Soulmates

Warm water danced over Hemedes' toes, sparkling like glass in the Attrian sunshine. It was the first trip to Moonwake Pond as winter wound down, and he didn't want to waste a minute more of it on the shoreline. He stripped out of his clothes, letting them pool on the pebbly beach in heaps of blue cotton and white linen. His leather boots were further afield, resting near the sway of golden reeds dancing out the first breezes of spring.

Sunlight kissed his olive skin, and he hummed, hugging himself with a beaming grin.

"You coming in, or just sunbathing?" Reikos called from the water.

Hem turned his gaze from the glorious sun onto the brilliant face of the older man.

Reikos smirked at him and flicked water with his toes, nearly reaching Hem on the beach. His hair was a new color today. Yesterday, it had been a pale blue; today, it was a rich violet. Tomorrow, it could be a fiery red. It splayed over his bronze shoulders like a magnificent cape of color. He looked so beautiful.

Hem ran a hand through his thick curls and then ran forward. He plunged into the water with a whooping holler, raining water down onto Reikos' head. He heard the other cry out, but the water muffled it in his ears. He surfaced and giggled, shaking droplets from his hair.

"Rude," Reikos cackled.

“You shouldn’t rush me,” Hem answered, moving to float on his back.

The caress of the water was perfect. He felt weightless, as if he could fly. Well, he could fly, just not from here. He didn’t want to.

A hand grabbed Hem from below, and he only had a moment to squeal before he was dragged under. He kicked and splashed, then grinned as Reikos pulled him closer, chest-to-chest. Waving beams of sunlight lit up the deep blue gloom of the pool, painting it with ribbons of soft gold. He stared into the depths of Reikos’ storm-filled amethyst eyes, watching pale light dance within.

He didn’t resist as he was pulled closer still, until their lips met in a brief kiss. They had to surface for air, but Hem didn’t want to. He could stay like this forever, in Reikos’ arms, far below the waves, far away from the world.

It was over in a crash of water and a gasp for breath. The dull songs of birds sharpened, and Hem opened his eyes. His chest rose and fell against Reikos’s own. His frame was so slight compared to the older man’s, but it didn’t bother Hemedes. He loved it. He loved fitting there. He only wished there had been one more person with them, one more he fit perfectly against. Then, that day would have been that much more perfect.

He knew why Mattias wasn’t with them, but he still longed for him just the same. He couldn’t fault him for being gone. He was a busy man and had a life beyond them, beyond Attria. Still, he would miss him until he was home again.

He was drawn from his thoughts of Mattias when Reikos’ lips brushed his ear, making Hemedes smile and look at him again. The warmth in the man’s eyes soothed the bruises on his heart.

“I miss him, too,” Reikos said.

“I want to talk to him,” Hem admitted. “I want to tell him that I miss him. I want to ask how he’s doing. I want to know what he’s been up to. And I can, but… but he needs his privacy, too. So do I. It’s hard, though.”

“Tempting, when all you have to do is turn your magic on him, isn’t it?” Reikos chuckled.

“It’s *so hard*,” Hem sighed. “But I want him to know that I respect his time when he’s away. I don’t want him to feel like I’m always watching him, or he’s always watching me. I’m trying to be good.”

Reikos chuckled and kissed under Hem’s chin, catching the soft skin between teeth.

Hem’s fingers dug into Reikos’ shoulders, a soft huff of a laugh escaping him.

“Rei,” he complained. “You’re making it worse. Stop!”

Reikos laughed and nibbled some more, chasing a line up to Hem’s mouth, where he fell captive to a kiss.

Hem breathed against him, greedy in his reciprocity. Tongues brushed, then embraced, and silence fell in around them as their passions ensnared them. Hem’s fingers threaded themselves into Reikos’ hair, clinging to him as if he might drown if he let go.

They parted to breathe, and then brushed foreheads.

“I know it’s hard,” Reikos murmured at last, making Hem’s eyes slowly open to look at him. “But this is part of loving someone. It’s knowing when to give them their space, knowing that you can’t always be side-by-side.”

“I guess I never had it,” Hem said quietly, a faint thread of shame weighing down his small smile. “Real love. Real longing to be with someone when they weren’t with me. I think, in my heart, I always knew my longing for Ventros wasn’t what I thought it was. I longed for the

love he could never give. That's what I craved. This is so different. I don't know what to do with myself. I feel silly."

Reikos smiled, and his thumb cradled Hem's cheek, tempting him to snuggle against it.

"You're not silly," Reikos told him with a smile so gentle, it made Hem smile, too. "You're in love, Hem. For the first time in your life, you're *really* in love. And it's so beautiful to see. I'm so lucky to be part of it."

"Really?" Hem asked, tears welling in his eyes.

"Really," Reikos nodded. "I've never seen you this happy. You deserve every second of it."

Hemedes wrapped his arms around Reikos' neck, kicking his feet a little to stay above the water.

"I love you, Reikos," he said. "I love you."

"And I love you."

Another kiss, then a second one chased it, and then a third…

"Is this what it's like to have a soulmate?" Hem asked softly as they broke the string of kisses.

"I think it is," Reikos chuckled. "Only we're lucky. We have two each."

Hemedes grinned and opened his magic up to Mattias, wherever he was on Nirn. He wanted him to feel their love, even if he didn't open the connection entirely to share the whole of this experience.

"I like having soulmates," he said to Reikos, then tugged him as close as their bodies could possibly be. "Love me."

Reikos grinned down at him. "Never feel like you have to ask."