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Wand'ring Home

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Holiday eBook Freebie

Wand'ring Home
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Sometimes the darkest days bring the brightest joys.

Jimothy shivered under his heavy wool cloak and pulled the hood tighter around his head. It didn't matter that it obscured his peripheral vision. Jacques knew the route as well or better than he did and the shaggy gelding was relatively unaffected by the falling snow. Jimothy had woken to it that morning. An inch had fallen overnight to blanket the countryside in white. He'd been happy to have the warmth and security of one of Kanbec's many waycabins and its adjacent stable to shelter himself and his horse.

He was so near home now that he could feel it in his bones.

Or maybe he was just getting old and the cold was getting to him.

At the moment the latter seemed as likely as the former and he shook his head wryly as his romantic side disputed with his pragmatic side over the cause of the longing he felt. Neither side could win the argument. Not until he was safely home with Ricky and had had a good, hot bath. Then, maybe, he'd know if the ache was in his heart or his body.

Home.

He still wasn't used to the idea. In the time since he and Ricky had first met on that wet and fateful late summer morning, they had spent more time apart than together, and that primarily due to Jimothy. A Wand'ring Minstrel was always a Wand'ring Minstrel, whatever other choices he made. And yet...

Home.

He hunched his shoulders and shifted the reins from one stiff, glove-clad hand to the other. He stretched his fingers that had been clenched for the past hour. The gloves—the gift Ricky had given him at their first long parting—kept his hands good and warm even on the bitterest cold day. They were a treasure that he would keep until the end of his days, even when they wore down to no more than scraps and stitching.

The snow was falling heavier now. The sun obscured by such dense clouds that near what he reckoned was midday, it was as dark as dusk. He and Jacques had left the waycabin in snow that barely topped the horse's big, black hooves. Now it had accumulated so that Jacques plodded through it more than ankle deep.

Jimothy wasn't worried. He and Jacques had seen some pretty hairy winter weather together. And this was familiar ground. Home soil.

Nearly there. Soon they'd see the city walls, all its gates completed for last year's tercentennial celebrations, and then it was only the city itself between them and home.

Ricky paced. He couldn't help it. Jimothy was due back any day. Any day! He'd been gone less than six months this time and still it seemed like an eternity. With luck, today would be the day. The clouds outside his bedroom window loomed ominous and foreboding. Snow that had begun to fall in the night still came down in the dark afternoon. Much more of this and a person could get lost walking across the street. Of course, in Couvin, that could happen anyway.

He sent a prayer to Blessed Martha and to Jimothy's small gods of anything-he-could-think-of that Jimothy would arrive before sundown. The longest night would fall in precious few hours and he so wished to spend the dark holiday with his lover. It was the first time they had even a chance of it; Jimothy had been away each previous winter on Sect business.

Not for the first time that day, he stretched his mental muscles to see if he could find his wayward lover.

Jimothy?

Silence.

He tried again. Waited again.

Nothing.

Continuing to stare out at the lowering sky, he seriously considered borrowing his mother's conduit to stretch his mindspeaking range, but that would require asking one of the house musicians for help, and that would too great a risk. A conspiracy of two was dangerous enough. Three and his mother was certain to find out. Lanmere Fallon wouldn't approve of him using royal resources for personal reasons.

Impatience, anxiety, and desire welled up in a sudden rush and he practically shouted with his mind: *Jimothy?*

There. A whisper. A very surprised whisper.

Ricky?

It was enough. A grin split Ricky's face and he nearly danced with glee.

Jimothy had to be within the city walls. There was no way Ricky could have reached him if he weren't. He was good, but not that good, and Jimothy had no mindspeaking talents of his own to bridge the distance.

He rang the bell for a servant and went back to pacing.

Soon there came a deferential knock.

"Come in!"

A young man in household livery opened the door.

"Ah! Quinn! See that the boilers are filled and stoked. I want a bath ready to be drawn the moment I request it."

"Yes, my lord."

"Off you go then."

The young man departed, the hint of a knowing smile on his face. Without doubt, the household would know within minutes that Jimothy would soon be home.

It was the last few miles that were the worst of it. Seeing The Heathers there atop the hill. Knowing he was so close and yet still must wind through the city's serpentine streets. Jacques, sensing the end of their journey, hurried his equine pace. Jimothy held him in check. It wouldn't do to slip and fall on the icy cobbles with their destination so close at hand.

At last, they passed through the estate's main gate. The guardsmen were old hands who recognized him, waving him in with a smile. This time when his horse picked up the pace, Jimothy didn't argue. They both scented home and warmth and food, and Jimothy gave the horse his head, letting him find the quickest way to the stables.

They were met by the hostler's boy who led the shaggy horse away to care for him after the long, cold ride. Another stable lad raced ahead towards the house, presumably to announce his arrival to the waiting lanfis.

Like his horse had before him, Jimothy hurried his pace, thankful for the path the stable boy had cut for him with his swift passage. While he was still several yards away, the house door nearest the stables was flung open, reflecting off of the snow and brightening the growing gloom.

Then he was there. Framed in the wash of light. Eyes beaming. Smile a mile wide. And all for Jimothy.

Reaching the door, he let his packs slide softly to the stone floor and embraced Ricky tightly. Cold lips met warm with instantly kindled passion and the yearning desire of two hearts kept too long apart.

When at last they parted, Ricky said, "Welcome home, Minstrel-mine. I've had a hot bath drawn for you. And dinner will be waiting for us after."

Jimothy laughed. "You know me so well."

"I do. That's why I had Jenja place heated stones in the bed so it'll be warm for us after we've finished eating."

At that, the Minstrel laughed outright. "By all the Greater Gods, I have missed you!" They kissed again, long and loving.

It was true dusk by the time Jimothy, bathed and fed and wrapped in a soft wool robe, sat across the table from Ricky. The house maid departed with their empty dishes, leaving them with no company but each other. A pot of mulled wine sat on the hearth near the fire's edge, beside it a suspicious stoneware crock that Ricky wouldn't let Jimothy open.

"I missed you." Ricky's voice was tinged with melancholy, his expression mixed.

Jimothy reached a hand across the table and laid it over his lover's. "I'm sorry."

"I don't blame you."

"I know. But I'm still sorry." There was a moment of silence, broken by Jimothy with an abrupt change of tone. "I brought you a present."

Ricky's eyes lit up, yet he shook his head. "*You're* my favorite present."

"That's sweet, but you don't know what it is yet." Jimothy smiled a secret, knowing smile.

"So, what is it?" Ricky practically vibrated with anticipation, more like a little kid than the heir to a throne.

Jimothy rose, not releasing Ricky's hand, and came around to stand framed by the sumptuous four-poster bed, the centerpiece of the room. "Come to bed."

Ricky needed no more urging than that simple, softly spoken invitation. Months apart had honed his desire to a knife edge and he was hard in an instant. Jimothy smiled and untied the sash of his robe, revealing his like condition.

"I've missed your cock, too," Ricky said. He fell to his knees and took Jimothy into his mouth in one fluid motion.

Jimothy gasped and shivered in pleasure as Ricky worked him with lips and tongue. Oh, such a clever tongue! He neared the edge of release quickly. Too quickly. He reached out his hand and cupped Ricky's cheek, wordlessly urging him off. His lover needed no words, silent or spoken, to understand. He released Jimothy's cock and rose to his feet.

They kissed, open-mouthed, bodies hungry for those things which nothing but each other could supply. It was a matter of moments for Ricky to strip off his clothing and come again into Jimothy's arms. The Minstrel opened his robe and wrapped it about them both, naked bodies pressed together along their full lengths, erections rubbing together between them. Ricky dropped his head onto Jimothy's shoulder and nuzzled the warm, clean skin, reveling in the feel and smell of his partner, his lover, his Minstrel.

Spurred by need, Jimothy turned his head and nipped lightly at Ricky's ear. The simple act sent a jolt of urgency straight to Ricky's cock.

He looked up into Jimothy's dark eyes. "I thought we were going to bed."

Jimothy laughed, tossed off his robe, and took Ricky in his arms once more, tumbling them both onto the big four-poster bed. Arms, legs, lips locked together. Cocks hard and hot between them. Jimothy pushed himself up to his knees. Ricky tried to rise with him, but Jimothy pressed him down onto his back. He knelt above his supine lover, straddling him, and with lips and hands began to make his way down Ricky's torso. He coaxed Ricky's nipples to hardness, alternately licking and sucking the tiny nubs. He nipped at sensitized flesh, causing his lover to squirm under him, and then soothed the reddened spots with soft kisses. With the very tip of his tongue, Jimothy tickled a line down Ricky's belly to the root of his cock. He continued his path downward, around the base of the hard shaft, and beyond.

Ricky groaned at the sweet torment. Jimothy smiled to hear it. He liked nothing better than pleasuring his lover, unless it be the pleasure they found together in mutual release. He slipped strong arms under Ricky's buttocks, lifting them a little off the soft bedclothes.

"What are you—? Oh!" Ricky reacted reflexively, bending his knees so his feet could lift him up and closer to Jimothy's mouth. The feel of Jimothy's tongue circling his anus, its tip

flicking just into the tight hole, was overwhelming. Jolts of pleasure rushed through his ass and straight up his spine, exploding in his mind with bright colors. "Holy—"

Jimothy broke off only long enough to reach for his discarded robe where it lay on the foot of the bed. A moment's quick search and he found what he sought. Fingers dipped into spicy salve and it warmed and softened with his touch.

He felt more than heard Ricky's deep inhale and sigh as he caught the scent. They both loved that smell.

Jimothy took another moment to tease Ricky's hole with his tongue and then slipped two slick fingers inside in one long stroke.

Ricky arched into the intimate touch. "God, Jimothy! I've missed you so much!" Jimothy looked up to see the fire in his blue eyes. "Fuck me hard, Minstrel-mine."

As royal commands went, this was Jimothy's favorite. It was the work of a moment to slide his fingers free and his hard cock inside in their place. Heat engulfed him and as one, they moaned in pleasure at the coming together of their bodies.

Jimothy rode his lover hard, driving him with an urgency and need they both felt, glad that they needn't be cautious after their long absence from one another. Jimothy was ever thankful that the first time they joined upon each of his returns, Ricky didn't want slow and tender.

"Yes! God, yes!" Ricky's cries urged Jimothy on and he dove deep. Each withdrawal pulled him out to his sensitive tip before plunging in once more.

Ricky gasped and grunted with each thrust. Every jolt of ecstasy as Jimothy struck the pleasure point within him sent him higher and higher until there was nowhere higher to go. Soaring on his release, he cried out Jimothy's name like a prayer.

Jimothy came hard inside him, cresting the waves of pleasure until he collapsed, spent and content atop his lover. The slick warmth of Ricky's semen mixed with their mingled sweat and Jimothy breathed deeply of the smell of their sex.

They dozed in one another's arms for unmeasured time.

Eventually, Ricky turned his head on the pillow, smiling. "Some present."

"Wait until I give you the rest." Jimothy's heart fluttered in nervous anticipation, but he said nothing more. He could bide a little longer.

"If I were the jealous sort, I'd ask where you learned it." Ricky's eyes were curious but without a hint of doubt towards Jimothy's fidelity.

The Minstrel put on an earnest, heavy tone. "I have to be honest." Ricky's expression turned wide-eyed and stunned. Unable to keep up the cruel illusion, Jimothy went on quickly, "I read it in a piece of particularly ribald fiction."

Ricky laughed. "You had me going for a moment there." He grew serious. "I can't imagine you would ever. Not really."

Jimothy regarded him with all sincerity. "Never. I swear it." He kissed him softly.

"I have something for you, too," said Ricky when their lips parted.

"You don't have to."

"It's Solstice Night. And it's your birthday."

"Is it already?" After so long alone on the road, the days had begun to blend into one another. He only knew it was near mid-winter.

Ricky laughed. "You don't know it's your birthday?"

"I lost track of time."

"I didn't. Let's clean up. Then you can have your gift."

The bath water was no longer warm, but it felt good to cleanse and cool their heated flesh. Dressed once more in woolly robes, they retired again to the bedroom. Ricky used a fluffy towel from the bathroom to protect his hands as he lifted the mysterious crock from the fireside and set in on a metal trivet on the table.

"It's a traditional Solstice dessert." He lifted the lid and set it aside. The delicious scents of baked apples and pears rose on the released steam. Intermingled were the unmistakable smells of caramelized sugar and spices—cinnamon, nutmeg, and clove. And something else...

Jimothy sniffed and puzzled over it, unable to pinpoint the scent. "What is that?"

"Pear brandy. We have a distiller who makes a limited batch every year especially for Solstice. You can only get it from him, and only if you're quick enough to beat the rush."

"I thought I knew every intoxicant there was," Jimothy said, only half joking. He inhaled deeply and smiled. "I'm glad to find I was wrong." Ricky served it out into bowls and Jimothy plunged his spoon through the crumbled topping of butter, oats, and sugar, digging into the warm, gooey confection. It was delicious, rich, heady with spices and liquor. "I like this present." Jimothy smiled over an indulgent bite.

Ricky licked his spoon seductively, his eyes alight with mischief and promises of more pleasure to come. "Good."

Jimothy set down his spoon and looked across at Ricky, his expression intent and serious.

Ricky squirmed in his seat, a tiny frown of uncertainty furrowing his dark brows. "I'm not sure I like that look."

"The rest of your gift."

"There's more?" His expression turned surprised and pleased. "I thought the sex was quite sufficient as far as gifts go," he went on, joking. "Even if I didn't exactly get to unwrap you."

Jimothy chuckled. "You'll have plenty of chances for that later."

Ricky leaned forward over the table and spoke in a deep, seductive tone. "Don't think I won't take every opportunity."

The Minstrel matched him in tone and intensity. "I'm counting on it." He sat back a little. "But that's for later. I have something else for you first." He rose from his seat and dug into his satchel. Coming up with a small wooden box, Jimothy knelt before his lover, the lanfis of Kanbec, the man who would one day rule the country.

Jimothy opened the box to reveal a simple band of white gold etched with a Forever Knot. He looked up to see Ricky's bemused expression turn to wide-eyed astonishment.

"Marry me?" Then he added with a mischievous quirk of a smile, "My lord?"

Ricky's grin lit up the room like no amount of candles ever could. "I'd hoped. Inside. But I didn't dare *hope*, eh?" he said. Then he hesitated. "You don't... You don't have to leave?"

Jimothy's voice was quiet but firm. "I will always be what I am. But, barring unforeseen crises that only my presence can resolve..." His tone was evidence of that likelihood. Jimothy shook his head and smiled. "The Headmaster has agreed. I need never again go beyond the borders of Kanbec." His smile grew coy. "Unless, of course, you desire my company in your own travels, my lord."

"I desire your company, Minstrel-mine." Ricky reached into the pocket of his robe and pulled out a similar box, opening it for Jimothy to see. Inside was a gold ring inscribed with something Jimothy couldn't quite read. Ricky removed the ring from the box and handed it to his betrothed. "Just as it says on the ring."

Jimothy held it up and read the inscription.

Forever Always Beloved

Jimothy smiled wryly. "That's a long time. Sure you won't get bored with me?"

"Impossible." Ricky's reply was unequivocal. Then his expression turned sly. "Especially if you keep reading that ribald fiction."

Jimothy burst out laughing and Ricky grinned back at him. Catching his breath, Jimothy answered, "Forever and always, my love."

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