

Chapter 92

Loneliness sucked.

Tibs hadn't expected that.

He threw himself in the work that needed doing, channeling Purity. Once it was dark, he ran the roofs, then broke into a noble's house, then headed to the room to sleep and found it empty.

That... had hurt.

It was his fault, and he accepted that, but the realization he'd expected at least Jackal or Carina to be in their room made him understand how badly he'd hurt his friends.

He tried to ignore the hurt by working and training with Quigly, but he was distracted glancing around, hoping Jackal would show up to cheer him, even jeer him.

They didn't even come to their table to eat their meals.

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"How angry is he with me?" Tibs asked Kroseph as the server brought him his meal. Kroseph looked around, then sat. "He's not angry Tibs. He's hurt."

"I didn't mean to—"

"No, he's hurt," Kroseph said. "After your training, my man decided it was a good idea to go to the pit and Arruh was more than happy to make him regret fighting distracted. He's been healing since."

Now, Tibs felt bad for not considering Jackal might have a reason not to seek him out. "You didn't tell me..."

"He didn't want you to feel like you had to go see him."

"He's my friend, of course I'd have gone seen him."

"Jackal's not always the smarted around, you know that."

"Should I..."

Kroseph patted his arm. "That's for you to decide." Then he left to go back to his work.

Tibs looked at the papers he'd set aside to make space for the plate; they had to be dealt with. Even without channeling Purity, that was what he wanted to do. But, he decided, no matter how angry Jackal was or wasn't with him. If Tibs was in trouble, his friend would come help.

Tibs could push through the discomfort of facing someone he'd hurt to help him.

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Tibs closed the door and dropped the satchel by it, then turned to look at Jackal lying on the bed. He looked fine, if Tibs ignored the bandages on his legs, chest, arm, head. Sensing the essence, Tibs saw he had no injuries that put his life in danger, but they were extensive.

"You going to judge silently?" Jackal asked. "Or you're going to tell me how much of an idiot I was?"

"I'm the idiot. I shouldn't have said what I did."

Jackal's chuckle was interrupted by a groan of pain. "The plan was for you to practice overflowing with truth."

"I failed."

"Why didn't you come to me with your problems, Tibs?"

Tibs shrugged. "I told you, I didn't want to burden you with them."

"But why? I can take burdens. I'm pretty fucking strong."

"You're already helping plenty with the fighters. I didn't want to take more time away from you and Kroseph."

The silence stretched.

"Okay, wow, you are right. You're an idiot, Tibs." Jackal looked at him. "Helping you isn't taking anything away from me and my man. You're my friend. Fuck, you're more of a brother than those who were born to my mother. I can be there when you're having hard days without sacrificing what I have with Kro."'

Tibs forced himself to say it. "I'm scared to be the reason you get in trouble with Kroseph."

Jackal's head snaps in his direction, and he winced it pain. "Tibs, that is more stupid than anything I've ever come up. Kroseph considers you family. He'd have helped, if you thought none of us could. Fuck, talk to Russel if it comes to that. With those big ears of his, he can definitely do that. And don't bring up that thing with the girl he was sweet on. He's a grown man. He understands she was using him."

Tibs stepped next to his friend. "Do you think I can fix this?"

"You've fixed me after worse mistakes."

"I mean the team," Tibs replied, but couldn't keep from smiling.

"Of course you can, Tibs. You just have to go and do it."

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He found Carina in the cellar of a bookseller, surrounded by books. He was only slightly surprised. He knew she had guys she spent times and nights with, but she always found books more comforting.

"Not so scared of books anymore?" she said, not looking up from the one she was reading.

"Only if you plan on throwing one at me."

She looked at him, horrified. "Tibs, how dare you think I'd do that. These things are heavy and they hurt."

"I think I deserve some pain after what I inflicted."

"No, you don't." She sighed. "I didn't either."

"I know. I'm sorry."

She nodded. "I never realized how dangerous truth could be. Everyone's saying how lying's bad, that it'll ruin everything around you, but all it took was one truth, and I was ready to walk away from everything we've shared." She looked thoughtful. "Do you think they do it on purpose so we won't all wield it as a weapon?"

Tibs shrugged.

She smiled at him. "I guess not all lessons come from books."

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Khumdar found him.

Tibs was walking along an alley and the cleric stepped out of a shadow.

Tibs wasn't surprised and he couldn't tell if it was because he'd been too lost in thoughts or if he's sensed something.

"I will tell you why," Khumdar said.

"No."

"You are who make me search, you deserve—"

"I had no right." Tibs rounded on the cleric. "Even with Light pushing me, I had no right to say what I did. To question you and why you do what you do. You've respected us. I should have been strong enough to respect you."

Khumdar studied him and nodded. "Thank you."

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Tibs ground his teeth as he felt the looks, the stares, the disapproval at his presence on their street. They wanted him there as much as he wanted to be here, but this is where he needed to go to speak with Mez.

And it was fitting punishment for the pain he'd inflicted.

The house wasn't the largest, or the most extravagant, but it was still larger than it needed to be for the handful of people living there. The cord was a delicate fabric Tibs didn't recognize, the chime when he pulled it sounded as delicate.

Mez's girl opened the door, and the look she gave him was withering.

"He is not here," she said slowly, enunciating the word, but it did little to smooth the accent. She slammed the heavy door before Tibs could ask where Mez was.

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Mez was at the archery field.

Not firing his bow, but helping another archer with his posture. He noticed Tibs, gave a nod and focused on helping the man again. Then he stepped aside as the man drew the bow.

"I'm sorry for causing problem between and your girl," Tibs said.

Mez raised an eyebrow.

"I went to the house you stay at and she answered the door."

"You didn't cause that. We're having a difference of opinion on what we're meant to do with the position we hold in society. Multiple differences, really." He shook his head.

"Can I help?"

Mez chuckled. "This isn't something you can fix. And it's not your responsibility." He motioned around them. "A lot of this isn't your responsibility, Tibs. You can't save everyone, or protect everyone. You need to learn to accept that, or what you're trying to do will kill you."

"I can't just give up on them."

Mez faced him. "Tibs, strangers who came here knowing they could die and did sent you in such a bad place you hurt us. Yes, it's bad that they died. It's worse they did know

was we know about the dungeon, but it wasn't your fault. They weren't your responsibility. You need to figure out how to let some of this go before they drag you down to oblivion along with them."

"Who's going to keep every safe if I'm not the one doing it?"

Mez grabbed him by the shoulders. "We will, Tibs. Me, the team, the others. And as much as you hate it, even some of the nobles. You aren't alone in this. We're here for you."

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"I can't eat with you for a few days," Jackal said, dropping in his chair, "and you start thinking you can just put anything you want in my place." He gingerly pushed papers away from him.

Tibs smiled and made neat piles of the papers.

"You need to get a proper desk," Carina said, dusting charcoal dust off the table. "I don't think this goes well with venison."

"It's going to have to be in a corner here," Mez said. "Tibs likes being around people too much."

"It is all those pockets," Khumdar said, sitting. "Rogues simply cannot move away far from them."

Tibs's smile hurt as he put the papers in the satchel, but he didn't mind that pain.