

"You ready to do this?" Rafe peered out over the balcony to look at the crowd gathered in the hall below. "It's crazy packed down there."

Forest didn't dare look down. The noise level was enough to unnerve him, and the lilt of Irish mingled into the chatter only drove home the importance of what was about to happen. There were too many things to worry about. Did he make the right choice going with a mandarin collar tuxedo, especially when the guests appeared to be all wearing ties? Did he make a mistake putting his groomsmen in silver waistcoats when he was wearing a blue one? Did he forget to put someone on the guest list? And as his fingers sought to turn the gold band he'd been wearing for the past few months, panic swelled through his chest.

"Fuck. The ring." He sucked in a hard lungful of air. "Who's got my ring?"

"I've got Con's. Kane's got yours." Miki drawled softly, picking through the bowl of peanut M&Ms left for them in the waiting area. "Get a grip. Not like you haven't done this before, dude."

"And it's a small crowd." Damie interjected, joining Rafe at the balcony. "Shit, smaller than what we played in New Jersey. You've got this."

"Breathe into a bag or something," Rafe tossed over his shoulder. "That way, if you're going to puke, it's already there near your mouth."

"You're standing up with me. You're supposed to *help*." The bag thing wasn't a bad idea, but Forest didn't know where he could get one. Instead, he began to plop on the settee with its one hundred pillows then caught himself in a flailing stop before he sat. "Shit, I almost wrinkled the suit."

"They're not going to kick you out of your own wedding if you've got a wrinkled suit." Miki popped a piece of candy into his mouth then grumbled at Damie who nudged him with an elbow to open his hand and share. "There's a whole fucking bowl of them over there. Why do you want mine?"

"Because they're better that way," his brother replied, plucking out the yellow ones. Chewing, the guitarist perked up as the music from the speakers changed. "Shit, that's our call. Gotta head down, guys."

"You've got this," Rafe echoed Damie's words, patting Forest on the back. "We'll be there holding your place in front of the altar. Just remember, don't lock your knees and if anyone offers you a pale, white cookie, don't get it stuck to the roof of your mouth or you'll be digging at with your tongue through the ceremony."

"Wait, no. There's wafers?" Forest's panic rose again, and he struggled to recall that part of the rehearsal. "We weren't doing anything like that. Were we? Don't say shit like that unless someone's changed something. Suppose they bring out the wafers?"

"He's being an asshole." Miki shoved the last of his M&Ms in his mouth, chewing furiously then swallowed. "We'll be downstairs. I've got the ring. It'll be fast. Just... don't puke."

"You're *not* helping," Forest ground out, suffering through Damie adjusting the buttons on his tuxedo to show more of Forest's deep blue brocade waistcoat. "I'm so going to puke."

"Well if you do, there's mints on the table someplace. Swallow a handful after you hurl or that first kiss is going to really suck for Connor." Miki stood at the top of the back stairs leading down to the main ball room. "Hurry up, D. Priest wanted us there before they opened the doors to let people in. Brigid's going to skin us if we fuck this up."

"You can do this," Damie whispered, pulling Forest into a quick hug. "'Sides, your guy's here to keep you company. Why don't the two of you just kick back here while everyone goes to find a seat then come down when you're ready."

“Come down when the fucking music starts like they want you to or Brigid’s going to yank you two down there by your ears,” Miki shot back, nodding at Connor coming up the stairs. “Yeah, we’re going. D, *come on.*”

If Forest’s heart was skipping from nerves before, it went into overdrive at the sight of his husband striding across the carpet dressed in his crisp, dark blue formal uniform. There were flashes of gold, medals and a hat Connor had tucked under his arm but beneath the gilded navy and embossed star lay the man he’d fallen in love with.

“Hey, babe. You look good.” Con gently tossed his hat onto the settee then gathered Forest up into a tight embrace. Angling his head, he stole a soft kiss from Forest’s open mouth, deepening it as the music swelled below and the sounds of people moving into the ballroom reached them. “God, you taste good too.”

He leaned into Connor’s chest, hooking his hands behind his husband’s back and exhaled, forcing all the tension out of his body. From the chatter and clinking of glasses, it sounded as if their guests were slow to trickle in through the doors but at that moment, Forest wouldn’t have cared if it took them forever to find a place to sit. He was wrapped up in a hug with his favourite person tucked against his heart while the world waited for them to speak their vows.

Again.

“You know, we can slip out while they’re all busy and just elope,” Connor suggested, snuggling his face into the crook of Forest’s neck.

“That’s what got us into trouble the last time.” He laughed under his breath. “Now we’re standing in front of a million and a half people—”

“Three hundred.”

“Three million—and my stomach’s eating itself.” Connor’s chuckle rumbled through his chest. Its deep roll lightened the pressure building up behind Forest’s temples and he exhaled again, grumbling at having to let go of his anger. “Miki’s right. We should have just said no.”

“Miki’s fearless and can stare down a T-Rex, *a ghra.*” Con reminded him. “You and I are mere mortals and that’s my mum we’re talking about. I’m man enough to admit I’ll never say no to her.”

“Yeah,” Forest admitted softly. “I wouldn’t either. She just wants to be there to see us happy. I get that. This is... we can get through this then go stuff ourselves with cake. Guys were right. It’s not like we haven’t done this before.”

“Last time Elvis married us. This time we’ve got a rogue Catholic priest, a rock band and my Irish clan behind us. I think we’re doing better this time around. At the very least, we’ve got better whiskey and music.” The music shifted once again, cycling into a classic Irish love song, warning the couple they had five minutes to get to the now closed double doors. “Ah, they’re almost playing our song, love.”

“Almost.” He tightened his arms around Connor’s waist, holding still for a moment longer. “I love you. I can’t imagine loving anyone else but you.”

“Can I tell you the truth?” Connor leaned back slightly, meeting Forest’s gaze. His lilt was thick, spurred on by the emotions running through them both. “Every day I wake up and I think, I just can’t love him any more than I do today and every night when I go to sleep, I discover I’m wrong. You, *a ghra*, are my universe. You hold every bit of stars, suns and life in you and until I found you, I was stumbling around in the dark. So remember that when we go downstairs. Today’s just the day we tell them down there that we’ve found one another and shall stand strong against it all.”

“Yeah,” Forest said with a grin. “Remember that when we have kids and they’re eating nacho cheese out of those big damned cans you keep buying.”

“I like orange gloop on my chips,” Con teased. “I can’t wait to have kids with you, Forest Morgan-Ackerman, and I sure as hell can’t wait to spend the rest of my life dancing in the kitchen with you too.”