduce him!” he protested. “I only want to know if he felt anything for me...if he could, under different circumstances.” He tried to explain. “He couldn’t, not as we are. Nearly a hundred years stand between us. I was only fourteen when I became his page, and seventeen when I was sent away to another part of the court, and then away from the palace entirely. I was a child even then—I didn’t understand why everyone whispered and laughed about the Duke’s affection for me. I didn’t know why there was such haste to get me away from him. Since I’ve grown to see what all the fuss was about, I’ve wondered what truth lay behind it. Did he feel more for me than an old man’s kindness? If we were to meet when he was near the same age I am now, I could find out. I won’t throw myself at him, Mikha, but I must know.”

His friend stared at him solemnly, and Andemyon was afraid Mikha would refuse to help. Perhaps he’d been foolish to expect otherwise. So serious a mage must disapprove the use of magic for something as frivolous as this. Magic was Mikha’s profession; he’d given himself to it, heart, body, and mind, so that there was room for nothing as personal as love. Andemyon had felt that before, close friends as they were. Mikha would draw away from him and retreat into a cool aloofness whenever he became too enthusiastic or affectionate. Mikha would refuse...

Then Mikha said, “Very well, Demy. If we find the right spell, I will try it. For you.”

The truth was that he was half in love already. There'd never been one improper word or touch between himself and his aged lord, but Andemyon fondly remembered the months he'd served as the Duke's page. He'd been one among seven young boys whose duty it was to accompany Dafythe around the court, bear his messages, and attend him in his private chambers. How many nights had he sat up at the foot of Dafythe's bed, for the Duke was frequently ill and restless and in need of company in the small hours? How often had he sung to soothe Dafythe to sleep? Before it had changed, his voice had been a sweet soprano. How many tales of magicians, taken from the books in his father's library, had he repeated to Dafythe?

Those nights were among Andemyon's most treasured memories, for they were the only time when he and the ancient Duke were alone and could talk without formality. His memories remained unspoiled, even though the courtiers had made a scandal of it once they'd noticed that Dafythe asked for him to take this duty more often than the other pageboys. When the gossip had reached the ears of the Duke's eldest son, Lord Ambris, Andemyon had been abruptly removed from Dafythe's service and they'd never been left alone together again.

Ah, but those nights! During those nights, Andemyon had told Dafythe what it was like to grow up in the house of a wizard; Dafythe in turn had told him thrilling tales of his own boyhood in the Emperor's court. They were both younger sons of great men, and that had made a bond between them in spite of the vast difference in their ages. Dafythe talked of how he'd come to the Northlands as a young prince to rule this faraway territory in his father's name. He'd made the Northlands, which had always been Andemyon's home, sound like a fabulous wilderness of tall trees and strange beasts, with only a few scattered castles, fortified towns, and villages. Dafythe himself had made it into the civilized realm it was today. He spoke of his friends of

those long-ago days, gentlemen all and trusted courtly advisors, and it seemed like something out of legend, like the tales of King Arthur and his knights. As he'd listened to these stories, Andemyon had pictured the ancient Duke as a youth not much older than himself, and imagined himself at Dafythe's side.

Had it begun then? Had this idea that he might reach into the past to meet Dafythe already formed in his mind? All he needed now was a way to make it come true.

Nothing more was said for the rest of the term. He and Mikha continued their separate studies at Maryesfont and occasionally met in the young mage's rooms at the top of the library to talk, but Andemyon thought his friend had grown more reserved with him. No doubt Mikha continued to disapprove of his plans.

When summer came, they traveled together to the Lightmaster's castle, a large, empty, and solitary building on cliffs at the far end of Greenwaters Island, where Mikha would be tested. If he could prove himself a proficiently skilled magician, he would end the third phase of his training, be released from his mage vows, and be confirmed a true and full wizard.

Yryd Lightmaster, tall and austere, and surprisingly youthful himself for a wizard of such fame and power, met them on their arrival. This fabled bringer of storms, this destroyer of lesser wizards, this force of lightning and fire wrought in mortal form, smiled with very human delight at the sight of his half-grown son, and greeted Andemyon with a fierce embrace and kiss upon his tousled curls. He was more genial to Mikha than he usually was to mages who came to him to be tested.

"You needn't be afraid," the wizard promised his son as they entered the castle. "If all I've heard of this Mikha is true, he'll do very well. But you mustn't expect I will be more indulgent with him than I've been with the others, because he is your friend."

"I don't expect it, Father," Andemyon answered.

“Nor does Mikha.” He turned to look over his shoulder at his friend, who was walking several paces behind them, somewhat timid since meeting Andemyon’s fearsome father. “Only be fair.”

“I am always fair, my child. Even if he fails, I promise you I will not harm him.”

The testing of a mage was rigorous, but private, a process only those who would undergo it could know. Such magical matters were not for Andemyon, and he didn’t ask what went on between his father and friend when they emerged after long hours shut up in the chamber atop the castle’s highest tower, both looking weary and strained. While Mikha and the Lightmaster were occupied with their grim business, Andemyon searched through his father’s books for spells that had to do with time.

Nearly two weeks after he and Mikha had come to the castle, he was in his room, studying a particularly promising tome, when he heard the patter of footsteps running along the hallway outside. As he rose from his seat at the desk, the door to his room burst open. Mikha had become pale and tense during the days of his testing, but he was smiling now, smiling as Andemyon had never seen him before.

Before the youth could speak a word, his friend caught him up in his arms and announced, “We’ve finished, Andemyon! I am at last a wizard!”

Then Mikha quickly set Andemyon down and recovered his composure. He withdrew into aloofness again, but this time it was because of his own unmage-like exuberance rather than anything Andemyon had done.

Andemyon smiled. “Father wasn’t too hard on you?”

“Oh, no. There were times I thought...” the young wizard grew solemn as he recalled it. “He gazed into my mind, Demy, and I felt as if he could *see* everything I was or had ever done. If there’d been a flaw in my training, or if I’d let my vows lapse even once, he would

have discovered it.” Color appeared on his pale cheeks. “I was terrified that he would blast me to ashes. But he never did. I think I surprised him. He told me himself he’d never before encountered a young magician with such strength to withstand him. If I should challenge him hereafter, when I have come into my full powers—”

“You wouldn’t,” said Andemyon. He knew that this was the way of wizards—even between allies or friends, there was an unending rivalry, as they constantly challenged each other to establish and maintain their places in the hierarchy of who was most powerful—but it horrified him to think that his father and closest friend would do battle one day. One or the other might be destroyed. “Mikha, promise me that you won’t.”

Mikha smiled at his earnestness. “I can’t promise you, Demy, but I think that your father and I have come to an agreement on that point, without word. Neither of us would wish harm that one whom we both love best.” His cheeks colored again, and he turned his head aside to notice the book Andemyon had left open on the desk. “You’ve found a spell to send you to Lord Dafythe?”

“Yes. I think it’s the right one.” Andemyon picked up the book. “Come and tell me.”

Mikha read the miniscule writing on the page. “It looks right...Andemyon, are you certain you wish to do this?”

The youth nodded. “I know you don’t approve, Mikha, but I have to find out. You will help me, won’t you? You won’t take it back?”

“I won’t take back my word,” Mikha replied. “Copy out your spell, and we’ll try it as soon as we are finished here.”

A newly made wizard was meant to wander, to seek knowledge and experience from all the corners of the world before he was ready to challenge the elder wizards and establish his place among their ranks. But Mikha did not intend to go far on his first journey, for Andemyon was going with him. After his confirmation ceremony, in which Mikha formally took up the robes of

a wizard, they left the castle and rode to the Duke's city of Pendaunzel. They took a room at an inn not far from the palace gates, but went out at sunset to leave the city and enter the woods beyond its walls.

After searching for a time in the fading light, they found a clearing within a cleft of rocks, distinctive and untouched. "This spot is exactly the same as it would've been a hundred years ago," Mikha explained. "This spell will move you through time, but not space."

"What must I do?" asked Andemyon.

"Stand there," Mikha directed, and placed him in the center of the clearing. Using a broken branch, he drew a circle in the mossy earth around the youth.

"And how do I return?"

"Come back to this same place, when you're ready. Are you ready?"

Andemyon nodded, heart beating faster now that they were actually at the point of performing the spell. Would it work? Or would he only be left looking very foolish before his censorious friend?

Mikha climbed up to perch on a large rock that loomed above the clearing, and began to recite the words of the incantation. It seemed to Andemyon that his friend's voice grew very faint, as if he were far away. The dark figure on the rock flickered and faded, then disappeared altogether.

Ninety-two years before...

A young man of cherubic appearance in somewhat odd and unfashionable clothes walked up to the gates of the Duke's palace.

"May I have audience with Lord Dafythe, please?" he called up to the guards. "I've come such a very long way to see him."

The young Duke had arrived to assume his duties only a few days before, but a number of petitioners had already gathered. People had come from all over the Northlands in anticipation of their new liege lord's arrival, and Andemyon was assumed to be one more. He

gave his name, and was admitted to the palace grounds.

If he'd had any doubt that Mikha's spell had worked, the sight of the Duke's palace told him that he was truly in another time. This was not the grand array of stately buildings and cultivated parklands that he knew so well, almost a city in itself, with courtyards surrounded by long colonnades, towers that rose above the trees, and the chapel spire that seemed to pierce the sky. One day, over five hundred people would live and work here. But now, Andemyon walked up a dirt road toward the Great Hall, which sat alone on the hill—how lonely and bare it looked without its pillared portico and the two wings stretching out on either side! There was nothing else within the walls but the old castle keep and a few unimpressive outbuildings to house guards and stable horses.

He entered the Great Hall, where petitioners were waiting outside the Duke's chambers. He waited too, for what seemed like hours. At last, there came a moment when one petitioner admitted to the Duke's presence departed, and the next had not yet been shown in. The door stood slightly ajar. Summoning his nerve, Andemyon crept forward and peeked in. Dafythe had risen from his seat on the dais and was pacing before it.

Andemyon had seen paintings of Dafythe in his youth, formally posed portraits in lush purple robes that would one day hang on the walls of this same hall, but they didn't prepare him for the sight of this long-limbed young prince, all arms and legs in nervous motion. He cast aside his formal robes and was in an unadorned if well-cut and luxurious-looking tunic and hose. Dark chestnut hair tumbled loose around his shoulders. He turned suddenly, as if sensing that he was not alone; his face was all bone, the skin tanned and taut. Dafythe looked a little fretful and impatient after receiving so many of his new subjects, but his face changed at the sight of his latest visitor. When he smiled, the resemblance to his yet-unborn children and grandchildren was remarkable.

“Come in, boy,” said Dafythe, and waved to dismiss the guard, who should have been keeping watch at the door but had only now returned to uphold his duty. “Are you a messenger?”

“No, my lord,” the boy replied with a low bow. “I speak only for myself. I come to offer you my service. My name is Andemyon Lighteschild. I am the son of the wizard Yryd Lightmaster.”

“I haven’t heard his name before,” said Dafythe. “I thought I knew the names of all the magicians in my father’s realms. He must be a minor wizard of this land.”

“He is of the Northlands, my lord,” Andemyon answered, “but he will be the most powerful wizard in the world one day.”

The young Duke laughed. “You have great faith in your father’s abilities, my lad. What of your own? Do you intend to serve me as a court magician?”

“I’m not magical myself, Lord Duke. I thought I might act as your secretary—it appears you have great need of one—or perhaps as a guide.”

Dafythe looked interested. “Guide?”

“You are new to the Northlands, my lord, and not yet familiar with our people and their ways.”

“Yes, that’s so,” Dafythe agreed. “I’ve come miles over the sea at my father’s bidding. He *is* the most powerful man in the world, Emperor of the greatest realm ever known. He hardly pays attention to this little part of his empire at all, so long as the taxes and proper tributes are paid. I suspect that he means to test me, or to see me out of the way for a time in this wilderness. But I mean to surprise him. I hope to make this Northland of yours a land the Emperor will be proud of. Can you aid me in this task, Andemyon Lighteschild?”

“Lord Duke, I believe I can,” Andemyon replied. “If you will permit me.”

He was appointed the Duke’s personal aide. Within a few weeks, he was indispensable. His advice was

always perfect.

“What a marvel you are, Andemyon!” Dafythe exclaimed one evening while alone with the youth in his chambers.

They’d spent the day riding around the countryside and viewing the villages near the palace. Not a formal progress—that would come later—but Dafythe was eager to see something of the land he was to rule. They’d visited Pendaunzel, the port less than a mile from the palace, where Dafythe had landed after his sea voyage. It was little more than a harbor surrounded by warehouses, some drinking houses, shops, and one shabby inn. Dafythe thought it could be more: a true “Duke’s city,” a place where ships from all over the world might dock, as well as a cultural and administrative center. He’d returned to the palace full of ideas and expounded on them to his smiling courtiers over dinner, and more to Andemyon afterwards. Once they’d gone to his chambers, Dafythe took up a quill and pot of ink and began to sketch it all out.

The more he saw of what the Duke was like as a young man, the more Andemyon admired him. Dafythe would never be a magnificent warrior-king like his father, but he was as great a man in his own way. He might be an intellectual and dreamer, but he had enough common sense and strength of will to see his ideas realized. As Dafythe spoke of his plans for the future, Andemyon knew how much of it would come true, and his heart beat faster with pride. At moments such as this, he was reminded of Mikha and how he and his friend used to discuss the source and purpose of magic—although the two men were nothing alike beyond a certain raw-boned lankiness and intensity. Was it the way Dafythe’s eyes shone with excitement, like Mikha’s, when he spoke of what was most important to him?

Encouraged by the young Duke’s enthusiasm, Andemyon offered some ideas of his own: “You might cut a processional avenue from the palace gates down to

the water,” he suggested. “A straight road, cobblestoned and lined with trees on both sides.”

Dafythe drew it in. “There must be fine buildings to either side, but I suppose those will come after the road to reach them has been made.”

“They’ll come up to the palace wall someday. What about a theatre? If you mean to make Pendaunzel a city of the arts as well as commerce, you must have a theatre. Bigger than the one at Maryesfont. A great O of wood and brick, open to the air at the middle with balconies all around the sides.”

“Like the imperial playhouse in London?”

Andemyon had never been to London, but he knew what the Duke’s Theatre would look like; he’d accompanied the aged Dafythe and his family there many times.

Dafythe drew a large circle to one side of the processional. “How do you *do* it?” he asked as he looked over the rough map of the city that was to be. “It’s almost as if you read my thoughts and make my intentions clear. You see it all exactly as I do! You mayn’t be a wizard, but I’m certain there’s some magic in you.”

Andemyon relished this praise, even though there was no magic involved beyond the spell that had brought him here. It was simply a matter of knowing his history; he could advise Dafythe to do exactly what he knew Dafythe had done.

“I sometimes think you were sent here specially to me,” Dafythe continued. “An angel in answer to a prayer for aid and guidance.”

“I’m no angel, my lord,” Andemyon answered, smiling. “But I did come to you for my own reasons.”

“Which are...?”

“To meet you. To see you, as you are, and to serve you, if I could.”

Dafythe laughed. “An angel, just as I said.”

They worked on his plans until a late hour of the night, and even when he at last set down his quill and

flexed his aching fingers, Dafythe's eyes were still bright with excitement. "I feel as if we ought to begin work tomorrow," he said. "What trouble it seems, that I'll have to argue the merits of it for weeks before I can send a single man to lay down the first bricks."

"Your councilors will do whatever you wish. Haven't I picked them all out for you?" Andemyon was sure of this, for he well remembered the stories Dafythe had told him of these early days of his reign. He recommended councilors to be appointed to precisely the positions he knew they would occupy, and suggested exactly those plans and policies that the Duke's Council would implement. He had no desire to alter the past, only to make himself a part of it.

"So you did. We shall have to see how agreeable they are, in the morning..." As Dafythe extended his arms wide and arched his back in a stretch, he turned his head to the window. "It's nearly morning already! The night is nearly done, and I don't imagine I'll get much sleep."

This was the moment. "Shall I stay up with you, my lord?" Andemyon offered, scarcely breathing.

But Dafythe answered, "No, Andemyon. You'd better be off to bed. I've kept you up late enough with my talk."

"I don't mind it, my lord. I can see you're still restless. We can go on talking of the new city, or—or I could sing to you."

"Sing?"

"I've been told I sing very nicely."

Dafythe smiled. "I feel sure you do, as perfectly as you do everything else, But I've no need of lullabies, thank you. Go to your bed, Andemyon, and sleep."

Thereafter, Andemyon did all he could to show how willing he was to do anything Dafythe desired, without making an open declaration of love or flinging himself into Dafythe's arms—but time and again, his oblique offers were rebuffed. Dafythe seemed not to understand

them. Could an intelligent man be so blind? Or was *this* his answer? Dafythe had no desires, but was simply fond of him; the young Duke valued his advice and enjoyed the companionship of someone who shared his enthusiasm for the future of the dukedom. Nothing more.

The summer drew to a close, and Andemyon grew dispirited. He must decide soon: should he summon the courage to speak, or should he admit to failure and return to his own time? He was beginning to miss the Northlands he'd grown up in, a more civilized and comfortable place than this colonial wilderness. He missed his family, and he missed Mikha. He would go home...and yet he lingered. In spite of his disappointment, he enjoyed the young Duke's company as much as Dafythe enjoyed his, and he hadn't quite given up hope.

One evening after dinner, when they were playing chess in Dafythe's chambers, a message arrived for the Duke bearing the Imperial seal. Dafythe took it away to read in private, and returned some minutes later still holding the message, its seal now broken. There was a look of distress on his face that alarmed Andemyon.

"What is it, my lord?" he asked "Bad news?" He tried to recall his history. What disaster had befallen at this date?

Dafythe shook his head and announced, "I've been informed that I am betrothed to one Lady Aline, daughter of Father's Lord High Chamberlain. It's all arranged."

"You won't marry her," said Andemyon. This wasn't a denial, but a simple statement of fact. Dafythe wouldn't marry until he was nearly fifty, and then to a noblewoman of the Northlands.

Dafythe smiled. "I've no wish to marry anyone at present, least of all someone I hardly know, but I don't see how I can refuse. It's Father's wish—and my father's wishes are orders that must be obeyed. Someone has carried tales to him, and he's decided that

this is the best means to quash them.”

“Tales?” Andemyon knew that there was gossip about him and Dafythe, although, to his dismay, there was no more truth to it now than there’d been in his boyhood. Even when he spent half the night in Dafythe’s chambers, nothing passed between them that the entire court could not have witnessed. But the Duke’s courtiers were jealous of his position and influence. Those whom he had recommended to appointments and those who had hopes were wise enough not to complain, but others, disappointed, whispered about the Duke’s obviously favoring a pretty youth. And while Dafythe was oblivious to his offers, Andemyon was aware that there were gentlemen of the court, and ladies too, who would’ve been happy to take them up if they hadn’t believed that he belonged to Dafythe exclusively. Had the stories carried so far as to reach the Emperor’s ears?

Dafythe brandished his letter. “Father writes of it very frankly. If I’ve the misfortune to be ‘buggerer of young boys,’ then I should have the decency not to flaunt my scandalous behavior with my ‘catamite,’ but conceal it and get married as soon as possible before I completely disgrace myself. I’m to get rid of you, or at least, I’m not keep you so close by me that it causes this sort of talk. Perhaps he’s right, Andemyon, for your sake as much as mine. You’re too fine a young man to become the object of vile gossip because of my affection for you.”

“But I don’t care what they say,” Andemyon answered honestly. “I wouldn’t mind the gossip, my lord, even if it were true.” Stepping forward, closer to the Duke, he made the bravest move he had dared so far; it might be his last chance. “Dafythe, I wish it were.” And he flung himself.

For an instant, Dafythe’s mouth was against his—then Dafythe’s hands were on his shoulders and he was being held away at arm’s length. To Andemyon’s relief, Dafythe didn’t appear angry at his audacity, nor

disgusted, but the young Duke's eyes were sad.

"Oh, my dear Andemyon. I was afraid it was so. I've grown accustomed to people who bow-and-scrape and make up to me because I am a prince, but no one has ever regarded me as if *I* were wonderful myself. That it should be a boy like you! You are like no one I've met before. You've been more help to me than you realize during these last difficult months. I don't know what I'd have done without you. But you must see that it is impossible. I can't love you as you'd like."

Andemyon stepped away from the light grip on his shoulders, contrite and red with embarrassment. "My deepest apologies, my lord Duke. Please forgive my presumption. I won't make such a fool of myself again." With a bow, he stepped backwards toward the door.

Dafythe still looked pained. "Andemyon—"

But the young man mumbled a plea to leave his lord's presence and exited without waiting for an answer. Dafythe did not follow him.

When he left the Duke, Andemyon went to his own chambers to change into the clothes he had arrived in. He left a note of resignation and farewell where it would be found, and took nothing away with him. Once it was dark, he left the palace and returned to the woods, as Mikha had told him to do when he was ready to end this experiment.

He found the same clearing where Mikha had cast the spell and stepped into its center. He had no sense of the spell being uncast; there was only a shift in the soft light, as if the moon had abruptly changed its phase and place in the night sky, and the trees around him were different; some slender trunks had grown mighty, and others had gone. Mikha was seated on the large rock at the edge of the clearing, where Andemyon had left him.

"How long have I been gone?" he asked.

"No time at all," Mikha answered, and climbed down from his perch. "As far as I observed, you never

left the circle—only flickered away for a moment, like a blink of the eye. Did it work? What happened?”

“Your spell worked wonderfully,” Andemyon told him. “I was at Dafythe’s court for months, served Dafythe as a young man...but nothing happened. It ended no differently in the past than it did—would—when I was a boy. I sent myself away again, for the sake of my Duke. But I know now that Dafythe doesn’t care in that way for me.”

“That’s exactly what you wanted to find out.”

Andemyon sighed. “Yes, but I’d hoped to find out something different.”

Together, they walked silently back to Pendaunzel. The city was large and well lit, with broad, paved streets and a straight, tree-lined avenue, the Duke’s Parade, that stretched from the gates of the palace to the harbor. A number of people were out and about, which was odd at so late an hour, and both young men overheard a certain nervous, hushed murmuring that they hadn’t noticed earlier in the day. At the inn, they heard the news: Duke Dafythe had fallen ill and wasn’t expected to live through the night.

A young man walked up through the crowd awaiting news at the palace gates, and called up to the guards on the wall above: “I’ve come to see the Duke, one last time. Will you let me in?”

Since Andemyon was known to the guards, they did not bar his entrance but admitted him to the palace grounds and escorted him up to the Duke’s residence on its hill. Dafythe’s eldest son, Lord Ambris, who was just outside Dafythe’s chamber door in whispered conversation with a group of courtiers, looked extremely surprised when he saw the young man approach. “Andemyon Lightesblood? How came you here so swiftly?”

“I was in Pendaunzel when I heard my lord Duke was ill,” Andemyon said simply. “Is it so bad as they say in the city?”

“It is,” the Duke’s son confirmed grimly. “A matter of hours, no more.”

“May I see him, please?” Even though Ambris had been the one to investigate the rumors involving his father’s favorite page and prove them false, he had also been the one who’d arranged to send Andemyon away to Maryesfont to prevent further scandal. It was possible that he would bar Andemyon from seeing the Duke, even tonight.

But Lord Ambris said, “It’s fortunate you happened to be so near. Father’s been asking for you. I wouldn’t have sent for you at the university, but since you are here, you must come in. Your presence cannot harm him now, and may be of comfort.”

He brought Andemyon into Dafythe’s bedchamber, where the Duke lay. Doctors and courtiers and other members of the Duke’s family were gathered; they stared at the young man as he entered, for they all remembered the circumstances under which he’d been sent from court, but Andemyon had no mind for them. His gaze was fixed upon the figure on the bed—the long ash-white hair, the ancient face more pinched and wrinkled than when he’d last seen the aged Dafythe five years ago. But in that very old face he could detect the features of the young Duke, and when Dafythe opened his eyes, they were just the same.

“Demy...” Dafythe held out a hand, and Andemyon came to stand beside the Duke’s bed to take it; the bones of the fingers were like twigs, and the skin frighteningly cool to the touch. The grip on his own hand was so light he could pull away easily if he wished to.

“I’m here, my lord Duke,” he said, and squeezed the fragile fingertips gently.

“I was thinking of you, my dear...remembering. When I first saw you, you reminded me of another youth I knew, long ago. Such a lovely boy. That same look of an angel sent to aid and guide me. Did I ever tell you of him? No. He was only here for a little time, that first summer after I was made Duke. It was all his doing...all

of this. My palace. My city. My dukedom. It wouldn't be as it is now, if not for him. I've thought of him often since you came to serve me. The same face. The same name. Lightesblood. Lighteschild. A wizard's son. There is only you, isn't there, Demy? Only one boy."

This might sound like nonsense to anyone else who heard the Duke's soft-spoken words, drawn in and out on each labored breath, but Andemyon understood it perfectly. "Yes," he answered, "there is only me. I had to leave, for your sake."

"Ah." The Duke's mouth moved into a faint smile. "No, we couldn't have a scandal. You went away so suddenly. I never could find where you'd gone. I searched all the Northlands, but it was as if you'd never existed. I wanted to tell you. I can now, when it doesn't matter. If I could have loved you, my Andemyon..." The Duke shut his eyes. The grip on Andemyon's hand loosened, and Dafythe's fell to the bed. His physicians pushed forward to attend him, and Andemyon was driven back from the bedside. He didn't protest, but retreated to sit out of the way and wait for the end, which came within the hour.

The bells of the chapel rang to announce the Duke's death as Andemyon left the palace; the bells of the city's churches took up the peal. He could also hear the sounds of the crowd beyond the main gate mourning, for Dafythe was well beloved by his people. His death was the end of an era. Who could remember a time before Dafythe had ruled over them? He'd made the Northlands what it was, and it wouldn't be the same now that he was gone. Tears rolled down Andemyon's own cheeks at the memory of the Duke he had known, both as a young man and old.

Once outside the palace gates, he was surprised to find that Mikha had waited for him. "I'm sorry, Demy," said his friend. "I know more well than anyone what Lord Dafythe was to you."

Andemyon nodded, accepting this condolence. "I

feel as if I've lost him twice in the same day." He blotted his tears with the back of his hand. "He did love me, Mikha. He told me so. He knew who I was, that I was the same Andemyon he'd known ages ago. He was fond of me as a boy, because he remembered me...before." They began to walk back down the Duke's Parade toward the inn. According to Dafythe, *he* had made this, formed the past by entering it. But he'd only advised the young Duke to create what he knew would be one day, repeating Dafythe's own plans to him. Surely they hadn't been *his* ideas to begin with? "I understand now. It wasn't the great gap of age or time that separated us—it was his duty. Whatever he felt for me in his heart, nothing could ever have come of it, not in the past any more than today. A prince can't choose where to love. He doesn't have that freedom. That's what he meant when he said it was impossible."

They went into the inn. Daylight wasn't many hours away, but Andemyon was exhausted and heavy of heart. The bells were still ringing for Dafythe. At the foot of the steep, narrow stair that led up to their room, he leaned against his friend's shoulder for comfort, but at the touch he felt Mikha stiffen and draw away from him. In their room, Andemyon quickly took off his shoes and tunic and, in shirt and hose, climbed into the room's single bed. He looked back at Mikha, who was still standing fully clothed.

"Aren't you coming to bed?"

"No." Mikha sat down in a chair near the door and settled as if he intended to remain there the rest of the night.

"But you must be as weary as I am." He knew how spellcasting taxed a magician's strength, and Mikha had cast a very powerful spell for his sake this night.

"I'm not," his friend insisted. "I'm used to long vigils of wakefulness. You need to rest more than I do, Andemyon. Go to sleep."

Andemyon was at first hurt by this rebuff, but he cast a curious glance or two at his friend before he slept.

Two months later...

One rainy afternoon at the end of the summer—a summer that seemed twice as long to Andemyon, and not only because of the months he'd spent in the past—the young man heard the thump of boots on the stairs that led up from the College of Magic's library, then a knock on his door. He was surprised; his room here under the eaves was a solitary place where few visitors called. He rose from his work to see who it could be.

"Mikha!" Andemyon hadn't seen his friend since they'd parted the morning after Dafythe's death. Mikha had gone on his wanderings in the wilderness to the north, and Andemyon had stayed to attend the Duke's funeral before returning to the university to resume his studies. "How did you know to find me here?" he asked as he stepped back from the door to admit his friend.

"I was told you'd taken my old room," Mikha explained.

"It was vacant. The librarian needed an assistant, and someone had to look after your things." Andemyon indicated the belongings the former mage had left behind. "After all, you might want them again someday."

"As a matter of fact, I did want one or two books of mine..." Mikha glanced at the papers left lying on the floor before the hearth, where Andemyon had been sitting. "But I see you also make use of them."

"I've been reading your notes on our old experiments. Do you remember how I sought to discover the source of a magician's power?"

"Yes, of course I do. I'm glad to see you're carrying on with it, Demy. It will be of the greatest importance to all scholars of magic someday. Since I've been away, I've often thought of this room, and of you and I here." He fell silent, listening to the rain pattering on the roof.

Mikha had been speaking with his usual reserve; as a well-trained magician, his poise and self-command

were nearly impenetrable to one who didn't know him well, but Andemyon thought he detected an almost wistful note in his friend's voice as he recalled the hours they'd spent together in this secluded place at the top of the library. When their eyes met, Mikha looked at him with an intensity that was much more than wistful and made him feel suddenly shy.

"I've missed you, Mikha," he said impulsively. "I would've gone with you on your travels, if you'd asked me."

"I thought it best not to," answered Mikha. "You were so grieved over Lord Dafythe's death. It was better you come back here."

"Yes, perhaps that *was* right," Andemyon sighed. He didn't meet Mikha's gaze. "I needed a peaceful and familiar place to return to, to recover from my sorrows and to think." During these past weeks, he'd spent plenty of time alone with his thoughts, and he'd come to understand a great many things. "But there was another reason you didn't wish me to accompany you, wasn't there?"

"What do you mean?"

"It wasn't my sorrow for Lord Dafythe, but my love for him. It pained you to be near me while I was still thinking of him, because *you* love me, Mikha."

This quiet statement was enough to ruffle the young wizard's composure. Mikha gaped at him. "How—? When did you know?"

"I guessed it was so on the night he died," Andemyon explained. "I kissed Dafythe once, in the past, and he held me away from him in the same way you always do when I draw too close. I used to believe that meant you disliked it, but it wasn't so. You held me away for the same reason he did: I was too dangerous to you. Too great a temptation. A mage must be even more careful than a Duke." He looked suddenly up into his friend's eyes. "I'm not wrong, am I?"

"No," Mikha admitted. "No, you aren't wrong."

"You never told me."

“How could I?” Now that his secret had been discovered, the words came quickly. “A mage has no business falling in love, especially not with an innocent young boy. It was the worst trial of my will I have had to endure. I didn’t dare speak. The very moment at which I saw you might understand how I felt was the same moment when I saw you were already in love with someone else.”

Andemyon bowed his head. “My lord Dafythe.”

“He was a hero to you. I had no hope of comparing with your dream of him. I thought that in time you’d grow out of your infatuation, but you are such a determined scholar! Once you learned that it was possible to travel into the past to meet him as a young man, you searched everywhere for that spell.”

“Yet you helped me to find it. You agreed to send me to him.”

“You would’ve found it yourself eventually. I knew you wouldn’t rest until you did, or else you’d go on dreaming after him. I thought it better not to stand in your way and allow you to find out...what you did find out.”

“You *knew* how it would end?”

“I knew that, whatever happened, you couldn’t remain in that other time for long.”

“No,” he had to agree. He’d seen that for himself long ago: if he’d been successful, even the briefest tryst between Dafythe and himself would have brought ruin to the young Duke. He might have altered that same history that he’d desired to enter in ways he could never imagine. “I couldn’t stay. I’d have to return...to you?”

Mikha laughed. “Oh, I’m not so presumptuous as *that*! I didn’t come back to find out if you’d gotten over your grief for Lord Dafythe—only because I couldn’t stay away any longer. I had to see you. I know that you’ve looked upon me as a friend, no more. I’ve no reason to expect you to consider me, even now...” But the hopeful look in his eyes betrayed him.

“I didn’t when I saw you last,” Andemyon answered

honestly. “One doesn’t think of a mage as a man like any other...”

Could he think of him in that way now? As his grief over Dafythe receded, Mikha was more often on his mind. He couldn’t deny it. He *had* missed Mikha these past long weeks; he hadn’t realized how much until now. Was he ready to accept that this friend he’d always considered untouchable was someone he could love? Yes, that was possible.

He stepped closer, and for once Mikha did not draw away. As they stared at each other, the only sound was the drumming of the rain. The university around them might not have existed, for they felt miles away from anything beyond this little room. Tentatively, Andemyon placed his hand on Mikha’s cheek.

Their first kiss was rather clumsy, and it was followed by cautious, chaste little dabs that missed as often as they struck true, but that fell more rapidly and grew more soft and wet—until Mikha caught him up suddenly with a delighted laugh. Andemyon had only seen him like this once before, on the day when Mikha had been confirmed a wizard. All his careful guards were down; for the moment he was not a magician, but simply a happy young man.

“You don’t know how long I’ve wished for this, Demy,” he said. “You’ve made it so difficult for me to keep my vows these last years!”

“Fortunately,” Andemyon answered, matching Mikha’s laughter, “a mage does not have to keep his vows forever.” He knew certainly that Mikha hadn’t yet broken his vows and had even less experience in these matters than *he* did. But they were intelligent young men, willing to experiment, and they would soon find their way together.

The End