

Preview of:

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a boys' love anthology

Sixteen sensual stories of boy meets boy.



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## Rite of Passage

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L.J. Eves

“Cantos,” Riate said as we trudged up the stony path, “have you always wanted to be a guide?”

I glanced back at him. Riate was a shapeless mass of black pilgrim’s robes, the gleam of eyeglasses and the sharp angle of a nose the only evidence that a young man followed me, and not the devil himself. I fought a scowl and hitched my pack higher on my shoulders. “I’ve lived here all my life, sir,” I lied. “It seemed the thing to do.”

Riate nodded and tucked the robes between his legs as he climbed over a boulder. I waited for him. For the past three hours, Riate had been cordial, distantly polite...and completely oblivious to the lies I spun. Was the little prince so engrossed in playing pious that he’d forgotten the delicacy of his situation? Or did he think a tribesman like myself was below suspicion?

Palms itching, I took a deep breath. No use thinking about it now. It would only make the nervous anger flare

and increase the chances that my face or my speech or the smell of my sweat would betray me. And then Riate would bolt back to the camp at the base of the mountain like a deer in flight.

Like any other animal when it smelled death.

I knew I couldn't kill him yet. We were too close to civilization, and the transmitter hanging beneath those pilgrim robes would alert the royal guard. Soon enough, though, the mountain winds would scramble the signal, and then....

Riate gasped. I turned, snatching instinctively at the prince's sleeve as he teetered on the edge of the boulder. Behind the glasses, Riate's eyes were impossibly wide, his hand surprisingly strong as he grasped my wrist and regained his balance. "Thank you," he murmured, flushing, and looked over his shoulder at the would-have-been tumble. The slope below us prickled with jagged rocks and thorny underbrush. Riate inhaled unevenly, a cold wind tugging at the hem of his robes and he swayed, a swirling, dark figure poised against an aching blue sky. Moisture blossomed between his palm and my wrist, a slick and heavy point of pressure.

It was the first time I'd ever touched royal sweat.

I jerked away, breaking the contact. Riate fell forward onto his hands, his expression confused and indignant as I turned away. Gripping the straps of my pack, I continued up the path. If I expected a tirade from the young prince at the rough treatment, I received none. Only a grunt and the soft *shush* of robes as he followed. In any case, I didn't dare look at him long enough to apologize; I was too startled by my own actions to risk it. I should have let him fall, I told myself, let him break his neck. A humiliating death. He was a prince of the house of Ambraeo. He deserved as

much. I had a brief vision of black robes cartwheeling down the mountainside, colliding with sharp rocks in a spray of blood, those ridiculous eyeglasses spattered with red.

I felt terrified and elated and aroused and disgusted at the thought of it. And ashamed that I was unable to be single-minded about the whole affair.

I consoled myself with the thought that it was my first assassination. That, in the end, the Revolution of Tribes would only remember my actions. As long as I did my duty, all would be right with the world.



The people of my tribe have a saying: “You can measure a man’s quality by the strength of the fire he builds.” Riate had no fire, but the heat generator he’d brought was small and it glowed weakly in the dimness of the tent. He’d insisted on rigging it as I pitched camp for the night, stroking his own ego, no doubt, playing the true pilgrim. No matter that the previous night had been spent in luxury—now he was simple and humble and one with the earth. I had to fight a sneer as I opened the air vent.

As I knelt and dug through my pack for the rations I carried, Riate seated himself beside the generator and began to unfasten his pilgrim’s robes. Layer upon layer of black slid away from his slender arms, his narrow chest. When he shook the hood away from his face, the cloth pooled around his hips. Riate was handsome the way only the rich and powerful can manage to be: his posture self-possessed and unnaturally erect, features so finely chiseled, he might have been a woman if not for the thinness of his mouth and the angle of his brow. His hair was an ambiguous brown in the dim light. His glasses glinted, hiding his eyes.

I wondered if the thick wildness of my hair and the broadness of my face seemed as alien. If I seemed like a savage, or a young beast, or the ragged shadow of his own “superior” being. Or something else entirely. Not that it mattered, I told myself. Not as long as he didn’t see me as a killer.

Riate accepted his share of rations with a small nod, eating primly with one hand, playing absently with the transmitter around his neck with the other. “Do you know,” he said between bites, “that I’ve never climbed this high before? Father always hires a litter when my family visits the shrine.” He smiled slightly, eyes on the generator. “It’s always so very bumpy. Now that I’ve seen the terrain firsthand, I understand why.”

I took a bite of hard biscuit. How many of my tribesmen had borne the weight of those litters? I wondered. How many had starved on the low wages and backbreaking work of it? When had technology advanced to the point that only stubborn aristocracy demanded such demeaning labor? I chewed slowly, composing myself. “Why did you decide to walk the pilgrimage alone this year, sir?” I asked. I could swallow my own pride long enough to play his game of small talk, if it meant maintaining his trust another day.

The prince shrugged, the gesture awkward on square shoulders. “It’s...a rite of passage, I suppose. Is that what your people call it? A rite of passage?”

I prickled a moment. “Yes,” I said, my voice little more than a growl. I feigned a cough, lightened my tone. “Yes, sir.”

Riate nodded and turned his head. For an instant, his eyes became visible behind the glasses and they were distant, oddly sad. Infinitely old. They startled me. “Not many

are making the trip this year,” he said quietly, almost to himself. “The roads have become too dangerous.” He turned his gaze slowly back to me, studying me. Silence passed between us, thick and palpable, and I suddenly feared that Riate did in fact know who and what I was. My throat tightened, and still he studied me, a pair of gleaming lenses on a perfect face. An inhuman face. The generator cast red shadows over Riate’s lips.

The tent’s walls snapped around us and we both jumped. I laughed nervously, cursing myself for my fear. “It’s only the wind, sir,” I said and stood to close the air vent, struggling with the stubborn vinyl and the sharp, howling wind before finally yanking it closed. The prince had no idea who I was. Of course he didn’t. I began moving back to my side of the tent. Running a hand through my hair, I opened my mouth to ask if Riate would “care for any more supper” when my calf brushed against his arm. I paused involuntarily, the memory of his moist palm against my wrist surging through me. Did he tense against me now? Was that fear? Disdain? Or was it I who was...?

“Cantos?”

“Yes, sir?” My mouth was dry. We were still touching.

He held the transmitter in both hands, eyes glued to its smooth surface. “I never thanked you properly for volunteering as my guide. So few are willing to assist with the pilgrimage these days. So few are willing to....” He looked up at me. Looked *up* at me. The concept was so odd I forgot to breathe. “Thank you, Cantos.”

I blinked rapidly and moved away from him, nodding, grunting as I busied myself with my bedroll. When I finally lay down, I caught a smile on Riate’s face. I made myself believe it was smug. How dare he humiliate me! How dare

he patronize me! Killing him would be more than duty, I told myself. It would be a pleasure. I watched as Riate slid into his bedroll, glasses still on, robes still half undone and clinging to his hips, his back to me. His hair spilled onto his pillow, exposing one carefully sculpted ear, the soft vulnerable curve of his throat. I wanted to kill him. I wanted to kill him. I wanted to.

I closed my eyes and prayed to the gods of my fathers and brothers and tribesmen that I could believe that was true.



Of all of the candidates in the tribe, I had been chosen to assassinate Riate Ambraeo because of my knowledge of mountainous terrain. However, nothing had prepared me for the storm that had begun brewing in the night. A wind that seemed to blow in all directions at once howled through the mountain pass, rain shooting sideways like needles, blinding us and turning to ice beneath our feet, and a sky so gray it was nearly the color of Riate's robes swirled and churned above us like a thing alive.

Hunched against the onslaught, I plodded along and fingered the small dagger at my side. A simple, ancient weapon. It had been my grandfather's.

A gust of wind shoved me, and I clung to a boulder. Riate half-stumbled into my back, latching onto my arm, head down. "How much longer until we reach the passage?" he asked. His face, when it poked through the fitfully snapping hood, was wet and pale, his glasses smeared.

I grimaced, tightened my hand around the dagger. "Not much longer, sir." I pushed myself away from the rock,

forced myself not to look at him, to steel myself. Not much longer now.

“May I ask you a question?”

I continued walking, finger playing with the hilt at my side. “Yes,” I said, forgetting the “sir,” managing to glance back at him, making myself hate him. Forcing it. Because it had to be done.

Riate gripped at the rock a moment, waiting for another gust to pass before catching up with me. “Why?” He gulped a breath. “Why were you watching me sleep?”

I gaped, unable to stop the stunned flush that rushed over my ears, though I had enough peace of mind to continue walking. I hadn’t thought he’d noticed. *I* hadn’t even noticed at first. I had woken long before he had, and my eyes had wandered over his sleeping body, taking in the hard planes and sloping curves hovering between adolescence and manhood. The steady rhythm of his breathing, the angle of one arm flung overhead, the uncertain rise of a nipple through his thin undershirt. Beautiful. I had thought it then in the hazy, warm morning when he’d finally stirred and I looked away, remembering my purpose. Beautiful.

I thought it now.

The wind howled. The air turned cold, electric. I flushed more deeply, and my weakness made me sick. I had to end this. Now. I had to end it.

I whipped around, catching Riate by the arm and shoving him toward the mountainside. His head snapped back, eyes a confused blur behind their glass as he collided with the rock. The dark robes flew in all directions and I remembered how I had envisioned him the day before, colliding with the rocks, all blood and darkness. I gritted my teeth,

planted my feet, wrapped my hand around the hilt of the knife, and lunged forward.

Wind caught me like a gigantic fist and flung me sideways, my feet slipping from beneath me as my head smacked into the ground. Stupid. Stupid. So stupid of me. I tried to push myself up, but black spots winged across my vision like hundreds of blackbirds...or the hem of a pilgrim's cloak.

I laughed. And lost consciousness.



"You shouldn't move," Riate said from some faraway, hazy place.

I opened my eyes slowly, the pain behind them so intense I thought for a moment I would vomit. As my vision sharpened, the sensation became a dull, persistent ache in the back of my skull. I lay in the poorly-erected tent, its sides and top quivering around me. The generator glowed a hellish red. Riate knelt above me, bare-chested, skin dripping with rain or sweat or both, transmitter glittering around his neck. It took me a long moment to realize I was naked, swaddled in his robes. The generator blazed. I shivered.

I shifted, pressing myself upright, but Riate shook his head, a hand curling around my shoulder. "You've hit your head, Cantos," he said. His glasses slid down the length of his nose and he pushed them into place with his free hand. An absent gesture, so mundane and surreal and perfect. "You shouldn't move."

I blinked up at him, his face so close I could smell his skin, could see the reflection of myself in his glasses: a disheveled young man buried in black cloth. I didn't want to see that strange, animal boy in the reflection, the creature

that looked more terrified and wretched than anyone had a right to look. I wanted to see Riate. I wanted to see the young man I was supposed to kill. The bastard prince. The thing I had been taught to hate from birth.

Reaching up shakily, I removed his glasses.

Riate inhaled sharply. "What are you—?"

The glasses clattered to the ground as I wrapped a firm hand around his neck and yanked him downward. Our mouths collided as my head hit the floor, and I held him there despite the stars exploding behind my eyes. He grunted, straining away from me, one hand scrambling at the vinyl floor of the tent. I held him there, wanting to taste him, and forced my tongue past his lips and teeth. Above me, Riate grew still, his body rigid as I explored his mouth, not so much unlike other mouths, really. When I pushed against his soft tongue he had no choice but to push back, and I felt his breath, hot exhalations from his nose, quicken against my skin. I reached up with my other hand, afraid to release my grip on his neck just yet, and trailed my fingers along his arm, the slender muscles I'd admired in the morning light. They jumped beneath my touch, but he did not pull away. When I pressed my palm against his back, he came down with a shiver.

I wondered what drove him then. If it was curiosity or youth, or if his brain, like mine, suddenly felt so full of guilt and desperation and confusion that this was the only recourse left.

Riate's transmitter, useless in the stormy mountain passes, pushed cold and hard through the layers of cloth on my chest. I realized dimly, as I laced my hand into his hair and his lips finally moved against mine, that I could kill him now. I'd failed before, made a fool of myself, but I could kill

him now. Even with my head throbbing and my body freezing, it would be so easy. As I began formulating the best way to go about it, however, my conviction wavered. Riate was warm and alive against me, his mouth tender and wanting. The *other* on top of me, waiting.

In that strange moment of tentative warmth and shallow breathing, I felt a tiny spark of rage burst inside me. And I hated all of it: the bitter cold and the mountain, the aristocracy, and—I realized with a jolt that sent heat into my cheeks and groin—I hated the Tribal Revolution that had made me want to kill this beautiful young man.

I pushed my body up, and Riate made a tiny, muffled noise in the back of his throat.

I hated my duty.

I struggled to pull away the cloth that bound me, and my naked chest found his.

I hated my tribe.

I writhed beneath him, and my nipple grazed his.

I hated myself for all of it.

Riate broke the kiss with a shudder, panting against my ear. Bracing his arms, he began to push himself away from me. “We shouldn’t—”

“No.” My voice was jagged. Rock jagged. Deadly jagged. I sat up quickly, fought the pain in my head and a wave of nausea, and shoved him to the ground, climbing on top of him. An animal. A young beast. I no longer cared.

I half-expected Riate to scream, lash out. I surely would have. He didn’t. When I bent my head to lick the smoothness of that narrow chest, he gasped. When I reached between his legs to fondle the warm bulge there, he groaned, and I all but ripped the trousers away from his pale legs.

The air in the tent had grown thick with sweat and steam, but Riate shivered against me. I hovered over him, my tongue tracing wet patterns onto his flesh. I cooed softly, my cheek pressed against his, as I suckled his ear, my hands exploring with growing urgency the contours of his ribs, his navel, his thighs, the hardness rising up to brush against my own belly. His eyes, more naked without his glasses than his body could ever be, widened in confusion when I prodded my fingers past his lips and told him to suck. They widened further when I slid the wet fingers between his legs and into him.

When I finally lifted his hips with either hand and thrust into him, he bit his lip, eyes closed as if in a bad dream. Perhaps it was, and we were locked in the center of it; a nightmare of writhing, sweating limbs and lust, bodies slick and red in the light of a generator that hummed as we shuddered our releases in time with its quiet mechanical laughter.

When it was over, Riate lay beneath me. Naked and vulnerable. His legs tangled with mine. His belly sticky with his own pleasure. I panted softly against his shoulder, my eyes closed, my head pounding.

“You know,” I said, swallowing, trying to find my voice again. “I’m supposed to kill you now.”

Riate said nothing for a long moment. Then, running an uncertain hand through my hair, he sighed. “I know,” he whispered, and reached for his pilgrim’s robes.

He covered us both with the blessed dark.