

Part 7. In which our hero feels relief.

18. Friends and Lovers.

They had been home, or at least in Colorado Springs, which Adam was vaguely beginning to think of as home, for almost two days. Pleasant lazy days, eating, drinking, chatting. Socialising with friends. Exploring their American surroundings. Adam wasn't sure which of them had suggested a nightclub but it had become a definite date for Saturday night and at the moment he was considering what to wear.

He hadn't actually had what he would call a date with Vlad yet. They'd been to places, especially bed, but including Mesa Verde and the Stargate commissary. Parties, too and barbecues. Only never an honest-to-goodness Saturday night date, just him and Vlad, going out together.

He knew perfectly well that he was reacting like a teenager, and didn't care. He surveyed his entire wardrobe with deep dissatisfaction, checked his bank account online and headed for town. And no, Vlad wasn't invited. Adam shopped for clothes alone. Serious clothes, that is.

He ended up with tight black pants and a silver grey shirt that showed off his white-blond hair. Black cowboy boots and a heavy leather belt with a buckle in the shape of a crouching dragon. He could wear his leather jacket if the weather was cool. Happy with his purchases so far, he continued window-shopping and found another belt, crocodile skin with a subdued silver buckle. Crocodiles, he'd read, were coming off the endangered species list because they were being sensitively farmed. He wasn't sure if it was true, but he liked the belt, and asked the shop assistant to gift-wrap it. He hoped Vlad would like it too.

It earned him a flurry of kisses and delayed dinner by quite a while. They'd promised to eat with Niki and by the time they got to the apartment the pizza had gone cold. Nobody cared. They discussed where they should go. Niki had heard of a small club that served meals and had good music. With dancing. And it was a known gay venue. They could join that evening and book a table for Saturday night.

As they made their way home, pleased to have their 'date' settled, Vlad's fingers found Adam's.

"In the street?" Adam was not so much shocked as worried for his partner. Much of America, much of the world, was homophobic, and besides, Vlad was military. Russian, but still. Vlad dropped his hand but muttered resentfully.

"Mine," Adam heard. "Mine for all to knowing." He grinned in the dusk and walked taller. He was happy to be Vlad's. Very happy indeed.

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They admired each other's outfits and set off for the club. A young waiter, probably Italian judging by his accent, showed them to their table and they ordered drinks while they looked at the menu. Adam felt shy, all of a sudden. Why, he wasn't sure. Somehow, this seemed to be a crucial moment in their relationship, tipping it from friendship, lust and sex into something deeper, more lasting.

He was trying to read the small print under the dim lights when he heard Vlad draw in his breath sharply. He looked where his lover pointed. Two men were just entering the club. Two surprising men. Colonel O'Neill and Major Davies. Together. Very together. You only had to look at their body language and the way they kept glancing at each other.

They, of course, noticed Vlad and Adam. And came over. For an awful moment Adam thought they were going to suggest joining them. Not that he didn't like them, but . . .

But Jack O'Neill was simply making sure they all knew the score.

"Hi, fellas. Nice to see you here. Better than that vegetable nursery, huh?" He looked at Paul. "These two were with me on our last mission," he went on. "Fenwick kinda saved the day."

Paul nodded acknowledgement but was obviously as anxious to be alone with Jack as Adam was with Vlad.

"Maybe we could meet for a drink sometime and you could all tell me more about it." His voice was courteous but he was pulling at Jack's sleeve. Jack was not to be hurried.

"Don't know about your lot, Major," he said to Vlad, "But mine have this policy called -"

"Don't ask, don't tell. I am knowing this." Vlad was smiling. "Not worry, Colonel, there is nothing. I telling nothing. To nobody. And you too." And oblivious of his double negative he picked up his drink, a certain signal that the conversation was over. The pair moved away, shepherded by a harassed waiter who wanted his customers seated and organised. Vlad grinned at Adam.

"You were knowing?" he asked.

"No, but I sensed something. When he congratulated me, during the debriefing, on my singing. He said something about if he'd been in my place. But I'd heard that he and Daniel Jackson . . ."

"Perhaps. But they are hide very well. And the Jackson man he is not - living? And now is Major Paul. Am sure."

They ordered and ate. Steak, salad and baked potatoes. Simple food, beautifully cooked and served. And, as usual in the states, far too much of it. Adam had a theory that Americans were always worried about droughts and famine and ate huge main courses in case pudding never came. In this case, it didn't. They waved the sweet menu away and settled for coffee, Vlad bemoaning the lack of tea. Tea after dinner, Adam decided, was strange. Exotic, even. Russian, anyway.

Then they watched as a number of couples danced to the live band. It was liberating to watch men dancing together. Vlad pulled Adam to his feet and they did a kind of jive to the music. Then the musicians started a slower number and Adam was instantly in Vlad's arms. This was a very satisfactory date.

They were moving, but only just. Vlad held him so tight that their feet were inclined to tangle, and neither of them could see where they were going. The music was old-fashioned and languorous, and seeped into their bones. The melody of 'It's almost tomorrow' changed to 'Smoke gets in your eyes' followed by 'Love letters in the Sand.' Adam was in a dream, held in place by the Russian. When the band stopped for a break, he hardly knew where he was.

They ordered more drinks and sat down again. When the music restarted, Jack O'Neill was hovering, suggesting they swapped partners for the next dance. He thought, he said, that it would be a good idea all round if the four of them were friends.

Watching Vlad dancing with Paul almost made Adam bump into Jack as they moved onto the floor. He grinned ruefully and decided to concentrate on what he was doing. It was enjoyable and very, very strange, to be dancing with the colonel. Not only because Jack had turned out to be gay, but because he hadn't struck Adam as a likely dancer. He said as much and was treated to a lopsided grin and a short version of how Paul had persuaded him to change the habits of a lifetime. Adam laughed and decided to enjoy himself. Eventually, after a fast and furious version of 'Jailhouse Rock', they made their way back to the table. Vlad and Paul headed for the bar to replenish their drinks.

"You love him, don't you?" Jack spoke abruptly. Adam stared, then nodded.

"Be careful. He's not just military, he's Russian. You never know what they'll do. And don't expect it to last for ever. That's the way to heartbreak."

Adam stared some more. He knew O'Neill's opinion of the Russians in general. But Vlad?

"He - we - that is, we're important to each other." He knew he sounded defensive.

"Yeah. I'm just saying. People don't always stick around just because you want them to."

"Daniel?" Adam could see Jack's blush, despite the low lighting.

"Yeah, but your Russian, too. I never thought Daniel would leave me."

"But surely - I mean - he didn't intend to?"

"He had a choice. Or didn't you know that?" There was pain in Jack's voice. Bitterness too.

"But now you're with the major." Adam wasn't really sure what to say but wanted to bring them back to the present from what appeared to have been an unwelcome past.

"Be careful, is all. You hear me?" Adam heard him. Loud and clear. And for a cold, still moment envisaged life without Vlad. Then grinned in relief as the drinks arrived and with them the laughter and the love that he'd come to associate with 'his' Russian.

They danced some more then the Americans left and the band slowed into a last waltz. Adam and Vlad danced carefully and formally, gazing into each other's eyes. Then they took a cab back to their apartment, and made hot, violent love well into the night.