

The splash of lukewarm water did nothing to bring Ruben out of what felt like a self-induced daze. At most, it removes the trail of blood that had almost trailed down to his neck. But it will come back, and Ruben did not have the patience to oversee such an inconvenient injury.

“You’re not seeing any of these hits,” Toz sighs, coming to his side and resting both bokkens against the fence railing.

“Yes, Toz. My nose and the bruises being collected along my arms and torso are good enough indicators.”

“Do not blame them all on me. You showed up with half of them. What’s up? I’ve never seen you like this.”

“Focused and in pain?”

“Focused but unfocused. Your attention to detail is there, but it feels like you’re moving the wrong way every time. And you are slow as if every step is delayed, but it is not from caution.”

“I’m practicing two significantly different fighting styles at once. Do you expect me to be able to alternate back and forth?”

“First, I’d like it if you didn’t sound like you wanted to choke me simply for being curious and worried. Secondly, if you had said that initially, I would have cut this session short. You need rest, Ruben.”

“We are not stopping,” the Chieftain growls, “I’m fine, and we will continue.”

“Your stubbornness gives me such a headache. My condolences to your future partner.”

Ruben snorts, his smile at least causing Toz to cheer up a bit, “you act as if my future partner will not be just as stubborn.”

“To put up with you, yes. They are either that or simply a sadist.”

“You will have something in common then.” Toz roars in laughter, glancing over at the idle bokken, considering it but inevitably shaking his head. Ruben watches the action, letting out a deep sigh.

“Don’t make me pull rank, Toz.”

“You can pull rank whenever I bend the knee to you voluntarily. Not a moment before. Come on, I’m taking you to your bed.”

“No.”

“Listen, you large, obstinate man.”

“No, as in I will not be receiving much of a break when I return to my room. Fuldreis is waiting for this lesson to be over before resuming hers.”

Toz stares, waiting for his friend to tell him that he simply jests, that he has received a moment to breathe this past week. But no such amusement appears on Ruben’s face.

“Your d’uun must know the body needs rest and that yours is near frayed.”

“I am sure that is the point,” Ruben sighs, wincing at the pain he feels upon stretching, another bruise then on his back. That one will be remiss in leaving. “The more tired I become, the more I must work through it. She wishes for this.”

Toz bites his tongue. He has done a decent job hiding his disdain for Fuldreis this long. And out of respect for Ruben, not only as a friend but as his leader, he will continue. No matter how much the seasoned woman causes him to want to pull at his dreads. “Then come, we will go to my place. If Fuldreis asks, I will say that I had you run laps instead, which will make up for our absence.” Grabbing Ruben’s arm, Toz helps support some of the man’s weight, unsurprised when he lightly shoves him away.

“I can walk.”

“Will the day ever come that you will admit and allow others to help you?”

“I am not prideful,” he growls, Toz immediately snorting at the lie, “I just don’t need your help.” The twisted way he walks away says otherwise but wrestling with a peevish dragon is unwise.

There is only one thing Ruben dislikes about Toz’s dwelling: how far away it is from his own and how close it is to the tavern. It might as well have been attached to the building. Many a soldier would love such a position, which is why Toz refused to take on roommates or relinquish ownership, even when Ruben offered him a room in his own home. Finding a moment of peace is rare, despite how relaxed Toz always managed to appear. The lutes played all night, the shouts and

songs of drunken patrons were sung so far off-key, and roars and howls would join them on the good days (though they feel like the worst).

Opening the door, Toz nods for Ruben to enter, closing the door behind him. Leave it to Toz to make such sparse decorations feel homey. Even Ruben felt as if his room still had an edge to it, and due to his bloodline, he received lavish gifts that far outdo any that his people possess. Seeing that he is the only one in the area with pegasus silks, yes, if any room should bring forth a sense of calmness, it is his. And yet, here is Toz.

His full bed is pushed against the wall, and like the cover of a tent, large thin sheets hang from the ceiling to frame the sides of the bed. Two large pelts cover the mattress, and even more rest along the floor as rugs. A multitude of candles rests in the room, allowing it to remain dim due to an absence of a window but take on a much softer feel. It is no wonder Toz can sleep all day. The decorations that sit upon end tables, hang along the walls, and dangle from the ceiling are different. They depict various scenes, which some Ruben recognizes as gifts from him.

“Alright, get on the bed,” Toz tells him, pushing him and wincing at the sound that his bed makes when Ruben falls onto it.

“I suppose we’re about to test your bed’s integrity,” the red-headed man chuckles, “you should’ve put me on the floor.”

“That would’ve been rude.”

“But wise.”

Sending him a crooked grin, Toz asks, “is that where you would have put me?”

“No.”

“Be honest.”

“No. I would’ve thrown your princely ass right on my bed and probably taken occupation on the floor.”

“Oh, to be invited to Chieftain Ruben’s bed, what an honor,” Toz laughs, sitting on the rug and lying back. He can feel Ruben’s eyes on him and, after a moment of waiting, finally decides to see what the matter is.

“What, Ruben? You should be trying to sleep.”

“Have your bed. I will take the floor.”

“Aren’t you chivalrous? I offered the bed to you. You will keep it.”

“You speak as if I can’t simply get up and move our positions.”

“If you move, two of us will be on the floor, and I know nothing more idiotic than that.”

“Then take the bed,” Ruben urges, sitting up, only to be restrained by a quick-moving Toz as he applies pressure to an unsuspecting Ruben.

“You will lay down and rest for at least a few minutes. For the sake of the Six Divines and the Mother, just for a few minutes.”

“And if not?” Ruben questions, smirking and irking Toz further. He leans forward, grabbing onto Ruben’s chin aggressively.

“Seeing that you have yet to beat me in a fight, one would think you show some hint of aptitude and simply stay down.”

“I am far keener on this position that we have found ourselves in.” Toz frowns, glancing around and realizing that Ruben is indeed correct. Toz straddles the more prominent man’s lap, and Ruben’s hands sit snugly on his hips, inches away from grasping his butt.

He snorts, “if you think I am embarrassed, you do not know me as well as you believe.”

“Toz, if I ever see you embarrassed, I will hunt down the culprit myself. Humility is a trait you simply do not possess.”

“I possess it. It simply does not manifest in the way you may be used to.” Toz blinks, his heart practically tripping over itself as he narrows his eyes on Ruben. Those crimson eyes have pierced his soul too often, always striking different emotions within the black dragon. He recalls the time they first met. His eyes seemed more like a poorly understood anomaly more than anything else. But then, when he held Ruben as he cried his soul out, those eyes were a window to the soul like no other. Or the moment the two spent together watching Hat’ein with others, how those falling meteors reflected back in awestruck eyes. And how a being once possessed with so much

rage became a little more beautiful and calm. Now, they seem more like an invitation into a world of lecherous dealings that not even Toz believed himself ready for.

Ruben's hand grasps his chin, combing out the man's beard and glancing from his lips back up to his eyes, whispering, "can I kiss you?"

"You know I'd rather you just -" Ruben cuts him off with a gentle kiss that soon takes on a feverous shift as the two deepen it. At times it feels as if they are competing to lead, one overstepping the other in the attempt but always being brought back, restarting the cycle. One would have to relinquish the hold, and though Toz was used to leading, he is far more curious about how Ruben performs in this area.

As soon as he does, Ruben tightens his grip on the man's hip, bringing him closer just before flipping them. He roughly pulls down Toz's pants before massaging his excitement, coaxing the member out of its sheath. He watches as it grows, the ridges along the length becoming more prominent until reaching a full erection.

"I have to ask," Toz hums, unprepared for the sight of Ruben laying kisses against his erection. His tongue trails the underside until making it to the tip, where it swivels. The black dragon clears his throat, again taking on the nonchalant attitude he is so notorious for having, "does your dick look like your hands?"

"You just want to see the fire veins on my dick, huh?" Ruben questions, pausing for a moment before continuing.

"You must admit, it would be quite a sight. Fire focused to your dick," Toz continues, pouting in thought, "would your cum be hot or fire? Lava?"

"Stop talking," Ruben orders, grabbing the back of Toz's neck and placing a harsh kiss on his lips while holding the man's erection. Toz moans as he bucks his hips forward, encouraging Ruben to pump him.

"Come on, Ruben," Toz purrs, as soon as Ruben draws back, "use me."

Ruben chuckles, grabbing a handful of the man's hair and yanking his head back to expose his neck. His intention was to place light kisses, teasing Toz in an attempt to see how long he'll beg. But the sensation he experiences from Toz's nails digging into his thigh sends him over the edge.

His lips once again meet his friends, capturing them in a bruising kiss, nipping at his lower lip before pulling back.

“Turn over,” Ruben orders, moving off the bed and looking over the contents on Toz’s end table. There is no way the appropriate oils wouldn’t just be lying around, especially with how open and honest Toz was. It takes only a few seconds to find it, snorting when he sees an entire collection there.

“You think you got enough, Toz?” Ruben questions, dangling the oil so that the man can see.

“Ymos likes to experiment from time to time and sends them my way to see how well I like them.”

“And you never give them back?” he questions.

“I’m her best customer. I don’t have to,” Toz winks, raising a curious brow at the look that Ruben passes him. “What?”

“Didn’t I say turn over?”

“Oh, I wanted to do the opposite if only to -” The words never make it out of his mouth as Ruben seizes him roughly by the hips, dragging him to the edge of the bed. His knees hit the floor as Ruben pushes his head into the pelts, and Toz lets out a quiet laugh.

“Noted. Rough Ruben is a fun one.”

“You have to have a gag lying around here somewhere.”

“Perhaps next time,” Toz chuckles, trying not to linger on the thought of there being a next time and Ruben’s silence concerning such a statement. He’ll worry about that later; for now, he simply wishes to stay in this moment. Still refusing to release him, Ruben uses his free hand to apply the oil to Toz’s opening and then to coat himself. He was practically shaking now, a bit unhappy that he hadn’t gotten to catch a peek of the royal dragon’s erection due to his lack of listening. Dragons are known to be particularly large, but only now did he consider how large a dragon with royal blood shooting through his veins would be.

He finds out sooner rather than later. The scream of pleasure is muffled by the pelts that his face rests against, his legs shaking as Ruben pushes himself deep in a single motion.

“Fuck, Ruben,” he growls, fighting against the man’s hold in an attempt to look at him.

“I’m not going easy on you until I hear you ask me too.”

“You’ll be waiting,” Toz hisses, relaxing and letting out a shaky breath as Ruben enters and exits with long strokes. He feels like he’s already undone, perhaps a record, and he was sure that Ruben hadn’t buried himself fully.

“I won’t be able to walk after this,” he whines, half of his attention on the pleasurable feeling ricocheting through his body and the other on the constant shaking of his legs.

“We did say this was just another training session,” Ruben jokes, leaning forward to bite the skin along Toz’s shoulder. “What does this feel like?” Toz prepares to ask him to better articulate the question when he realizes what he means. Ruben trails a heated finger down his back, the fire sparking his own internal element. His entire body heats up, sweat forming along his forehead and smoke rising off of his skin as the fire disrupts his acid. Despite seeing this, he has no want or need to stop it. The sensation reminds him of when he would join the ladies in the smoke rooms, the intoxicating aroma mixed with whatever herbal remedy always caused him to feel lighter. To realize that he could have this same reaction and with sex no less, his day couldn’t possibly get better.

Ruben stops, and Toz whimpers.

“Don’t stop.”

“I’m about to come,” Ruben growls.

“Then move off me, big boy. Unless you’re into that kind of thing, then, by all means, continue on.”

“Your talking really ruins the mood sometimes, you know that?” Ruben asks as he moves away, spilling his seed onto the ground with a long huff.

“Yes,” Toz whispers, “I do.”

“Did you -?”

“Two times. Don’t worry about me,” Toz tells him, collapsing on the bed and probably giving Ruben a view of exactly where those times landed. He’d clean up like he always does, but he

just wants to rest right now. Ruben doesn't lie down, but he comes to sit on the edge, resting his back on one of the bedposts as he gathers his breath. Both men quiet for some time.

Ruben's frown is heavy in thought despite the ecstasy still shooting through him. Wanting to question Toz on several topics but not wishing to ruin what seems to be a calm air. A curiosity piqued that he fears will have to be buried, if for the sake of them both. Thankfully, he glances over at a quiet and smiling Toz. Toz handles things like this better than he. All would be fine as long as Toz comes out of this unbothered.

"Why haven't we done this before?" Toz asks, sitting up and taking a piece of Ruben's hair into his grasp, trying with all his might not to have his eyes linger across the nude man's body.

"Don't ask questions you know the answer to, Toz," Ruben sighs, grabbing the man's hand and moving it. "We shouldn't have even done this."

"Don't speak as if we are still children. I have no regrets, and I would hope that you have none either. I simply wonder why when obviously our previous actions show that neither of us has any inhibitions about it."

Ruben smirks, stretching as he glances over at Toz with a hint of sadness in his eyes, "not all of us can lie with someone and restrain our feelings and emotions."

"You saying got a crush on me, Ruben?" he smirks.

"No. But I can see myself falling for you as easily as anyone else if this was to ever be repeated. But I also know you far too well to know that those feelings will never be reciprocated."

Toz frowns, "you say never as if I do not feel love."

"Not from this you don't, or will you disagree?"

"I will not. But I also feel like there is something else you wish to say that you have not." Ruben groans, leaving Toz's side and causing a chilling wave to hit the young man.

"I should go find Fuldreis." All his life, the question of whether to hold his tongue or not has been an issue. He is known to speak his mind and say his piece whether those in attendance like the words. And yet, he watches as Ruben gets dressed in silence, biting his tongue hard enough to cause it to bleed.



“Friends?” Ruben asks, “despite the awkwardness this may cause?”

“We simply had a more private training session,” Toz grins, clasping Ruben’s outstretched hand. Ruben leaves with a laugh and nod, and Toz’s grin drops. He stares at the ground, wishing to curl up and, for the first time since his discovery of the activity, forget.