

## Chapter 127 - Good Intentions

The team of disruptors had already left the outpost to set fire to the prearranged locations. All the Republic's attention would be on them to prevent the fire from spreading, running them around town chasing ghosts.

All the while the true threat came from the sea. No one would expect a pirate raid in the archipelago. Why would they when it never happened before? In a few hours, panic and blood would paint the streets of Sylspring.

*Dammit. I'm so stupid.*

Flynn punched the tree for the third time, one of the few left in the clearing among the buildings. The pain in his hand did little to distract him from the guilt racking his insides. No one told him what the documents he copied were for. His mother just told him to steal them, and he did. He had thought himself so smart.

Because of him any chance the sentries would detect pirates' arrival was eliminated. By the time they noticed the ships it would be too late to muster a proper defense.

They were supposed to fight the Republic that killed his father, not create more orphans.

He threw another punch, splitting his knuckles.

*Damn fucking idiot! Can't even do one thing right.*

"What the hell are you doing now?" Tridel's mocking voice reached him. "You might have convinced your mother that your little friend can be useful, but she'll soon see reason."

Turning around, the smug sneer of the hunter welcomed him. Flynn hid his desire to put a dagger in his back behind a smirk of his own. "Bitter they didn't take you either?"

Tridel's face stiffened. "They need someone to keep an eye on things. Someone they *trust*."

"Yeah, and you were the *only* person they could do without," his voice dripped with derision.

The hunter stepped closer with a menacing expression. "Don't think your mommy can protect you forever. The cause comes before everything."

Tridel was so close he could smell his pungent breath. Flynn stood his ground, looking on with a bored expression. After a few seconds of intense staring, the man begrudgingly went back to his patrols.

Only then did Flynn allow himself to show his hatred to the only person he despised more than himself.

It was too late to stop the raid, but if it wasn't for Tridel he would have succeeded in his one good action. Kai and his family would have been safe from the mayhem.

*I couldn't even do that.*

He had tried to warn him after he found out the true plan, but only made things worse.

He knocked another piece of bark off the tree, staring numbly at his bleeding fist. Even if he only told them a fraction of his friend's capabilities, that would be enough to see his value for the cause. It was the only way he had to keep him alive.

Kai would be forced to work for the Voice of the Ancestors, but he'd be alive. If Flynn was confident in something, it was in the little fiend's ability to get himself what he wanted.

*At least he'll be safer here than in town tonight.*

The outpost was deserted except for a handful of new recruits who were supposed to keep tabs on things. Tridel was the only true threat and he had disappeared beyond the treeline.

Inside a city, he might have had a chance to slip away, but deep into the Veeryd jungle, the hunter would have the field advantage. Despite how he despised him, Flynn knew Tridel would have no trouble spotting him if he tried to leave.

*Never good enough.*

More blood spilled on the tree.

Slipping in the shadows, Flynn made his way to the storage room. His mother told him Kai was fine, but he needed to see for himself.

After learning to avoid the enforcers, dodging the few guards left in the outpost was child's play. He took out a lockpick from his sleeve and easily forced open the first door without a sound.

The storage area was clear. With no windows to worry about, he made easy work of the second lock and closed it behind him.

He immediately spotted the unconscious form, lying in a corner of the small room. Tightly bound hands and feet in two layers of rope, a blindfold hid most of his face, but he would recognize him anywhere. Flynn hurried to ensure he was still breathing and let out a sigh of relief.

It was so strange to see him like that, wrong. To see him without his usual unreadable gray eyes, observing each person as if they were a mystery to solve.

The nape of his neck was tinged in red where Tridel hit him unconscious. Flynn clenched his fists.

*You're not the only one who keeps his threats.*

Despite being three years younger and a head shorter than him, Flynn had never thought of Kai as such. One glance from him was enough to discourage any person from thinking of him as a child. And if that wasn't enough, Flynn clearly remembered the dozen bruises he got when he challenged him, high on the thrill of his new profession.

Fragile had never been a word that passed through his head when he looked at him.

"I'm so sorry. I just wanted to help, but I fucked up *again*."

Tears rolled down his face and he couldn't stop himself from rambling apologies and curses no one would hear. Because he was too much of a coward to speak them to his face.

"I know it doesn't matter now, but I wanted to help. I'm sorry I'm such a shit friend! Damned spirits, I—"

An unexpected grunt made him freeze. Had someone seen him sneak inside? The door was still closed, and he couldn't perceive anyone else beyond. Another muffled grunt made him look at the person at his feet.

"You're awake..." Granny Su's potion should have kept him out till the next morning.

*When did logic ever apply to him?*

Flynn knelt beside him to help him in a sitting position. He couldn't help but smile as Kai's glared daggers at him.

*Yeah, that's more like it.*

He failed to stop his tears, continuing to mumble useless apologies. A disgruntled muffle demanded him to remove the gag. "Sorry, sorry."

Kai opened his mouth to speak, but no sound came out. Losing his balance, Flynn caught him before he could hit the floor. A fit of coughing interrupted him when he attempted to speak again.

*Right, how long did they keep him like this?*

"Wait a second." Flynn helped him drink from a flask of water, explaining in a confused jumble what had happened. Though no apology would ever be good enough.

"What. Did you. Say?" Kai croaked. His body swayed, having a hard time sitting straight, his eyes didn't waver, already grasping the implications.

Flynn expected, hoped, to get cursed. Kai just fell silent, observing him with that calculating gaze of his, simmering rage hid beneath the surface.

"Can you untie me?" His voice was calm and reasonable. Not a hint of fear despite his condition. "You said you wanted to help me, right? Well, help me now."

Guilt punched him with each word. Even if he left no trace, they would know it was him who set him free. But that wasn't even his main worry. If he freed Kai now, he would certainly try to run to Sylspring to warn them.

In normal circumstances, he might even be able to pull it off by some miracle, but not in his conditions.

*I can't protect him if they catch him trying to escape.*

“Can you use your skills?”

Kai tried to stand straighter, “I—”

“You can't, right?” Flynn didn't miss Kai's repeated blinks and biting of his cheek. He was fighting to stay awake and could hardly stand. “The main purpose of the potion is to stop you from using them, knocking you out is just a side effect. It'll be several hours, maybe a day before you can use them again.”

If he helped him escape, they might make it past the newbie guards, but Tridel would catch them as soon as they reached the treeline. Without his mother around, the hunter would take the opportunity to kill Kai, and probably him too, if he thought he could get away with it.

Anger burst through the calmness. “My family is in danger. Many people will die if I don't do anything. You can't believe their crazy plan is worth it?”

Flynn repeated the lines he heard countless times. “It's all for the freedom of our people. A small sacrifice is necessary to strike back at the tyrants. Most of the casualties will be among the Republic anyway.”

There was a time he truly believed them, filled with rage at his dad's murder. Now the words felt empty. He didn't know when it happened, but all he could see were the cracks in the speeches that once made his blood boil.

*What's the point of striking back at the Republic if more children lose their parents in the process?*

If only his mother and sister could see it too.

Kai heaved, seething with barely contained emotions, "You can't be that stupid. It will be a massacre!"

As Flynn expected Kai would throw himself at him to bite his throat, another veil of calmness took over. "You don't believe in this, do you?"

Flynn forced himself to meet his gaze. "It doesn't matter." The only thing he could do now was make sure Kai didn't get himself killed for nothing.

He must have read his decision, cause any pretense of calm fell away. Kai snarled his teeth. "I'm going to fucking kill you! If you hadn't done anything I could have been with my family! I'll—"

Afraid someone might hear the commotion, Flynn was forced to shut him up. Kai tried to wrestle himself free with surprising strength, screaming in blind fury.

*Hate me, but I can't send you to your death.*

After several minutes, his struggles grew weaker and Flynn let him go.

His body flopped down. "Please, Flynn. Don't do this."

Seeing him defeated made him waver.

*I'm sorry, I'm so useless.*

“We can’t do anything to stop it. It’s too late.” Flynn pushed the tears that threatened to spill. He didn’t deserve to cry or apologize. “I’ll go check on your family when they let me leave. Maybe I can find a way to help you escape when things settle down.”

Kai tried to wiggle away, but it made no difference. Flynn was about to gag him.

“Wait! My ring!”

“What?”

“My ring, the one I had when that guy ambushed me.”

Flynn paused. It was a weird request, but if this was a ploy of some kind, he couldn’t imagine what the advantage would be. He slipped a hand in his pocket and took out a roughly crafted silver ring. Nothing exceptional but worth a pretty penny just for the material.

Tridel had snatched every mesar, but he managed to swipe the ring, thinking it might hold some sentimental value.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t save your satchel too. You were carrying quite a lot.”

Kai immediately lit up, “Yeah, that’s the one. It was my dad’s last gift. Can I have it back?”

“They might take it away if they find it on you.”

“Please, I’ll keep it hidden,” Kai begged.

“Okay, you can keep it for now,” Flynn placed the ring in his hand. “I’ll go get you something to eat.”

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Kai waited till the door closed. Flynn’s steps hardly made any sound, but he was reasonably sure that he had left.

In his state, he could have been beaten up by a toddler. And time was a luxury he couldn’t afford. It wouldn’t be long before the boy would be back and Kai couldn’t be sure how he would react.

Even if Flynn genuinely wanted to help, he couldn’t take the chance. The road to hell was paved with good intentions.

*I can’t trust him. I need to leave right now.*

His family needed him and who knew what that crazy witch would convince him to do if she had more time.

Kai focused on the ring in his hand. While Elijah might consider a piece of silver worthless, it wasn’t the same for inhabitants of the archipelago.

*Thank the spirits Flynn got his hands on it before someone tried to melt it.*

He could barely feel the silver band he was holding, the rope that bound his wrists had made his fingers numb and unresponsive. Without Mana Manipulation he couldn’t access the spatial closet. He needed just a speck of mana to connect, but true to Flynn’s words, none of his skills worked. The fog in his brain made it seem a hopeless task.

His mind felt like mush and his thoughts were painfully sluggish. If he couldn't think straight, how was he supposed to fight his way out?

*Dammit, focus. Virya always said skills just help you hone an ability that is already there. I can do this.*

After more than four years of hard training, he could easily perceive the mana within him without any skill. The drug clouding his thoughts made things harder, but it was something he had done countless times before. Kai willed the mana to connect to the ring with the force of desperation.

The spatial closet flashed in his mind. His sword clattered to the ground beside him before the connection broke. Gathering what strength he had remaining, he wiggled closer to the blade. Elijah always stressed the importance of keeping the steel sharp.

*Glory to the almighty butler! I swear I'll always follow your advice.*

The fibers of the rope gave way to the honed edge with barely any effort. With a final swipe, his hands were free. It wasn't time to celebrate yet. He had to fight with his hands to grasp the handle and to free his legs.

After being forced still for hours, he couldn't stand, but it didn't matter. He had everything he needed in the palm of his hand. His teachers might have left him, but they had given him all the knowledge and tools he needed.

Focusing on the ring on his finger, Kai took out Dora's casket of polished cherry wood. Its delicate network of enchantments would preserve any alchemical creation for years before losing any efficacy.

He opened the lid, grinning at the rows of shining vials. He had wanted to keep them for emergencies since they were far beyond anything he could brew himself.

*If this doesn't qualify as an emergency, I don't know what will.*

His fingers browsed through the labels and stopped on a vial containing a pearlescent liquid: *Kai's Nullifier*. A yellow-grade antidote that would sell for one gold, maybe more.

*He* would need to study the composition of the drug they fed him to brew a proper antidote. But none of that mattered in front of the creation of a master alchemist with more than a century of experience. That was exactly why Dora created this.

*A sip should be enough.*

He grabbed the vial with both hands, still trembling, and brought it to his parched lips. Like molten fire, the liquid streamed down his throat, blazing and growing in power by the second.

The burning vaguely reminded him of his race enhancements. Kai welcomed each wave of pain. The cleansing fire swept through every inch of his body incinerating the toxin, proving itself more than worthy of its silly name.

His body was still battered by the treatment received. Nothing a sip of *Kai's Second Wind* couldn't solve. The green tonic had a much gentler effect, but it was no less effective. A healing drizzle restored his bruised body. In minutes, he was as fresh as if he had just got out of bed.

Kai stood up straight, firmly wielding his sword.

*Those crazy bastards are going to pay.*