

Wyn didn't move. He couldn't, not really. His arms were starting to tire but he couldn't risk letting them fall to his sides. He had to keep them suspended on either side of his head, palms forward as a show of surrender. If he were to let them fall... Wyn eyed the razor-sharp point an inch from his adam's apple. It could easily. . . he didn't want to think about it.

The woman holding the dangerous object was careless in its aim. She had loosened her grip on the handle over time and had begun to shift it slightly every so often. Every time the direction of the spearhead changed, Wyn changed ever so subtly with it, And every time this happened, she smirked crookedly at her skittish hostage. This nerve-wracking routine continued until Wyn scraped together enough scraps of bravery to break the silence.

She had approached him while he was strolling down the only path for miles in these wild woodlands. "Don't move!" she had yelled at him as she approached him spear-first, wearing a crooked grin. The grin promised mischief but it wasn't really threatening, or at least, not in Wyn's opinion. Honestly, Wyn was pretty sure she's screwing with him. This *greatly* irritated him.

"Can I go or are you going to actually do something soon?" Oak brown eyes narrowed as the woman's grin faded into a scowl. Wyn cowered slightly under her gaze.

"I have a spear to your throat, dimwit. I'd keep your mouth shut if I were you."

"Mmhmm, I've been quiet for the past... ten minutes if you hadn't noticed. I got bored." The woman lowered her spear, and stabbed it in the ground, out of the way. "And I was annoyed but you don't need to know that," Wyn whispered lowly under his breath, so she, hopefully, wouldn't hear it.

She stared at him blankly. "You . . . got bored?" Wyn nodded slowly.

"Yup," He said, popping the p for effect.

Wyn and the spear-woman stood silently in the midst of the forest for several sparse seconds. This ended with Wyn plopping down onto the dirt beneath him and removing his bag from his person. He dumped its contents onto the ground and met his captor's eyes. Wyn gestured widely. She blinked. "What," she said coolly.

"Peace offering. Take what you want."

"I don't . . . understand?"

"It's a trade, really. You take . . . whatever it is you want and I get to walk away without any extra holes."

Nodding in understanding, she turned her attention to Wyn's unorganized pile of oddities. Her eyes scanned through it slowly. Wyn noticed that her gaze

lingered longer on things like his rusted compass, bruised apples, and one small uneven pillow. She seemed not to care about his extra clothes or compact bedroll.

Her eyes locked on his worn but warm cloak. Wyn noticed immediately.

"No, no, come on!" Brown eyes snapped up to meet his own panicked ones. Oops, maybe he shouldn't have said that. She does still have a spear, after all. And no hesitation in using it. He regretted his words briefly, before pushing on anyway. He couldn't very well take it back . . . nah, not really.

"I want it."

"But..." he protested weakly, "That's my only cloak!"

"You said anything. I'm pretty sure a tattered old cloak fits the bill."

"Look, lady--"

"Nerezza."

". . . Look, Nerezza, couldn't you take something else?"

Her eyes shifted to the dagger peeking out from underneath the subject matter. Wyn frowned harder. An eyebrow raise greeted him when he glanced up to meet her stare. He threw his arms up and reluctantly...

"Fine! Take the cloak!" Nerezza grinned crookedly in victory. Wyn sulked in her direction sourly. Nerezza picked the cloak out of the pile and shrugged it over her shoulders. She smirked smugly. His eyes narrowed. Nerezza was much too

smug for his liking. He knew he should just let it be, that would be the smart thing to do. But, well, Wyn wasn't exactly well-known for his intelligence back in his hometown. Wyn did the dumb thing.

"No."

". . . What?" said Nerezza.

"You can't just have my cloak. I need that! I mean, winter's almost here."

She bit her lip, "And you think I care?"

Wyn stopped short. ". . . Um, well, I just . . ."

"I'll help you."

"Really? That's great!" He exclaimed cheerily before adding, "Wait, but why?"

Nerezza leveled him with an unimpressed stare. He immediately faltered into silent complacency, putting away his things as she watched coolly. She waited. And waited as Wyn took almost ten minutes to carefully pack his belongings into his bag. He ogled the cloak worn by Nerezza for a long, sorrowful moment before slinging his pack over his shoulder. They started walking in the direction Wyn had come from, much to said man's dismay.

For what felt like hours to him, Wyn and Nerezza kept walking. Every so often, Wyn would attempt to speak. Each time he did, Nerezza would hush the

short man with a look. Eventually, he stopped trying. The two continued on in complete, awkward silence until they reached the nearby town of Aeton. Wyn had passed by not too long before he had encountered Nerezza. Why they were here now, he could only guess, but Wyn had a pretty solid idea of why.

"So," Nerezza eyed him lazily as he spoke, "why are we here?"

"Why do you think?"

Wyn hesitated, "To get me a new cloak?"

"Yes and no."

"To get one for you?"

She shook her head. "No. I prefer this one."

"Oh, okay . . ."

"You'll get a new cloak, eventually. First, we're here for supplies. I need more armor if we're going to do this. Specialized armor from Filib specifically. It's the best kind around, and I'm sure he has some on hand. He knew I would be back. Hopefully, he has some to spare for your sake. Although, he doesn't know about you yet so it's doubtful."

"A—armor?"

"Whatever the case, we're heading straight to him. Stick by me, and don't get sidetracked. We'll get your cloak after we're done."

Wyn stared, "Sure?"

Nerezza grinned crookedly. "Good, let's go." She grabbed him by the wrist and led him into the city. Her face was set in stone as she weaved through the scattered Aeton townsfolk. Her grip on Wyn never wavered—likely so he couldn't wander—but his attention certainly did. He looked from stall to stall as they passed them by. His curiosity never wavering as he found something at most booths that enthralled him thoroughly.

And they passed by so many booths in their little journey. One covered in fruits Wyn had never seen before, and another with baskets woven from so many different kinds of woods. He saw stalls with warm, inviting foods and others with smells that made him scrunch his nose. Ew, livestock. He stopped short at one sight. A beautiful pure blue cloak as thick as three exact copies of his old raggedy cloak. Wyn stopped short to admire it. His slightly taller female companion pulled him along before he could properly appreciate its beauty.