

*you're no good, you're no good
you could kill me and you should
i'm an idiot for thinking
this was anything but blood*

"Do you think k'thir avoid copper roofs?" A sock was pulled up viciously, then wiggled to ensure it sat correctly. "Imagine walking on a roof that could kill you. I think it would be intolerable."

Maybe not unless they take in copper through their skin. I have not seen mortals up on roofs quite so much as you. As Marius worked on the second sock, the words percolated through the back of his mind with brief admonishment. Azurius was in a slightly antsy mood from spying on the monastery, which explained the mild telling off.

Shrugging, he reached for a boot as he replied, "Maybe they just have to be stabbed, then. Walking on a roof could give them a cold, or something... and hey. People don't expect you dropping in from up above. It makes things interesting." This time the amusement was shared between them. Emotions tended to flow from one to the other as quickly as a riptide, and he'd lost count of how many times Azurius caught a whiff of his bastard act and got shirty with him.

On the other hand, no one could make him calm as easily as the elemental. Having a whole other perspective on the situation helped keep his head from swelling too much.

The boots were comfortable, with thin cardboard soles which could feel every bump along the way. Sure, they were cheap and wore out quickly, but they had a level of responsiveness that he appreciated. *More roof-hopping today, I suppose?*

"Oh, no. Just normal walking so we can pick up the dagger, sadly. Though I might ascend if we can find Davenport and piss him off, if you like... he's all bark, but he could send that bloody bird-thing to peck at us." Standing, Marius stretched his arms one at a time across his chest before fixing the scarf around his neck. The coat he was wearing these days was one purchased with candidacy funds, since he'd been informed that his stepfather's coat wouldn't cut it for campaigning. Getting something that fit him nicely was a good change.

The elemental core swirled around his fingers as he dumped it into his most protected pocket. It tended to ice over the insides if he left it there for too long, but he'd done clean-up lately. *That bird demon is disgusting even when bound,* Azurius agreed idly, waters flowing in thin streams that vanished before he could get a second look. When he wanted to be known, he'd make an appearance. *We cannot abide warlocks.*

With a snort, Marius stepped out the door and locked it. He could agree for different reasons, namely that Davenport delighted in being a contrarian whenever his feelings were hurt. The two of them had stared down each other's noses far too much after one meeting, and he tried to shake off the memory as he settled into his usual stalk. He had to remember his goals.

Splashing water and alarmed shouts covered the way a stolen knife sank into robes and flesh. His other arm wrapped around the tidesage, yanking him back to stop the frantic chanting. This one was bigger than Marius, and he was weak from hard labor and light rations, but surprise gave him the brief window to stab again. And again, and again.

They'd killed the first captive laborers to run. But as the runaway water elemental turned on them, their attention had to switch.

When the body fell and gurgled, Marius yanked the curved tidesage knife out once more and turned to assess the situation. Two more tidesages were attempting to get the elemental under control... a third was off to the side, hands raised as she commanded her own personal tides. Sprawled out before her, a familiar shape twitched with his hands sinking into the drowning bubble wrapped around his head, completely silent. Cadoc Dorian's hands went limp, giving up the fight that he'd begun the instant the tidesages had shown up at their door.

Panic ripped through aching lungs. Marius stumbled forward with the knife, and the tidesage turned toward him in surprise - he could see her hand rising to block him. He couldn't stop.

Blade caught on flesh and bone. Her scream rang in his ears, unable to hear anything else. There was a frantic struggle in which both of them tried to get the knife out of her arm, and she dropped her water-working.

Then they parted. Her mouth opened. When he lunged in again, this time he cut across the bottom of her hood, biting into her throat. He hadn't expected the spray this released which splattered across his face and clothes in darkest crimson.

Sure, a red scarf wasn't needed in the dead of summer. It made a statement, though, one for Marius and also those who watched.

It didn't hurt that he looked good in red. Tristan may have worn it first, but Marius wore it better.

As he walked toward the dropoff point, he stuck both hands in his pockets and began to whistle a merry tune. This kept him occupied on the streets and covered for his footsteps, leaving his eyes to roam here and there and note anything out of place.

A woman beat her rug along a railing, and her impressive arms twisted with each blow that rattled out dust. Against a wall, a sailor attempted to fend off a ravenous seagull who'd appropriated their lunch. In the far distance, a tidesage in greyish green sat on a bench facing away. Now this caught his attention, and he stared at the familiar hood and mantles for long moments as he continued past, until out of sight.

Luring a tidesage out into an alley wouldn't be impossible, but it would be much harder in this corner of Boralus. It wasn't what he was here for, but he entertained the thought idly, like chewing on a bone for marrow.

If the tidesage were a k'thir, could only copper weapons be used to kill them? It was likely that normal weapons worked just fine, or they would have prevailed far more easily after the Fourth War. Sister Taggin had said it was poisonous to them, so it likely just worked better. All the more reason to get this blade, then.

The image of her floated up in his mind, and he could feel Azurius taking note. She'd looked so earnest for once in her life, recommending the knife to him. It had been practically altruistic of someone who by her faith was an ally to the old cult. Was she a k'thir as well? If he were to press his knife against her slender throat, would she have tentacles? It was tempting, especially with her own personal knowledge of the Abbot, but it might not be worth it if she told her allies.

A raised cobblestone met the toe of his boot and he almost tripped, arms flailing as the whistling cut off immediately. *Stop thinking about that tidesage's neck*, Azurius advised him with brief amusement. *Bloodthirsty*. Despite the brief jump in heart rate, Marius grinned.

As he walked toward the docks, he tipped his head up to greet the morning sun. None of the tidesages he'd faced before had changed into k'thir. That hadn't stopped them.

He'd wasted too much time, and the unmoving form of his stepfather wouldn't respond to frantic shaking. All he could do was give one last struggle to turn him over onto his side, stare at the purple face no longer gasping for breath, and stand to make sure he wouldn't be next.

The last two robed figures hadn't been paying attention to him... they'd been catching whizzing water and throwing it back, and one was attempting to close blued metal manacles to the elemental. If the one kept attention focused on himself, the other would succeed in subjugation.

It would have been a perfect opportunity to run. However, the thought never even occurred. This time the grip on his knife was certain, and Marius barely hesitated... the one without the cuffs had to die first.

The tidesage made a good shield for water right up until the knife pierced through his back to the left. Marius tried to twist it in deeper, then realized the shape of the blade was terrible for such a purpose. All he could do was give it a pathetic wiggle, squelching back and forth horizontally between the ribs. Only as the man fell did he realize he'd opened himself up to being under fire from the angry elemental.

Ducking, he yanked the blade out again. Water no longer whizzed past him, and when he peered out over the top of green robes the elemental was turned away from him. Marius watched in dazed bemusement as the last tidesage suddenly sprouted holes from high-speed jets of water. The body collapsed to the ground with a miserable thud.

Water dripped from the elemental as it turned to Marius. From there, blood mixed with the downpour that had flooded the shipyard, staining here and there along the huddled shapes of tidesage and worker bodies. The smell that rose from the yard was already reeking in his nose and making his stomach turn.

What little energy he had was spent on murder. Anything remaining trickled out of him as the knife dropped from his hand, slippery with blood. The two of them were alone.

They stared at each other.

Each moment slid into the next, punctuated by droplets. Seconds trickled onward, watering the soil with the remnants of terror and violence, to wake the seeds of something new.

An understanding lingered in the back of his mind. They'd both been held by the hooded order, forced to do their work. Together, they broke the shackles and found their freedom. If they didn't make the most of it, though, they'd simply be fodder for more tidesages.

They moved as one, approaching carefully to communicate with each other. This part always later struck him as being fuzzier than the rest, without the sharp brilliance of the preceding struggle that branded itself onto his brain. As if falling asleep, one moment he was himself.

The next, Azurius was with him.

"If you sold me a rusty iron knife then I'd be well within my rights to get my money back, you know. Having copper green like that isn't a good sign of your quality goods." The blade in his hands could be called beautiful, though the formerly bright copper was now darkened with oxidization to a deeper hue, mottled with green.

"Good luck havin' a knife as doesn't go green, mate. If it's the type o' blade ye specified, then it can't have any protective coatin' or that defeats the purpose," the seller argued. They'd chosen a relatively secluded corner around the edge of the dock for their trade, and Marius was regretting being away from direct sunlight.

With a curl of his lip, he palmed the hilt and hefted the copper dagger. The curved tip of the blade was rather inopportune for stabbing, but it would give a nice cut. While there was a nick in it, the edge gleamed bright from sharpening, at least. "As long as it doesn't fall apart on me, I won't come back for my money. Did you steal a tidesage's blade for this?"

The wiry man before him raised a finger to his mouth, shushing the conversation to a quieter level. "Swear on me mum, it's just a lookalike, see? Got the basic shape, but the tidesage knives had that tentacle engraved down the side. Guaranteed, if ye need copper in a blade, this one's it."

With little more discussion, the coin was traded and a basic sheath was provided. The hilt wasn't his preferred style, and jarringly familiar, but it would make do. After all, it only had to be used once.

This got stuck into a side pocket of his pants, opposite his other hidden dagger, and he spent a few moments fiddling with it before finding a relatively workable angle where it could be pulled out without struggle. The seller had vanished down the alley, leaving him alone with slowly-rising strands of familiar water.

It won't be necessary unless you're intending to walk in and kill him today. While Azurius could speak in Common, having learned enough of it from Marius and prior, he preferred to communicate directly through the bond. When the observation seeped in, it arrived with a note of caution. All the plans they had laid would be for naught if thrown away.

The smile that crept along his mouth was familiar, even if it didn't reach his eyes. It wasn't a smile for either of them, though it flicked on automatically. "I'm a professional. Grant me a bit of trust regarding my patience, please, and I'll let you yell at me if I do something I shouldn't have."

Water slapped the back of his head, making him rock, and he barked out a short laugh. *If you mess this up then yelling at you will be the least of your worries! We still need to watch out for the tidesage with the sword.* This was grudgingly agreed upon without a word, and he turned on his heel.

"I'm going to check up on Davenport. If the others are in town, so will he, and he's bound to visit his workplace." He injected a bit of a swagger into his walk, raising a hand to ruffle the back of his hair and get some of the dampness out. The water clumped against his fingers and sprayed against the stones.

Maybe if the man's mustache could be tweaked enough, he'd prove to be an interesting sparring partner. Marius wouldn't bet on it, though, not after the last time. He'd have to wait and watch how the wind blew.

When his feet took him toward the Ashvane yards, he completely forgot to whistle.