

The hoe hit the ground with an intensive might before being yanked back, exposing the good soil under long overturned dirt. His chore for the day for Lux wanted him to give back what he had taken.

Being taken meant the veggies that they had eaten while he had been there training. It was the shortest time he had been with a mentor, for he had learned so much of what the others had taught him. He had grown so much in his time jumping between the both of them, and even now with Lux, who at times would go stoic and stare Nocturne down, would ask him of his cannibal past, then seemingly laugh it off in the same sentence gave Nocturne a sort of confidence.

That his past was not something all would forever fear—No. It could be seen as a time where he was not entirely in control. One where he should not be afraid to show his skin, to be himself. To proudly hold his head high and state how, 'Yes, I was a cannibal. No, it was not willingly. And no, I will never do it again.'

Lux was interested in the fearmint gum, and once even asked Nocturne to eat it. Describing what it looked like. Observing Nocturne when he did, hand on his chin and humming his observation.

"Your magics glow brighter. One might see you as a formidable power holder if they didn't know what the magic was hiding." Lux had expressed, leaving Nocturne to fear if anyone knew what to look for under the guise of the magic. For the time though, once he left Lux, he didn't see himself needing to use it more unless it was for leaving Skire as a whole.

Noc had long ago decided that the human world was where he was safe and where he was to stay. He did not belong in Skire. He knew that, all the mentors knew that, and any CCCat that looked upon him and turned up their lip in a hiss towards him knew that.

It had taken his all to even come there outright. To learn magic to protect then to return home. That was his agenda. And it would remain that way.

So as he yanked back the hoe, exposing that fresh dirt, wiping sweat from his brow he glanced up, observing Lux who sat on the step of his house, drinking his green murky tea, Nocturne heaved a sigh, tossing the hoe spike into the floor then waded over to Lux who offered a spare cup that held the tea and he downed the earthy tasting liquid back.

"You think you got it in you, kiddo?" Lux inquired, his stare always unwavering and intense—even if Nocturne knew a joke would come soon after it.

"I think I've got the hang of it, yeah," Noc responded after his gulping finish of the glass, licking his lips. "Even if I didn't, you would just tell me tough and have me learn on my way back home, wouldn't you?"

Barking a laugh, Lux slapped his knee. A huge smile pulled back against those dark teeth. "I'd say it a lot more practically than that."

"I'm sure."

"Heh, you know what, kiddo? You're alright. Look, I'm only asking to make sure that if I let you free into the wild lands of Skire, that you won't go exploding into the sky with that there new magic of yours."

Nocturne grimaced. "I wouldn't do that. I'm not childish."

"No, but I've seen it, they wanted to defy the very Gods and it ended up burning them out, zapping a defect on them and they came crawling back asking what the hell happened." Lux took a sip, sighed, and then looked at Nocturne again. "Not that there's anything wrong with defects. It's just--"

"It's inevitable what it'll end with." Nocturne finished grimly, knowing exactly what it meant to have one. What it meant for his friends to have them.

Lux didn't elaborate. Nocturne already knew after all. He only stared, then looked at the freshly hoed patch of garden. "I know I've asked before, but I ask again with more trust in you now that we've been together for two weeks and you still haven't gnawed my arm off.--" Nocturne glowered at him and Lux only grinned yet went on, "What *do* you plan to do next? Where will you go now?"

"I--" Noc's ears fell. "Well... Home, I guess. Back to the Circus. Back to my friends."

Lux had brought up his arm, placing the elbow on his knee and his cheek in his hand, watching Nocturne. "Yeah? Then what?"

"Live?" Noc tested, waiting for Lux's laughter that didn't come. Instead, it had made the yellow and black CCCat scowl.

"That's just it then, you've learned all you needed and now you're going back to this Circus for the maybe possible who knows attack that your father might do? You aren't going to try to do anything more than that?"

"I mean, I've been gone a year now. Am I not allowed a break to finally go home?"

Lux scoffed, "You tell me. Do *you* believe you've done enough? Isn't there anything more you would want to do? Look at yourself. Look at that potential!"

Nocturne did indeed look at himself. Taking the words of his mentor seriously. All he saw was as he always was. A dark CCCat with dark magic. The tail of an eel and the perseverance of a man who wanted to be nothing like his father.

He looked back up to his expectant mentor, then narrowed his eye with a purse of his lips. "Are you just projecting? Is it you who wants to set out and do more?"

Laughing, Lux stood from his place and wandered to the garden, crouching to run his fingers through the moist cool dirt. "Heh, no. I'm happy here. Happy with my garden. Happy with my gadgets, my home, my magic. But you? You're a jack of all trades, ain't you? Why not try something unorthodox, something interesting and closer to home."

"Closer to... home?" Nocturne looked off, thinking to himself. "Like, back in the human world?"

"No, kid, I mean yourself! You're a fish after all, what do fish need?"

"Water?"

Lux sprung back up, hands on his hips merrily. "Exactly!"

"You want me to go to *another* mentor and learn something that I'm already well adverse in?"

"Yeah! It'd be cool, you got to admit." Taking a broad step forward, he thrust his arms into the air, showing the cool cloud dotted morning on top of that mountain. "An eel who can make and control his own water!"

"Seems moot since I'm already well versed in it." Nocturne chastised weakly, a smile still on his face despite it though.

"Oh, you're no fun." Lux whined, letting his arms drop to walk past Nocturne to the seeds he kept in cups along his home. "Its whatever you want to do, kiddo. But don't let logic stop you from doing what would be cool."

Nocturne shook his head, joining Lux who sprinkled a few seeds into his palm so he too could begin pushing them into the freshly tilled soil. "I'd assume anyone who had that mentality might have ended up dead."

Lux chuckled. "You got me there, you got me there. But hey, one does not become great by just sitting around. I think you're pretty awesome, but add some water under that belt of magic you got going? You'd be unstoppable."

It did sound amusing; Nocturne could see the appeal. But it would stop his journey home. Not to mention that would be one more mentor to need to sway. He was already pushing it close enough by having three allow him to be taught by them. Who was to say that this fourth guy would even let him near.

"Tell me then." Noc tested, using his thumb to push a seed down. "Who is this water mentore anyway? Where are they located?"

Lux gave a sidelong smirk to Noc who feared the answer instantly. "Near Meteor Lake."

"So in the opposite direction from home? Awesome."

"Heh. His name is Kol. Loveable guy honestly. Huge—but loveable. Might find he'll accept you faster than any of your past instructors would have."

Nocturne's ears lifted. "Really?"

"Could say training with him could be refreshing."

Noc closed his eye, refusing to give into the joke.

"Get it?" Lux bubbled playfully. "Cause it's water?"

"Yeah, I got it."

Lux hooted. Standing to brush the dirt from his knees. "I know I'm funny. Well. Its a long journey to him, best start prepping things you'll need."

"Hey, I never said I'd go to him. I'm only asking questions."

"You have a lot of time to think before that. There's only one safe way down off this mountain. Unless you suddenly sprout wings, you're going to be walking off for a long time. Gives you a bit of time to think, don't you say."

Noc pouted out his lip for a second, but didn't argue. In truth, he didn't know what he wanted to do. He knew that he missed his friends and worried for them. But Cake had encouraged him to go. Athen wanted Noc to do what he thought was best. And Midge, well.. She was her brash self. Loca often avoided him so there was no huge loss there.

"Say, think about it this way, what do you have to lose?" Lux inquired, and it took little less than a second for Nocturne to think of his answer.

"He could kill me brutally as most CCCats are intended to do when seeing a cannibal."

"That's debatable."

"No, it isn't, Lux."

"Party pooper." Lux sighed dramatically despite that, pausing to look Nocturne over, then sighed again and threw his arm in the air. "Alright, fine, I'll leave it alone. But just think about it, would ya? On the large off-chance that Kol does come after you, he might not. And you could

have another magic to use to help protect your friends. Water and electricity could be a deadly combo after all."

Nocturne didn't consider that, but it made sense. While waters never stayed shocked like movies implied, he still could deliver one. If that didn't take down his father enough then—

"Anyway. I need a new cup of matcha, you want one?"

"Oh, um, yeah sure." Nocturne rose, dusting himself then followed his mentor into his house. Pondering still if another month or three was worth having that magic under his belt, and what it might mean if the water mentor didn't outrightly accept him.

He thought about it all through the day. When dinner was made between the both of them, when he was settling for the night. When he couldn't sleep because it was so heavy on his brain and he rose with so much energy that he made himself a cup of the green tea stuff to calm his nerves.

He found himself mulling over the prospect of water magic on the porch facing the rising sun when he heard Lux's heavy steps on the stone floor. Noc scooted to allow him to sit, and there the both of them silently watched the sunrise.

By the time a golden ray of light was warming his face, Nocturne had decided. Sighing, his shoulders drooped and he turned to face the black and yellow CCCat.

"You say near Meteor Lake..."

With a grin, Lux began to tell him exactly how he would find this so-called huge water mentor. Nocturne couldn't grasp why he was so huge and buff if he was wielding water. But who was he to judge? By noon Noc had his things ready, heavier with some light packing of food.

When he was walking to the door, Noc felt a pang in his chest more than he had felt with the previous two mentores.

Lux was easy to get along with. Nocturne even wanted to say that the CCCat had even become his friend with their bantering and easy mornings. Nocturne found that if he had no where else to go and Lux had asked him to stay, he would have. He enjoyed the easy life here. It reminded him of the Swamp with Jeb and Bess.

However this was not his home despite wishing it would have been in another life. He still had some steps left in his journey before he would go home. But he found it in some form of a way with Lux here, and he wondered if the electric CCCat might feel the same.

Before he could even ask though, Lux already had his arms out and around the dark CCCat in a tight intense hug.

"Gonna miss you and your dry humor. You really are a good sport with them." He said into Nocturne's hair. Squeezing him all the more tighter and causing Noc to smile. He returned the hug with the same warmth; only pulling away when Lux did.

"You be safe going down that mountain, okay? And I better not hear about an eel CCCat getting got by Kol, alright? I want to see you thriving one day if I hunt you down."

"If." Nocturne teased. Lux only grinned.

"If is good... But seriously. Be careful out there. You've got a lot of potential. Don't settle for anything less than what you're worth."

Noc looked upon him with a sad smile, allowing those words to sink in with him. "I'll... I'll do my best."

"Chin up! This is hardly a goodbye. We'll see each other one day. Who knows when or for how long, but one day."

"I'll look forward to it." Noc turned before the man could see him cry, because he was beginning to. Walking down the platform to the front door where he gave one last silver-lined stare back, trying in vain to fight the tears, then opened the door and walked out.

One day, he hoped and would promise. If he had to hike up the mountain himself to say hello, he would. But that was not now. Now, was tracking down Kol for the final leg of his journey.

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It took him four hours to get down the mountain. In those four he thought thoroughly about his plan of action. He could possibly go to the Mentor just to see if they would teach him or not. If not, then it was no loss to him. Or he would be killed on the spot. He didn't want another fiasco like Midge when he'd first met her. At this point two of the three had intentions to kill him. Did he want to risk a third opportunity for another to go for him?

You'd be in your element. He told himself. Water was where he was safest after all. He knew it well and was even faster in it. So if he needed to get away, he had that chance, right?

But Kol was the mentor of water... he likely knew how to use it against water users.

Gods, what was he even thinking? He had been gone for nearly a year now, did he want to push that further by being gone even longer? Was anyone worried? Would they come looking?

He didn't want to think that any of them cared enough. Cake maybe. And perhaps Athen. Anyone else was likely relieved that he was gone.

So what was a few more months?

After all, water would only do well for him to have under his belt. Could aid his battle against his father by confiding him in it.

So was that his decision?

He paused, huffing at the base of the mountain. Panting and turning his head up in an attempt to see the tip top of it, squinting against the glare of the sun. His legs felt like jelly, but he didn't feel like giving up now. He needed to build up that strength again in them after not walking much when working with Lux. It was time to put his conditioning back on track.

Heaving his bag better against his back he went about putting one step in front of the other and went about his next adventure.

Any sign of danger and you can just run away, easy! Nocturne thought to himself while walking over the soft grass of the fields, large rocky mounds, and tall trees that encased a small forest where he was sure Kol would be. Or at least, that's what the map he was using to navigate Skire was directing him to.

He decided to take a sort of a long way to avoid meeting any Skires at the lake itself. He figured it was a hot spot for the locals to hang about.

The only thing stopping him—besides his frayed nerves—was his lead heavy legs. He'd been walking for a week straight. Only allowing himself a few nights of rest, he wanted to get home, but then changed his mind. Deciding that he did want to learn water magic. Or flee if Kol did not want him. Which... for him having the cannibal scent was not impossible to imagine.

He could see the gentle surface of the water once he crested a valley of a meadow that breached into the forest. He breathed deeply in the fresh smell of the water and the life that the forest had around him. He grew up similar to this in a way in the Cult. Which had cultivated a large corner of a forest. Expanding largely in their hundred years being in service now.

Nocturne eyeballed the lake expecting to see the giant mass that Kol was told to be. He feared whatever the CCCat was. Nocturne wasn't exactly tiny himself. He still had a lot of muscle to him. But if Lux was able to look at him and say that Kol was bigger that made the dark void of a CCCat worried.

Bracing himself, he ducked into the heavy foliage of trees to walk the outskirts of the lake.

If he was a mentor, where would he be situated?

The sound of rushing water that did not fit the gentle lap of waves of the lake the further he walked from it caught his attention. It sounded like a waterfall. If he were a mentor, a personal little lake to himself would be exactly where he'd be situated.

Lo and behold, the closer he got to the rushing sound of the water, he found exactly that. A small oasis of water nestled between overhanging trees. In the center of the water stood a CCCat.

And not just any.

This one looked like they could crush Nocturne in two if he so much as made a wrong movement towards him.

Gods, Lux wasn't kidding that this mentore was huge. It terrified Nocturne in ways of which he could only attempt to remind him of his father who was a huge relentless force of strength and anger.

Kol though? What was he driven by?

Nocturne stepped closer but stopped behind a large tree. He breathed deeply and took in his options for approaching this mentor. He had the advantage of being in the water already, and Nocturne was already laboring with his pack and his jelly legs. He wouldn't make it far if Kol decided to charge him. He was sure the CCCat could capture him in a moment.

Nocturne could go out palms up and explain quickly why he was there. Would Kol listen though? Or would he see that black magic and instantly become furious with him?

He could speak from behind the tree? But that would just make him look suspicious, wouldn't it? It would make him look instantly guilty.

Dammit. He should have just gone home.

Encouraging himself, Nocturne peeked from behind the tree to the water once more, hoping to find some other advantage he might have by engaging Kol.

However, when he searched, Kol was gone.

Nocturne's blood ran cold and his ears fell on his head.

Oh gods, where did he go? Did he sense Noc? Did he see his magic?

Dammit, he should have eaten the gum, he should have from the very start.

Noc flung his back to the tree once more, evaluating his next movements.

Perhaps he just scared Kol away? Maybe he knew better than to get involved with a cannibal and ran before Noc had the chance to get the jump on him—not that he was. Not really.

"Think think think.... Maybe he just went under the water?" Noc thought out loud, nodding at his outcome then turning to look at the water once again. Besides the surface of the water being disturbed by the waterfall, the rest of it was crystal clear, which showed no signs that the large CCCat had gone under its surface at all.

Oh great! Maybe he truly did scare the man off. Awesome. Time wasted traveling here at all.

Daring himself, Noc breathed heavily then pushed himself off the tree to walk into the clearing where the little lake sat. Maybe he might see him. But even as he was at the edge of the water he still saw nothing.

Okay. So he did just scare him away. Noc wasn't all too upset. This was a better outcome than ending up fish food for the mentor.

"So much for that—"

"So much for what?" A stranger's voice came from beside Noc. When his head swung to see, his body was already in the motion of toppling by his fright, and he went back first into the water, his tail flopping, and his eye wide to see Kol had been the one to speak. A huge smile on his face, his hands on his knees while he stared down at Noc who now sat in the water.

He towered over Nocturne, easily he had to be 9ft at a full stance and not crouching. How he managed to sneak up on Nocturne was beyond his comprehension. Either he was just that good or Noc had been far too distracted to be paying attention.

All he knew now was that he was drenched.

Everything was drenched, actually. His pack, him, and the map. And him.

"Awesome."

"Sorry 'bout that—I've always been told I'm much lighter on my feet than I mean to be." Kol's huge hand reached out towards him. "Let me help you—"

"N-No!" Noc cried, struggling in an attempt to stand. Before Kol had time to see what really lurked under Nocturne's skin. "I-I got it! No worries!"

"Are you sure? That pack of yours looks very heavy."

"Yeah it is!" He laughed nervously, opting to instead unlatching the straps on his shoulder and stood in the water, never letting his back to Kol. "I got it. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to— I'll leave."

Kol had gone still. Watching Nocturne with a tilted head. His hands came to rest on his hips and his chest high in the air. Still he smiled with that ever too large grin. Coupled with strong long arms bursting with muscle. "But you just got here? Don't you want to train?"

Nocturne halted, swallowing his eye and turned to face Kol. "You'd train me? Just like that?"

"Just like that!" Kol boasted proudly, stepping closer to Noc, his huge hand still held out. "You sure I can't help you?"

"You see what I am, right? And you're still willing to help me?" Call him paranoid, but Nocturne was having a hard time accepting Kol's enthusiasm. Maybe he was just as colorblind as Cake was.

Kol gave him an honest once over. A good long up and down then smiled. "You mean that you're a cannibal?"

"I'm—" Nocturne sighed. "I'm not. Not really."

"Oh really?"

"I was forced into it. I've never eaten CCCat flesh. I was born into a cult and ran away. But—"

"Your magic is stained."

"Yes, exactly."

"Then I see no reason not to help you. If you were a true cannibal you would have already attacked me. I saw your magic through the trees and came to investigate. To be honest, you don't look like any cannibal I know. So I figured why not? Clearly you had a story to tell. Do you still wish to learn?"

"Yes..." Noc repeated. Finding it hard for himself to accept that Kol was so trusting in him right off the bat. "I-I was sent here by Lux. He thought I should give it a try. That knowing water being aquatic myself would be good for me."

The ever-present smile on Kol's face spread. Looking at the body of water beyond Noc. "It does have its attributes of being an aquatic host. Are you an eel, too?"

Nodding, Noc finally allowed his shoulders to fall and his flighty feeling fell with it. He shouldn't bite the hand that was willing to feed him. But he had such whiplash of expecting the worst from Kol that he hardly knew how to even react to the too-nice mentor. Aside from Giyas, all of them had been at least minorly apprehensive; not Kol.

"Freshwater eel from what I can tell."

"Then we're the same, you and I. This will be fun. I could even say welcome home! Now! How strong is your swimming?"

"Good enough, why?"

Kol's teeth showed in his smile now. "My home is behind that waterfall. And to get to it we have to swim. Are you up for it?"

"So you're going to train me?" Noc asked, realizing he'd not officially done it. "You don't even know my name."

"Oh right!" Kol whirled on him, that huge hand held out once more, far more warm over the first time. Nocturne didn't have any of the fear that he'd had prior. "I'm Kol!"

At last, Noc decided to take it. "I'm Nocturne."

"There! Now we're met." Without saying another word he reached down and plucked up Nocturne's bag from the water. "Come inside, let's get you some food and get better acquainted. If you've come from Lux's, clearly you've walked a long way."

Nocturne allowed himself a smile, understanding that at least with Kol he likely had nothing to fear despite their immense size difference. Kol seemed the warm hearted type. Someone who wouldn't outrightly fool Nocturne into a sense of security. He was sure he could find some kind of sanctuary here with the fish of a CCCat. "You can say that."

Kol stepped further into the body of water, coaxing Nocturne along with that warmth and generosity that he had to learn still to accept from others. The water only came up to his waist which meant Nocturne was sure it would be closer to his shoulders. "I'll love to hear the story."
