

The Big Day

by Christian Baines

“Why is Uncle Bryan all dressed up?”

“Because he’s getting married, sweetheart. Just like Mummy and Daddy. He’s getting married to Uncle Cain.”

“But why?”

Bryan straightened his bow tie, remembering his niece’s words. Were they really ready for this? Sure, they’d gone to the rallies, barked the slogans and marched through the streets, until the day the magical bill was signed into law.

Then the nagging had started.

Nagging from his brother, “Play time’s over, bro. Time to take the plunge, eh?”

Nagging from Mum, “Now you can have a real wedding just like your brother!”

Nagging from Dad, “Come on son, time to make an honest fella out of Cain.”

And from Gran, “Look after him, dear. Just remember, the first one’s for fun. The second one’s for alimony. The *third* one’s for life.”

He tugged at his tie once more. He looked like a damn penguin. But yes, he was sure. He and Cain would get through this together, and after today, everyone would leave them alone.

\* \* \*

Bryan couldn't help but smile as he lost himself in Cain's eyes. They mouthed the words 'I love you' almost at the same time, sending a faint ripple of sighs and titters through the front three rows.

"Marriage is for many of us, the ultimate expression of commitment, fidelity, and love," said the celebrant. "I know many of us have been waiting for a long time to see Cain and Bryan solemnise their vows, and I'm honoured to now let the boys take that step with a few words of their own."

For just one moment, he hesitated. Did they really want to do this? Cain's smile steeled his courage. It was a day of commitment, after all.

"Bryan," Cain began, a sly smile curling his lip. "On this day, I pledge to honour, love, and cherish you. To protect, nourish, keep, guide, and respect you, for as long as you will accept and serve me."

Faint murmurs rippled through the crowd. Brian ignored them. He and Cain were realists. Nothing said today was going to change that.

"Cain," he said. "On this day, I pledge to honour, trust and obey you as you require it, and to the best of my ability, for as long as you will accept my service."

Silence hung on the air. Bryan forged ahead before anyone could interrupt. "I will celebrate you, dance with you, enjoy our shared happiness to the fullest, and allow you to pursue and explore your own. I will seek your approval on any guests I bring into our home or into our bed, and allow no overnight guests in your absence without express consent."

Another silence, until...

"Told you he was a dark horse!" laughed his brother.

"Always a trickster, ever since he was a kid," laughed Mum.

"Nearly had us there, son!" laughed Dad.

"Oh shut up and let them finish!" barked Gran.

With a nod and a smile from Cain, Bryan continued.

“I will likewise not grant any guest access to ‘our room’ without permission. I will let you know when the restraints are too tight, and dress as you would have me each day. I will cook, clean, and remember to keep fresh amy! stocked in the fridge.”

“Ah, boys? Question,” said Dad.

“Yes Bryan. You’ve had your joke,” said Mum.

“Shhh!” hissed Gran.

“I will honour our family,” Bryan continued. “Striving each day to be worthy of your love and protection.”

“As I vow to be worthy of you,” replied Cain.

“May we please have the collar?” asked the celebrant.

Bryan saw his father’s mouth silently open and close as Cain shaped the metal around his neck.

“With this collar, I take thee, Bryan Barker, to be my partner, servant, and closest friend, for life.”

“Master Cain,” said the celebrant, with a broad smile. “Boy Bryan...Pup Ruffles.”

“Wuff!” agreed Bryan, wagging his tail as his master scratched behind his ear.

“Are you for fuckin’ real?” shrieked his brother.

“Language, please!” shrieked Mum.

“He’s wearing a bloody collar!” shrieked Dad.

“That’s my boy!” shrieked Gran, jumping up in her seat. “Forget the second and third ones, Bryan! He’s a keeper!”

“I now pronounce you a family for life.”

Bryan smiled, lingering on his master's kiss. They barely heard the slow, nervous clapping of the assembled well-wishers, or the final words of the celebrant's speech. There was only his master, and that was more than enough.

"A keeper, eh?" asked Cain.

"Wuff!" agreed Bryan.