

Planning-43

Tibs ran the roofs.

He didn't have a destination, just a need to run.

To run away from the thoughts running through his head.

They'd started once he left the party. With the assassination attempt thwarted, he had no interest in remaining there. He'd saved a noble. How much more good will did Tirania expect from him? And it wasn't even needed.

He'd avoided paying attention to thoughts as he walked back to his room, but as soon as he lied down they grew in volume until he put on his armor, climbed to the roof and ran.

Was he a bigot?

Of course he wasn't. Tibs had reason to hate nobles. They were horrible people. They came into his street, his town, and tried to take over everything. Force people to defer to them for no other reasons than they were nobles, and therefor owed deferment.

There was no such thing as a good noble.

Except...

Amelia wasn't all that bad. Not bad at all, actually. And her brother wasn't horrible either, although Tibs didn't particularly like him. The man was full of himself, but the way people who knew more tended to be, not in the noble's usual 'just give me what I want' way.

Two out of all the nobles Tibs had ever encountered didn't mean he was wrong in considering all them bad.

There were a few more. Those close to Amelia.

But they were her friends. That didn't change—

He stopped running, panting, having trouble finding his breath.

He was not a bigot. Tibs had been under the heels of bigots too often in his life to be one. He knew better than to be one.

Bigots were only one step below nobles, when it came to being bad people.

"I am not a bigot!" he yelled to the sky.

Except he'd treated Lamberto horribly for no reason.

Not for no reason, because the boy has taken a knife for him. For no reason, because Lamberto had been nice to Tibs.

Over eager, and annoying in how he thought Tibs was so great, but he had done nothing to justify how Tibs treated him. Tibs had simply decided the boy was a noble, so deserved nothing more.

Just like nobles decided Tibs were below them without ever knowing him.

Then there was Don.

Tibs had decided Don had lied to manipulate him and his team because the sorcerer used to be an asshole. Maybe he still was. Tibs didn't know, because while he'd been too iced to care one way or another, he'd also not cared enough to pay attention.

Had he bothered paying attention to anything Don said to see if he'd been lying? He couldn't remember. Don was helping Tibs progress, and that was all he'd cared about while

iced.

He cursed.

He didn't want to talk with Don.

He fucking didn't want to listen to his side of things.

Don was just a wanna be noble who'd put himself first no matter who suffered, and that was all there was to it.

And Tibs was a fucking bigot.

Why couldn't Light go about hurting him thinking that, like it had every other time he'd lied to himself?

Like the answer to that wasn't self evident.

He looked over the dark roofs, wondering where the sorcerer might be. He stretched his sense as far as it would go, but other than the pool, he didn't sense anyone with Corruption as their element in his range.

He thought it curious that those who'd bought the pool hadn't arrived yet. Considering how special they thought the place to be, he'd expected them to arrive the instant the sale was done.

He'd also have to talk with Lamberto, apologize for how he treated him, but Tibs doubted he'd be allowed to reach that house, and he didn't feel like breaking into it just for that.

And he'd have to guide that team through the dungeon. He could talk with him there.

He ran again, this time sensing for a direction, instead of running away.

* * * * *

This was not where he'd expected to find the sorcerer.

Tibs had expected to head toward one of the better parts of town once he sensed the corruption. Instead, he was in one of the poorer parts.

It couldn't be because the sorcerer didn't have the coins for better. The loot had been good on all their runs, and if there is one thing Tibs had learned about Don, it was that while the man like nice things; it wasn't at the expense sacrificing his comfort, so why decide to reside here, in a house that hadn't fared well in Sebastian's attacks and hadn't seen much work done on it since. By the feel of those in the other rooms, this was where the workers who couldn't afford a house of their own resided.

The only thing Don had arranged was to have a room to himself, instead of sharing it with half a dozen others.

The sorcerer sat at a table. A tankard filled with a drink Tibs couldn't identify. Alcohol, by the corruption floating in the liquid, but not ale. Don would prefer something better than that, Tibs figured.

Tibs climbed down to the window.

Room was dark. Not even a candle for the sorcerer to see by.

Maybe Tibs should leave the man alone.

He knocked on the window.

Even without the light, he had no problem seeing Don turn, look at him, and frown. Tibs took it as acknowledgment and pushed the window open.

“Like my day couldn’t get any worse,” Don muttered. He took a long swallow before putting the tankard down. “What do you want?”

“How much have you had to drink?” Tibs noticed the bottle on the table, empty. Don didn’t sound drunk, but this wasn’t a conversation he wanted to have if the man wasn’t at least close to sober.

Don threw the tankard at Tibs, who caught it with water, then placed it back on the table, filled with it.

“Do you have any idea how hard it is to get drunk when corruption’s your element?” Don demanded. “No, of course you don’t. You don’t know anything. You just like to think you do. Too fucking good for anyone.”

Tibs sat on the windowsill.

“Fuck off, Tibs. I’m not dealing with your condescension tonight.”

“What happened?”

“What do you fucking care?”

“You know what?” Tibs was halfway out the window when he realized what he was doing.

“Go on,” Don said as Tibs sat back. “Just leave. You don’t want me here anymore than anyone else.”

Tibs didn’t respond. He could feel the sarcasm building. Don kept proclaiming how much better off he was away from Tibs and his team. How people clamored to join his team, if only Tirania would let him build it.

“I’m sorry.”

“Of fuck off. You think I need your pity? You think that if you’re nice enough to me, I’ll swallow the bullshit and return to your team so you can all treat me like some Street-rated replacement for that—” He snapped his mouth shut.

Don looked away. “I’m sorry, that’s not fair to her.” He took a swallow, made a face, then took another.

“You’re not—” Tibs stopped at the glare.

“Why are you here, Tibs?”

“To say I’m sorry for how I treated you.”

“Oh, I get graced by Tibs’s apologies. Hurray for me.”

“Oh, will you—” Tibs closed his mouth on the anger. “I treated you badly,” he said through gritted teeth.

“And that’s such a revelation to you?”

“Yes,” Tibs whispered, unable to look at the man. He felt the stare. He forced himself to look.

“Do you expect me to believe that you didn’t know you were an asshole to me?”

“Do you realize it when you’re being an asshole to someone?” Tibs asked defensively.

“Oh, yeah.” Don smirked at Tibs’s surprised. “Unlike Jackie-boy, I don’t come by pissing people off by accident.”

Tibs stopped himself from asking why he did it then. They'd talked about something relating to that at one point while he was iced. He'd barely paid attention, having his curiosity sated being more important than the answers he'd received.

"I thought I was better than that," Tibs said. Don snorted and Tibs had to swallow his anger again.

"What do you want, Tibs?" Don asked after a few seconds of silence.

"To say I'm sorry."

"You've done that. You can go."

He could, Don was right.

"Why did you lie?" he asked. "Why ask Tirania to say it was her idea?"

"Like you'll believe me."

"I will."

Don rolled his eyes. "I was scared." The words were dark.

"Of what?"

"Of you. Of you saying no. Of not having anyone around me who'd have the guts to call me on my bullshit. Jackie might be some clueless, muscle bound idiot, but it's good for not letting jackasses like me get away with it."

"He doesn't like the competition," Tibs said before he could stop himself.

"Ah, like he could ever compete with me." Don studied Tibs. "You're not calling me a liar."

Tibs shrugged.

"Why do you believe me?" the sorcerer asked suspiciously.

Tibs shrugged again. He had no idea how to explain it without bringing Light into it, and he wasn't ready for that.

"What happened? To make you seek me out, Tibs? I know you well enough to know this isn't something you just do. You thought about it and decided to come ask me if I'd lied."

"I'm a bigot."

Don narrowed his eyes, but didn't comment.

"I had to go to a noble's party."

"Galdain's, I heard." There was annoyance in the tone, but he didn't add anything.

"Lamberto, that's one of his sons who'll run the dungeon, was all over me with how glad he was to meet me. He dragged me around and introduced me to everyone."

"You let a noble drag you around?" Don asked, amused.

"Tirania told me to make a good impression, and I need her to think I'm on her side. So blasting the annoyance through a wall wasn't something I could do." He paused. "And he wasn't that much of an annoyance."

"You're saying something not entirely horrible about a noble," Don said. "He must be quite the man."

"Boy. He's barely older than I am. Well, maybe more like a little younger than you are. But I treated him horribly when it turned out everyone else at that party just looked at

me like a trick to be watched and snickered at. I made it his fault, even if he was the only one not taking part. He even told his brothers and sister to leave me alone.” He paused again. “And after I treated him like that. He still took a knife for me.”

Don raised an eyebrow.

“There was an assassin there after Palden. I got in her way, but she had a partner who tried to stab me while she distracted me. Lamberto shoved me out of the way and took it for me. He might have died before anyone could do anything, but he filled the wound with crystal and kept it from bleeding out. He has no idea how he did it.”

Don nodded. “Fear and a desire to survive can get you to do a lot you didn’t know you could. You should know how that goes.”

“You don’t sound surprised there was an attack.”

The sorcerer shrugged. “Back home, if there isn’t at least one attempt at killing one of the attendees, it’s not considered a successful party.”

“And you wanted to be like them?”

“Money, power, getting everything they want. Yeah, I wanted that. Especially after the little my family had was taken from us.” They were quiet again. Don drained the tankard and presented it to Tibs, who refilled it. “Why were you so angry when you found out joining your team was my idea?”

Tibs made himself a tankard out of ice and filled it with water to have something to do while he considered his answer. He hadn’t thought, when he found out, he’d just reacted. He’d simply lashed out. But why had he done it? Why had it—

“Because being angry meant I didn’t have to feel the pain the idea you’d used me for some selfish plan of yours caused. You aren’t that horrible of a person when you let yourself be, and the idea it had been an act hurt.”

Don nodded. “It was an act, of a sort. And I did have a selfish plan.”

“Trying to be better isn’t selfish.”

The sorcerer nodded. “But is that what it is if I have to deceive you to get it?”

“You were afraid. I get how that is.”

“And you were hurt. I get that too.”

They were silent again.

“What happens now?” Don asked.

“I’d like you to come back to the team.”

“The others might not go along with that.”

“Jackal will. He’s only angry at you because I was angry. Khumdar doesn’t care beyond the team being whole for the runs.”

“But Mez...”

Tibs nodded. “I can explain my side of it to him, but...”

“Yeah, I owe him an apology, too. He was the only one who tried to help me and with how I treated him when I forced him on my team. That puts him on the level of heroes of songs.”

“I think that once he knows why, he’ll understand.”

“If he believes me.”

“I can—” Tibs stopped himself. Sure, he could tell Mez Don wasn’t lying, and Mez would believe him, but, again, how did he explain it to the sorcerer?

He knew Don was truthful about why he’d done what he’d done, and if Tibs asked him if he had any plan on betraying him or the team, he knew Don’s answer would also be true. But Light didn’t know the future, just how people felt about what they said. It was only a lie if Don was planning on betraying them.

If circumstances changed and the temptation presented itself. Tibs couldn’t know what the sorcerer would do.

And that was still too much of a risk at the moment.