



(Written by Syrin  & Tea )
A New Horizon || Fantasy Series Episode 14

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Hawks: (Almost gentle, calmly) Now now. Easy there.... I don't think it would be too wise to reach for your weapon while you have a sword pressed to your throat, pretty bird. That's it, keep those hands where I can see them... I'd hate for things to get messy. **(almost under his breath, talking to himself)** I reaaally prefer when these jobs go cleanly...

Kirishima: (far away in the background, distraught) Traveler?! TRAVELER! WHERE ARE YOU!

Hawks: (Cocky hum) .. So. Here's the deal. You and that *very* valuable satchel you have on there, are coming with me. **(Slight shuffle as they try to make a move, hawks stopping them with his blade)** Ah ah ah. I'm afraid you're not going anywhere. You were requested to be brought before the King alive, so I'd very much prefer to keep your blood *unspilled*. I can see your upset, but unfortunately, this is one invitation you can't really turn down... **(mutters)** Believe me I've tried.

(pause, the listener calling for Kirishima)

Hawks: (annoyed) You're a brave little thing huh? Yelling like that...too bad for you..**(noise of effort as he picks them up)** I'm the fastest set of wings at His Majesty's disposal.

Kirishima: (alerted) Huh? Traveler! Someone's got you?! **(furious)** Hang on! I'm coming! Whoever you are, you better put them down NOW!

(The sound of footsteps rushing through the brush getting closer,)

Hawks: (amused) I was informed you'd be traveling with some.. Interesting individuals. Welp, can't be helped then.~ Time to go~ **(running and then a flap as he takes off)** Hey, watch the squirming! I doubt you want to be dropped from a height like this, little bird!

Kirishima: (On the ground, looking up) H-hey..! **(panicked, anger)** PUT THEM DOWN RIGHT NOW!
BRING THEM BACK!

(angry dragon roar and heavy wingbeats as Kirishima tries to follow them)

Hawks: Ah... So your little friend's a dragon shifter? Heh... Hold on tight then, birdie. Can't have him trailing us. Ah.. Looks like he can't quite keep up. Shame..~ It was a valiant effort on his part though, trying to save you like that. **(grunt as the traveler gets a hit on him)** Oof! Heh, nice hit, but I've had far worse than that...so just hold on huh? We got a lot of ground to cover and I doubt you want to travel it dangling upside down because you couldn't behave~

(sound of wings as Hawks and Kiri fly on, carries on into narration)

And just like that...you were gone... Just when I thought that horrible day couldn't get any worse, the gods decided to laugh in our faces. I flew as hard as I could, pushed myself to the very limit...my wings *screamed* at me as I watched you get further and further away. **(shaky exhale)** Even when the King's Hawk had you miles above the ground.. you were still fighting...screaming for me...**(voice tight)** Under the moonlight, I could see the expression on your face clear as day, how you reached out for me to save you but...There was nothing I could do...and it broke my heart.

All I could do was fly as far as I could...try to keep up, to keep my eyes on that bright red dot as it vanished over the horizon with you, towards the northwest... I followed, and followed, for as long as my wings had the strength to carry me. And gods, did I pray that if we continued in the direction I had seen him take you, we would find you again...

Katsuki hadn't... seen what had happened. While I came after you when you ran off into the night, He... Stayed put. In.. **(soft, shaky sigh)** In his mind, he thought you needed some space, like *he* did. He thought.. You'd come back to the camp for the night, and we'd sleep like normal and wake up and.. Figure out with clearer heads what we should do about the gem and.. Your situation.

(Audio fades out, and fades back in to the sound of fire crackling, some shuffling)

Hawks: Alright! **(rubs hands together)** I've got us all set up for the rest of the night. We still have a ways to go until we reach the port town, but a little sleep won't put us too off schedule. It's a little hard to fly when I kept nearly nodding off... **(Stretch sound)** .. mm..

Struggling like that won't do you any good, by the way. That's ghouls spider silk rope around your wrists and ankles.. I'd stop wasting my energy if I were you and get some rest for the night. **(kneels down)** ... Feisty little thing aren't you? Let's get this bag and your shortsword off so you can sleep a bit better. **(thud, pained grunt from Hawks)** Ow! Who headbutts people?! That's just rude. **(huff)**

(pause)

Mn..fair. Kidnapping someone is rude too, so...I'm gonna say this makes us square...ow...(small sigh) Look. I don't like this any more than you do alright? Just be glad the King wants you back *alive*...small mercies and all that.

(pause)

Why? **(sigh)** Hells if I know...Well. I may have overheard some talk here and there, but I'd rather not lose my head for telling you. I took an oath when I accepted this line of work for the King.. I'm sworn to secrecy.

Huh? No I'm not kidding. I'm a contractor you could say.. here to do what the king and the rest of his men can't or won't do. Royalty doesn't quite fancy getting their hands 'too' dirty, when there's someone else that could be paid to do jobs like this. It's not my place to spill the King's secrets anyways...

... Hm? You've got somewhere to be? Ah, too bad about that pretty bird, guess there's been a bit of a change in plans. Yeaah yeah, I know how inconvenient that can be... **(Huff, rolling out bedroll)**

Heh, you really like to ask questions, don't you? Well, you see.. It's gonna take us about a week to get to the port. Once we cross the ocean, we're soon gonna be on the way back to the capital city, Edolyn. You and your little group got lucky, you got on the last set of boats across the sea before the merfolk closed it down for the season. **(annoyed sigh)** Now we gotta take the *long* way back...Don't worry though. I'll make sure you get there in good condition. I'm not gonna starve you or beat you or anything. Might be a bit of a rogue, but I'm not a *monster* or anything. So just...breathe.

(Soft sigh) .. Here. Lay still. I know the bindings aren't comfortable, but I can't trust that you won't run off or even make an attempt on my life while I'm sleeping. Ah ah- Relax... I'm only putting this feather in your satchel. It's so that I can keep you in my sights, it's not harmful.. Don't worry your pretty little head over it.

Mm.. Let me pull this blanket over you... It's a bit chilly in these parts. **(Softly)** There.. That's it. .. I know you don't trust me, I wouldn't either if I were in your place. But.. I promise you, little bird. I won't hurt you.. I'm only here to deliver you from point A, to point B.

... **(hum, grunts as he gets up)** Alright, try to get some rest now. We'll be flying for quite a while the moment the sun rises. **(He shifts a bit, getting comfortable himself with a yawn)** ... Rest well.

The stranger, who only referred to himself as 'Hawks', hadn't lied to you. Although he was your captor, during the days that you flew over the landscape, he treated you well enough. He made sure you were fed and well hydrated, and he was kind enough... But unfortunately, he had eyes as sharp as the alias he went by. The chances of escaping him were little to none. It was strange, as if he always seemed to know what you were up to, even with his back turned. You thought it may have to do with the feather that was planted on you, but.. With your hands bound, there was nothing you could do about it anyways. As the days went on, and the farther you flew with your captor, the bright orange of Havenfall fell away from your sight completely.. And with no sign of Katsuki or I...you knew you were on your own.

All the while, he and I were searching. We barely spoke two words to one another, as I was absolutely *furios* with him about what had happened. About how he hurt you...and I was even madder at myself, for being unable to make him see reason. Telling him you were taken captive and stolen into the night was one of the hardest things I have ever done... We immediately packed up camp, even leaving some more non essential things behind with how quickly we set off to track you down.

As the days passed, we chased after you relentlessly. I couldn't help but worry deeply about why he had taken you so suddenly. With what we had learned about the Gem from the book and letters we found in that old library, we knew just how sought after it was. We.. could only hope that you weren't harmed by your captor over that *stupid* gem.. The gap between us and you was widening and I'll admit I was panicking more than a little. Especially when we arrived at the nearby town, asking around.. only to discover that no one had seen a man with red wings other than myself. It was so...so hard. Hard on both of us to think that we had lost you for good. I wasn't.. Taking it well, but.. Katsuki. He was silent and cold, and I could tell he was distraught over how the two of you had left things before your disappearance...but he kept it bottled up inside.

We spent days traveling from town to town, checking every Inn, asking around if anyone had seen an avian with red wings. Not a soul had seen you or your captor... And before we knew it...a whole week had passed...and we were starting to lose hope.

You on the other hand, hadn't lost it yet. Even as you traveled, you kept your sense of direction.. Thanks to what Katsuki had taught you about the constellations, you were able to keep track of where you were headed. You didn't know where on the continent you were...but you did know that the Straihorn mountains were North and you knew..that if you wanted a chance to get there in time...you had to escape...and soon.

(Audio fades back in to the sound of them flying)

Hawks: ... Hey little bird. You tired today? You've been so gutsy and full of fire this entire time, but since we started flying today you haven't struggled or cussed me out or tried to bite me even once. Heh..... **(soft sigh)** .. Silent treatment now, huh? Yeah... I can't blame you... Who *likes* being abducted?

.... **(soft sigh)** Look, while I don't know exactly the details of *why* I'm escorting you to the King, I *do* know that the Gem you have on you is something that's been highly sought after. Not sure if you're aware, but Solterra's been almost unrestful as of late... Can't pinpoint exactly why or when it started, but.. I feel it. It's uneasy..tense.. Something's brewing behind the scenes that I can't exactly piece together.

... **(huff)** .. Well, good news. We've arrived at the port. Made good time too, the sun's falling over the horizon... There, see the torchlight down there? Just up ahead. We'll be staying at the inn for the night, and then setting off tomorrow morning. Hold on tight, we're coming in for a landing in that alley over there.~

(Hawks flies down, landing in the entranceway of the somewhat bustling port town)

Now, little bird... Stand still for me. Hold out your arms. **(Slicing sound. amused)** What? This town might be known for being a bit rough but if I just walked in with you all tied up..wouldn't make things particularly easy for either of us. Now... I trust you'll stay close to me while we enter the port.

(Softly) Look at me, little bird....I mean it okay? I just want this to go smoothly. **(Soft hum)** .. Such angry, beautiful eyes. You're not making this job easy.. I'll tell you that. Now.. Come along. We need to get to the inn and secure a room for the night.

(They start walking into the port town)

Merchants and vendors are quite busy this time of year! With the merfolk running the ocean's waters this season, there's less fishing boats making trips into the sea. That means more demand for freshly caught fish from the ocean here and even from some of the islands...**(small amused laugh)** Well it matters because that

means there's a lot more people, and a higher potential for danger so...stick close to me through these busy streets, and please--keep close hold on your satchel unless you want to be pickpocketed.

(they continue walking for a bit, the tavern's sounds getting closer)

There it is, up ahead. 'Deep Sea tavern and Inn.' Sounds pretty lively doesn't it? The town's drunkards can't help but to indulge, it seems~ Follow my lead. I have someone inside I need to talk to briefly.

(they step inside, music lively and loud as they wind through the tavern space) Now... where is he? Ah--there he is. Just keep it quiet and let me do the talking alright? This guy isn't exactly as nice as I am so shhh~

Hawks: Hey there.

Informant: You're late, Hawks.

Hawks: Late? Heh, I'd beg to differ. I'm here, aren't I?

Informant: (Annoyed scoff) .. You keep this up and I'll inform the king of your infractions. You got the cargo then?

Hawks: Right here.

Informant: Unbound and able to walk freely?

Hawks: Can't just stroll into a town with someone all tied up now, can I? Besides... They're well behaved. They won't stray. They know they can't escape anyways.

Informant: (Irritated sigh) .. Listen, and listen well. You are to board the earliest ship departing tomorrow the moment the sun breaks the horizon; it's called the Zenith's Dawn. It's leaving from the south dock and you can -not- miss it, do you understand? You miss that boat and you'll need to explain yourself to the King. I'm done taking the fall for you, bird brain.

Hawks: Understood, good sir.~

Informant: The cargo that that traveler carries is precious, I do hope you understand the severity of the situation, and the importance of this mission. It *must* be seen through.

Hawks: I get it, I get it. No need for a lecture. So, what's the uh... procedure once we land and I present them to the King?

Informant: You insist on prying. Did you forget your job?

Hawks: Nah, I'm not prying. Just wanna make sure I get it right. Last thing I want is to misstep and end up with my head parted from my neck.

Informant: (long sigh) ... All I know is that once you give them to the king, he'll be confiscating the cargo they're carrying. An interrogation will obviously be conducted on them, then, they will be handed over to the court magicians. If they fail to comply or they're found to have no use...they'll be tortured for whatever information they may have been withholding, and executed.

Hawks: (a bit taken aback, but quickly collecting himself) .. Exe-... Mm. Right.. Of course. Typical procedure... **(Clears throat)** .. Well then. We have a long couple weeks or so of travel ahead of us if we want to get them to the King in a timely manner. So..! We'll be off for now.

Informant: *Don't* be late, Hawks. Your excuses will only take you so far...and if you're unlucky, they'll take you right to the executioner's block.

Hawks: (Walking away now) Right, right! You have my word, we'll be more than on time! **(To Traveler)** ... Hey. Sit down at this table for me, alright? I'll only be a moment.

(Walks off for a bit, comes back with some drinks, hums as he sits down and slides a tankard of it towards them) You drink, little bird? ... Hah.. well. I thought maybe you could use one after all this traveling... and well, hearing that...**(sigh)** It's just mead...so don't look at it like that, it's not going to bite you. Might be a bit strong, but it warms you right up after the first sip.

Heh.. Never tried it or something? Give it a chance then.

(long slow sip, heavy sigh) Gotta say, that wasn't what I was expecting to hear. Despite how that sounded..he's not so bad. The King I mean. If anything, it's probably his council of advisors dripping poison in his ear on how to handle this whole...situation. It's...delicate...but...mn..

Meantime...I'm going to grab us some plates and then -we- are going to hit the hay. Daybreak comes earlier than you think and we're gonna want to be well rested.

(shifting as he gets up and walks off to do just that, tavern ambience for a bit, footsteps return, bowl gently placed down)

Here we go. Got us some stew and some bread to go along with it. It's nothing fancy but, I see a lot of people eating this so, figured it's a safe bet. Lots of customers for a dish means it's remade fresh a lot..less chance of getting sick, heh.

(He settles in and takes a bite) Mn. Pretty good, especially after a whole day of flying....**(another bite and he pauses, swallowing)** You alright? You look like you're about to cry....The stew...reminds you of someone? **(realization)** Oh the Crimson...**(sympathetic)** I'm sorry little bird...I really am.

I promise things will look better in the morning...but trust me when I say, you're *going* to need all the energy you can get. Voyages can be long, you know...so **(gently)** C'mon...eat up.

.... Mm? **(Takes another swig, swallows)** .. Heh.. You and your questions. And those doe eyes that stare at me, waiting for an answer.. How could I deny you when you look at me like that? **(long sigh)** ...

So...you wanted to know why the King wants you huh? **(sigh)** I know I told you I didn't know many details of why I'm escorting you to Edolyn... But, I may have lied a teensy bit. Are you really that surprised? **(Amused huff)** Well.. I can tell you what I do know. It's not a lot, but it's... Probably good that you know what you're getting into. It'll be our little secret... I trust you'll keep it, or *both* of us might be losing our heads later. Well.. the music is loud enough, and everyone around us is quite drunk, ah? Shouldn't be too much harm in spilling some information...

You see, when you came into the capital city for the first time with that jewel? You didn't know it but you set off all kinds of wards and alerted the court of royal magicians. Wards that have been in place since the kingdom was *founded*...so...yeah, you drew attention to yourself. Most people don't know this, I got some intel because of my position with the king. But yeah... All of Edolyn is surrounded by a ward that can sense magic.

Ah..? You don't know what a ward is? ... You really are such a strange Traveler. Perhaps you're just not that familiar with magic, then? .. Well. Basically what I'm trying to tell you, is that when you stepped into the boundaries of the Capital city of Edolyn, that Gem in that satchel of yours basically set off a silent alarm for those who put that ward in place. Sort of like a protective wall that's sensitive to certain levels of magic..levels that are deemed a threat to the kingdom as a matter of fact... And when you stepped through it into the city, the king's magicians who are in charge of monitoring it immediately became aware that something was up. That make sense to you, little bird?

(drinks for a second) .. There's like an old prophecy about that gem you carry, about its powers.... Our beloved King wants to take it for himself, keep it out of the "wrong hands" and all that...use it to keep people in line...(sigh, says this next part with a bit of a tired tone) .. make sure no one gets any bright ideas of kickin' him off the throne y'know?

...Kind of rubs my feathers the wrong way I'll be honest... Right up there with the whole...Executing you thing. It's not right. You don't seem to be malicious or have any "grand scheme" to overthrow the kingdom or anything like that... So something that severe is just...cruel. If there's one thing I can't stand...it's cruelty. Grew up in it myself...last thing I want to see is someone innocent sent to the block for the misfortune of being in the wrong place at the wrong time... All I know for sure is that while you do hold something of great power, something that I only thought was some fairy tale I heard as a child... You don't seem like the type to use its power for unsavory things. **(sigh, laughing)** Mn. I think I drank too much, I shouldn't have told you all that...

... Hey, little bird? If there's anything at all that I think you need to hear, is that... I know you're going to do what's right. **(Softly)** When I had taken you.. You weren't just dead set on getting back to that dragon companion who was following you. You seemed set on something else... Some mission.. Right?

... Look. I don't know where you came from, Nor do I know why or how you've come into possession of that gem. But.. If that thing you carry is as the legends foretold, then.. You should destroy it. Destroy it to save the people of Solterra.

(there's a long silence for a moment, before Hawks huffs a small tipsy chuckle and drinks once more, before setting down his tankard with a thud)

Mnn.. Room's spinning a little... This tavern sure does give you pretty big tankards of this stuff. Guess I got a bit carried away and drank myself a bit stupid... Heh. How about we go rest for the night then? The both of us have a long day ahead of us tomorrow.

.. Come on now, little bird. Let's go.

(audio fades out then back in to the door opening, the tavern ambience quieting as he closes the door)

Whew...(grunt as he plops on the bed, he sits down on the bed with a heavy sigh, he sounds tipsy) Heh, I know I'm going to sleep like the dead tonight.

... Hey, come here a moment for me. Let me see your satchel. ... **(Soft huff of a chuckle)** Listen, If I was planning on stealing it from you, I would have long ago.

(Traveler hands him the satchel carefully, and he opens it) I'll be taking this feather back.

Heh.. why? Well,... I don't think I have a use for it anymore. Was using it to track you.. Keep an eye on you since you're such a flighty little thing. But.. who am I to keep you caged like this, little bird? You have somewhere you need to be, don't you?

Ah...? 'What about me?' Don't you worry your pretty little head about that. I'll be fine... No harm in finally breaking my chains so to say, spreading my wings~ Perhaps it's best for the both of us to fly free. What say you?~

You have quite the spirit. I admire that, so much. **(lowly)** Now.. listen to me carefully. I drank a bit too much mead, so I'm going to fall asleep here in a moment... Would be a shame if that prisoner took some of my supplies... *and* the coin purse I'm leaving on the dresser here... headed off to the adventurers guild in town to stock up on some supplies for an adventure of their own..~ Mmm.. Look for the blue roof okay? It's the only one..don't worry about it being closed, heh, they stay open all day and all night.

(chuckles softly, playfully) mm... Well, little bird. I'm off to sleep then...don't go getting into trouble understand? **(yawn, sigh as he settles down)**

And just like that...he was out..well, at least he *appeared* to be. Hawks had turned his back to you, his wings folded lightly and his breathing evened out. This was it. The moment you'd been waiting for. Slowly, you moved to where he had placed your things and started to gather them up, wincing when your shortsword hit the floor but there was no movement from him, but instead, an exaggerated and very obviously fake snore.

It seemed his offer of a chance to run was genuine and you were going to take it. Gathering your things, you helped yourself to the coin pouch he had so generously left out for you, and also some of his supplies. Knowing it wouldn't be too safe to waltz back down into the tavern, especially with that informant there, you tie some of the ghouls spider silk rope to the bedpost and open the window. Carefully, you shimmy down the sticky rope until your feet hit the rough cobblestone of the street below, quickly pulling up the hood of the cloak you took.

It was late, so the foot traffic was minimal. Most of the people that *were* wandering about were too drunk to spare you a passing glance as you hopped off the rope and began to make your way through the town. You knew you had to reach the outskirts, it was too well lit to see the stars properly to orient yourself, but first, you had to make one more stop: the adventurer's guild. Spotting the blue roof that Hawks had told you about, you hurried onward, heart racing in your chest as you pushed the heavy wooden door open.

(footsteps, door creaks open)

Desk clerk: Good evening. Welcome to the Costin Adventurer's guild, how may I be of service? Hm? Oh yes, our supply catalog is right here. Because this is a port town, all patrons are welcome to utilize it.

Please... Do feel free to let me know what you need. And do make it quick, please. My shift is coming to an end and I'd rather not spend it waiting on an indecisive patron.

... I can't help but to notice, you have quite the powerful aura, young traveler. Do you normally carry heavily enchanted items? **(Leans in, softer but a bit more tense)** Or perhaps... is this some sort of special occasion? Oh..? You have no idea? I'm sure you'd be well aware if you were carrying something with *that* much power... I know I would. I'm practically suffocating in whatever magic is emanating off of you. Quite odd that you don't know...

Mm.... Your satchel. It seems to be emanating from there.

... ah?... **(huff)** Right. So you've chosen what supplies you're after then? .. Mm. Carved wooden bow, with how many? 40 arrows. Suppose that's a smart choice, seeing as you only have a measly short sword on you. What else? ...a flint and tinder, two herbal elixirs, one pack of travel rations..a waterskin, a small bedroll.. And a compass. That's all then?

Fine. I'll be back. You better have the coin for these things.

At the time, you thought of the adventurers guild vendor to be a bit... rude. But you didn't think much on it. You figured, there were people who were rude back in your world, so of course there'd be people like that here. If there are humans, there are always bound to be ones who aren't very kind to others.

(The vendor makes their way back, setting down a bag)

I've put it all into a travel pack for you to wear. I don't suppose you want to lug all of these items around in your arms. Unfortunately the bag isn't free, but I'll give you a discount on it since you didn't ask for it. Now, that'll be 7 gold.

(listener hands over the pouch, and they sort through it a moment, before handing what's left back) ... Pleasure doing business with you, strange traveler.

Before you head off... Out of curiosity, you're traveling alone.. Aren't you? Mm... I see. Would have assumed someone such as yourself wouldn't be stupid enough to set out into these parts alone. May I ask which way you're headed?

... So secretive. That's fine. It's not as if I have a knife to your throat. Safe travels, then.. Farewell.

(Listener slowly heads out, a bit weirded out by the way the vendor was acting)

The exchange was uncomfortable to say the least. The clerk watched you, almost unblinking as you hurried out into the night, but you quickly shook off the feeling as the door closed behind you. Inquiring a nearby guard, they pointed you to the northern route out of town, and with nothing but a small bag of supplies and a rather rickety bow... You set off down the path, comforted by the traveling passersby on the way. The road seemed somewhat busy despite it being so late, but you chalked that up to it being close to a port town and all. It wasn't so bad though, it helped you feel less alone..

You walked as long as your legs could muster the strength to carry you; but eventually, your lack of sleep over the past week had finally seemed to catch up to you. Sleeping alone tonight wouldn't be easy.. And you knew that. Pushing that thought out of your head, and.. The thought of Katsuki and I with it, you set up a small little camp. Unappetizing rations were what you ate by the fire that night, but it wasn't anything you weren't used to at this point.

As you lay your head down on your bedroll that night, you stare up into the blue ocean of stars that litter the skies above you. You could only hope that the rest of this journey would be forgiving... Perhaps you could do it alone, but.. The company of others traveling by your side was something you had already missed dearly, since parting ways with us. Slowly, your hand moves up to the necklace that still hung around your neck, your fingers gently clasping around it... There was no sugarcoating it. You missed us dearly, even if you were still angry at Katsuki.. And.. We missed you too. As your tired eyes began drooping under the weight of your exhaustion, you wonder.. If we were staring up at those same stars above that night.

(audio fades, and fades back in to daytime ambience)

You awoke the next morning to the gentle sound of birds fluttering overhead, singing their morning song. The wind blows gently through the short grass all around you, and the nearby river bubbles gently over the smooth rocks. For those couple moments, you feel at peace... But it doesn't take long for the lingering dread to set back in as you sit up, and stare at the pathway you must keep heading down. There was still quite a long way to go.. And the thought of doing it alone.. It wasn't easy, but Katsuki had made it clear what he thought on the matter of getting you home so...you didn't have much of a choice. If you wanted to get back home? You were going to have to do it yourself. You weren't lucky enough to have the map that Midoriya had drawn for us, but.. You did have the compass you bought from that strange adventurers guild merchant and perhaps you could find more out about the altar when you drew closer to the mountains.

With a plan in mind, you got some water and had a small meal before you packed up your camp, and following the compass north, you set back off down the path. You walk alongside fields of lush green grass, smiling softly at the occasional traveler that passes you by. Some with horses, some on foot... Some pulling big wagons of supplies, and one in particular was driven by a man with large dog ears on his head, a fluffy tail wagging behind him. Your eyes met and a grin appeared on his features as he called out to you.

Merchant: Hey Traveler! Apologies but, you look as though you've had a bit of a rough morning. If you're heading the same way I am, I wouldn't mind giving you a ride for a bit? Aw, it's no trouble at all! Here, I'll scooch over for ya. Hop on!

... So, where ya headed off to? ... Ahhh, just the next town up ahead? That's perfect then, cause that's where I'm stoppin'! Just let your feet relax for a bit, you're lookin' a little weary. I'll getcha there.

Normally, you wouldn't trust strangers. But.. Your feet were so sore, your legs just as much so from the hours of walking non stop. Plus, it was an open wagon. If anything at all went south, you could jump off and flee. The man kept his word though, and after about an hour or two, he drops you off in a small village. Before parting ways with the friendly beastman, he gives you two loaves of bread, neatly wrapped in silky cloth. You thank him for the generous offer, before seeking the villages' inn to rest your head for the night. Thankfully, the stay at the inn was very cheap, and you could afford it with what coin you had left from Hawks.

The next morning, you didn't waste much time before you found yourself back on the road. Following the path and your compass, you trekked onward. On your way, you put the knowledge you gained from us to work. You hunted some star rabbits and foraged for wild food, just like I taught you to pad out your supplies..and you even foraged some herbs for medicine! If anything you could sell them when you reached the next town from here, for some extra gold. This journey was going to be long, and you knew you needed all the coin you could get. The days went on like this, your compass leading you further inland, northeast...and after about five days, you felt you had made some good progress on your own. Things were.. Going smoother than you thought. At least.. So far.

In the morning, as you packed your camp and continued onwards, the air felt...different as you traveled. It was growing warmer, more humid.. and you were unsure where it was coming from. After a couple hours of walking, the path seems to continue on into a large forest. You stop just outside of it, your eyes flitting over to land on a wooden sign that sat in the ground, overgrown by strange looking, green vines. Etched into the sign, read Karsuva Forest... Travel at your own risk. Avoid the lake.

Putting the unease those words gave you aside.. You continue on, into the forest. This place was between you and your way home, so there was nothing to do but push through. It wasn't clear what kind of dangers may lay ahead inside the lush green forest, but at the very least.. You knew how to use a bow, and your sword. As you walk, you take notice that the further you make your way in.. The more dense the forest became. It was jungle-like in nature, vines wrapping around the thick, tall trees.. Flowers and fauna that was unlike anything from your world as far as the eye could see, full of bright colors and rich heady smells of nectar. At the very least.. It was daylight, and visibility was good. You could only hope that if any creature who may want to attack, you'd see it coming.

Your tired legs take you far through the seemingly never ending jungle, the strange birds above singing and filling the forest with noise. You didn't mind it though.. It almost seemed soothing. The sounds were all the same, and that was for the better.. Until suddenly, you hear a strange bellowing, from some.. Unknown creature. It wasn't far from where you stand.. In fact, it seemed to have come from up ahead, further down the path.

With a heavy swallow, you keep pushing forward, hoping that whatever made that sound wouldn't see you. It wasn't until a couple moments later.. You hear a familiar sound..no..a familiar *voice*... And a loud explosion that shakes the earth beneath your boots.

(Traveler walking for a bit, before another bellow from the strange creature, followed by a distant shout and a loud but distant explosion. The dialogue gets louder as the traveler gets closer, eventually hiding a bit in the bushes as they watch Kirishima and Bakugou fight a large snake creature.)

Kirishima: (loud, genuinely irritated, strained from the fight) Katsuki! I told you to watch your explosions! This forest is dense, you wanna start a fire?!

Bakugou: Shut up! If YOU hadn't exhausted all your damn magic FLYING every single waking moment, you'd be able to transform and- URGH-! CRUSH this thing instantly! WATCH IT!

Kirishima: (loud, strained grunt as he blocks an attack from the creature, voice getting angrier) Don't go blaming THIS on ME! You're the reason we're in this mess in the first place! If you hadn't yelled at the Traveler like that...over something that *wasn't their fault* by the way! We wouldn't BE HERE! OF COURSE I'M GOING TO BE FLYING EVERY GODS DAMNED DAY, WE HAVE TO FIND THEM!

Bakugou: DON'T lecture me right now you stupid red lizard! NGH-! **(Harsh panting for a second)** Why the HELL is this thing so armored?! Its scales are impenetrable!

Kirishima: (Growly huff) I'll lecture you all I want KATSUKI. **(growls and swings on the beast, claws clanging off the scales)**

Bakugou: I GET it, trust me! I *get* it.. I messed up back there, I KNOW I did! You won't let me forget it! We'll find them- shit.. DODGE!

(The creature wails as it attacks)

Kirishima: (yelp as he dodges, panting a second) “Messed up”.. yeah that’s putting it lightly! We’re going to find them and then you’re going to APOLOGIZE and you’re going to -mean- it Bakugou Katsuki or so help me-

Bakugou: (angrily) I KNOW! (more explosions)

Kirishima: I TOLD YOU NOT TO USE THOSE! (Growl) Stick to your swords!

Bakugou: DON’T TELL ME WHAT TO DO! This thing is seconds away from making us its lunch- So I suggest you let me do whatever I HAVE to- Ngh..! Damn it!

Kirishima: You’re always so stubborn.. Gods! Why.. Why the hells do you have to be like this?! **(Grunt)** ..! You never listen, you hurt everyone around you.. Hells, you chased off our traveler and- .. And I’m scared we won’t ever see them again! I’m scared they’re hurt or-.. Or worse..!

Bakugou: (yelled) YOU THINK I’M NOT SCARED TOO?! I...**(startled as the beast lunges)** SHIT..! IT’S GONNA- NGH- MOVE EIJIRO!

(heavy sound as Bakugou shoves him out of the way)

Bakugou: (sound of pain as he’s snatched and coiled around)

Kirishima: (Heavy grunt as he’s shoved onto the ground) ... K-Katsuki..! NO!

Bakugou: (Choked, strained as the snake's tail is coiling around him) Shit- it’s.. It’s got me..! I can’t- .. can’t goddamn breathe... **(During the dialogue he’s hyperventilating a bit, trying to breathe while he’s being constricted)**

Kirishima: (panicked breathing for a bit as he tries to claw Bakugou from the snake, but the scales are too hard) I’ll get you out of there, Katsuki.. Please, save your breath! I got you! **(Devolving into a bit of hopeless crying)** Please.. Save your breath! Katsuki look at me, stop hyperventilating.. I’ll get you out of there!

(The snake hisses and wails, grabbing Kirishima and tossing him aside)

Kirishima: (Heavy grunt as he’s tossed hard, having hit his head on a rock. He’s a bit woozy) .. No.. NO! I can’t lose you too.. I can’t..

(Suddenly, the Traveler springs into action, noticing they have a clear shot from the bushes. They pull back their string on their bow, and let an arrow fly. It hits the serpent directly in the eye- the only spot it wasn’t armored. It shrieks in pain, letting Bakugou go. The creature bellows in pain as it slithers away with it’s wounded eye)

Kirishima: (Grunting as he weakly sits up) .. Where did that arrow come from..? Hello? .. Who’s there? **(Soft gasp as the Traveler steps out from the bushes)** ..

Bakugou: (Coughing, catching his breath, Weakly, sitting up, his voice soft, almost relieved) .. Traveler..