

Chapter 109

Tibs destroyed the wagon blocking the entrance to Sebastian's camp with a blast of water. He didn't bother shaping it using one of the two attacks he knew. He simply massed all the essence he could muster and sent it ahead of him into a chaotic wave. He felt a lot of it dissipate before hitting, but the nice thing about having such a deep reserve of an element so simple to refill was that there was still enough left there was only wet kindling and bodies by the time he crossed into the camp.

They were dry as he walked over them as he pulled the water back into his reserve, as well as that of anyone that came close enough to exchange blows with him. Tibs pushed the disgust he felt at how easy it was to turn them into husks. They chose the wrong side, now he made them pay.

Arrows stopped in the air, glistening with water, then fell. He sent the occasional attack to dissuade the archers, but began hoarding his essence. Sebastian wouldn't fall easily.

Finding the man proved easier than Tibs expected.

Too easy.

He sat on a wooden throne where the road ended at the new forest which had become the back of the camp. Sebastian wasn't cowering away after the display of power Tibs had shown. He sat there, in the large, ostentatious, had to be uncomfortable chair, with a crystal goblet in one hand and a smile on his lips.

Tibs stopped well away from the man, the one standing to his left, and Carina, strung up on a contraption of metal, wood and ropes by the muscular man who had a hand on the wooden wheel at the side of it. Tibs fought the urge to rush to her rescue. He couldn't sense her, but she looked to have only minor injuries.

He couldn't sense them through the odd sense in the air. It wasn't what Ganny did to the third floor, or what the block of green stone had caused, and it made Tibs cautious. Looking around for what caused it didn't reveal it, but it showed him that while Carina was restrained now, she'd caused damage before that. Fully loaded wagons that made walls to control movement with the camp were pushed away, the earth scratched with the motion. Bodies were littered under them, flayed by debris, from what Tibs could make out.

"Do you know what one way to deal with your kind is?" Sebastian called over the distance. "Exhaustion."

Tibs sensed his reserve, closed his eyes and suffused himself with Purity long enough to chase away any trace of that. Sebastian might think he knew everything there was to know about Tibs, but since the guild didn't, the man couldn't.

"It doesn't matter how powerful you are," he continued as if this was a conversation with a friend, instead of being yelled at a hated enemy, "you'll eventually run out of that, oh so, precious thing none of you can do anything without. Stamina. You might be able to call on that essence as long as you want, but if you can't muster the strength to move, well." He motioned to Carina casually. "I win."

"Let her go," Tibs growled.

"Or what?" Sebastian asked, amused. "You're going to blast me with water? You're

going to use one of this trinket the dungeon hands out and throw fire at me? Or muss my hair with wind?" he sipped his goblet. "Go ahead. Try something."

Tibs didn't. Learning to keep himself controlled while channeling fire had proved useful when he let it go. He could see Sebastian goading him into acting through his anger, demanding he do so. Which meant the man had protections in place. One of the green stone attached to his outfit would be from the shattered block, maybe all of them. They stopped all essence use from affecting them, so Sebastian would see them as a great first line of defense against Tibs or any adventurer.

Tibs stepped forward. He didn't need essence to kill Sebastian. All he needed was a knife and to be within arm's reach. The man was overconfident enough to let that happen.

He crossed half the distance when Sebastian's body language changed, going from relaxed to expectant, and Tibs froze, alert for anything to happen.

Except what did.

Line of essence sprang out of nowhere around him to latch onto his arms and legs as if they were ropes, and Tibs had a fleeting memory of Radcliff and his lasso. Then, as the odd sense over the area dissipated, eight sorcerers stood around him, easily two and zero paces away, each holding one of the line of essence, pulling on it, on Tibs's limbs, and holding him in place.

Each of the sorcerer had the element they used for the line holding him, Water, Fire, Earth, Air, Corruption, Darkness, Light, Purity.

Sebastian stood and beamed. "These sorcerers cost me a fortune, but the assurance you would be powerless so I could break you is worth the world to me now."

"You think they can keep me from killing you for what you did to my town? For taking my friend and hurting her?" Tibs grinned. "For all you know, the dungeon gave me something that lets me use metal, and crystal, and void."

Sebastian laughed. "They really don't reach you anything, do they? Haven't you wondered why these eight elements are called the core elements? Every other element is related to them, a child of a sort, and unlike my son, these children listen to their parents. Or anyone wielding the parent element. So go ahead and try to use metal to get yourself out of this. Or wood, or even mind. Please, exhaust yourself testing their power."

They were epsilon. This didn't have to sense the essence within them to know that much. They had to be for them to work outside the guild, and he found he couldn't believe the guild was greedy enough they would take Sebastian's coins knowing he would turn those adventurers against the town and their dungeon. And Carina had mentioned that sorcerers and their research were worth a lot of coins, so it was simple for them to repay their debt and leave. Few sorcerers found the life of adventuring appealing.

Tibs thought the Fire and Darkness were Gamma, the others Delta or Epsilon. Tibs hadn't had enough encounters with adventurers of those levels to tell them apart, but he could tell who the weakest of them was, and, amusingly enough, it was the Water Sorcerer.

Tibs sent his essence along the line of water, feeling for a crack in the tight weave. The sorcerer had experience and training over him, but Tibs had his deep reserve to fight with. He smiled, locking eyes with the sorcerer as his essence reached her hand, and pulled

as hard as he could on the water within her.

Tibs gasped as instead of pulling her essence to him, his was ripped away and into her. He let go, but the shock was enough the only thing keeping him standing were the taut lines of essence.

“Not so powerful after all, are you?” Sebastian said smugly, then waited. Once Tibs’ breathing was under his control, he glared at the man. “Now, here is what will happen.”

“Don’t do anything he wants!” Carina yelled, then screamed at Sebastian’s raised hand, and the muscular man turning the wheel a quarter turn. Sebastian lowered his hand, and the wheel was moved back. Carina panted quietly.

“You’d think she’d learned by now,” Sebastian mused, then smiled wistfully, “But Jackie always made friend with people who were as bad as he was.”

“I’m going to make you pay for that,” Tibs said.

“Me, pay? It’s you that’s going to pay, kid. You’re going to pay for a very long time. You think you get to humiliate me like you did and walk away? Or even just die? Do you have any idea the damaged you caused me? The stories of how this town stood up to me reach my city before I could catch my breath and I’ve had to put more would be usurpers down than even my forefather did when he build my family. No, I am going to parade you before every, bound to may will by what these fine sorcerers will do to you. You’re going to be my puppet, with no desire but what I give you. You won’t even have the will to suffer for what I’m going to make you do to this town in my name. How I’m going to have you bring me my son, so I can teach him to stay in the place I set for him.”

“I’ll never do what you want. They’ll have to kill me before I let them do anything to me.”

“Kids, they let you run a dungeon a few times, and you think nothing can hurt you.” Sebastian raised his hand and Tibs tensed, as did Carina, but he snapped his fingers. “But maybe you’re right. Stories are you’re the youngest crook to be thrown in one of them and walk out. And you’ve done so often enough to have accumulated an arsenal of magic, and kept it out of the guild’s hands. I’m told that’s actually impossible to do, so yeah, maybe you can stand up to eight powerful sorcerers until it kills you. And if you don’t, nothing I’ll do to you afterward will matter to you anymore.” He grabbed Carina by the hair as the muscular man handed her to him.

With a scream, Tibs ‘saw’ the ‘x’ of the attach before him, etched it and mentally stabbed with essence and the jet of water appeared, thick and fast, and vanished paces away from Sebastian’s head, the essence ripped apart.

“Well, that’s surprisingly disappointing,” Sebastian said. “I guess none of those items have recharged enough for you to do something truly impressive. Don’t worry, I will make full use of them once you hand them to me.”

Carina elbowed him and Sebastian shook her. “Stop making yourself more trouble than you’re worth, girl. Don’t you want to look honorable for your man?”

Carina froze, surprised.

Tibs stared, also surprised, but now noticed the necklace of green stones around her neck.

“Oh, you thought you two kept that hidden?” Sebastian laughed again. “I’ll grant you, you have the decency of keeping those things discreet, unlike that son of mine, but I’ve had spies watching you for months.”

“We’re friends,” Carina said.

“Teammates,” Tibs added. “Family.”

“And how intimate of a family are the two of you? Disappearing almost every night, making sure it’s never together. Didn’t take a lot of thinking to know what you two were up to.”

“I was breaking into nobles’ houses,” Tibs said.

“I was reading forbidden books,” Carina snapped. “Tibs is a brother to me.”

Sebastian snorted. “You know that in some places they frown on siblings doing what the two of you do? I mean, I never had any interest in my sisters, but what business is it of mine who you take to you bed? Who you grow especially attached to.”

“We’re not special to each other,” Carina said in exasperation.

“Really?” Sebastian pulled out a knife. “Then, this isn’t going to matter to him?” He put the blade to Carina’s neck.

“Stop!” Tibs yelled.

The man smiled. “That’s what I thought.”

“That isn’t because I’m special to him,” Carina said through gritted teeth. “It’s because he’s a good person, unlike you.”

Sebastian shrugged. “I’m someone who gets what he wants. That’s served me better than putting other people before me.” The smile he gave Tibs was filled with malice. “What caring for someone else gets you, that they be special or not, is this.” With a quick motion, he cut Carina’s throat open.

Tibs sent purity at her before the knife was done moving, but it was ripped away. With a scream, he sent more. When the reserve in his bracer ran out, she channel purity and kept trying to heal her as Sebastian held her up by the hair. As her essence thinned into nothingness.

Tibs kept trying until even his deep reserve was nearly empty. He could force the rest out, Alistair had warned him using up all his essence could kill him, but if he’d had the strength, Tibs would have sacrificed himself to bring Carina back.

Instead, all he could do was cry and the pain of another loss buried itself in his heart.

“No,” he growled. He channeled water, froze the pain where it was. He wasn’t going to let pain bring him down this time. Not while the man responsible was within reach. Ice was good for that, stopping emotions from interfering. He raised his head, the tears still falling, but his voice hard. “I am going to kill you.”

“Impotent rage, how wonderful that is,” Sebastian said, smiling. “Don’t you understand yet that there’s nothing you can do to me? I won. I took the most precious thing from you. Soon, they’re going to take any desire you have away and you will be mine.”

“Them?” Tibs said, straightening. “You think they can protect you?” Tibs released Water, keeping his control of the ice through the reserve in his bracer. He didn’t replace it with anything.

“His eyes,” the Sorcerer before him said. “How?”

Tibs pushed the remnant of his essence along the line of water essence. He didn't react as it made contact with the woman's hand, as he wove his essence in with hers. He was utterly uncaring to her screams as he ripped the essence out of her and into his reserve. As soon as he had enough, he sent another strand over the line of Earth.

He didn't react to Sebastian dropping Carina in his surprise. Or the shock as the Earth sorcerer joined the withering woman in screaming.

The line of light loosened around his leg and Tibs latched onto it. “No.” He sent his essence along the line reaching the sorcerer before he could get over his surprise panic. He had his essence reach for each of the sorcerer and pull on theirs until there was nothing left. When his reserve was full, he continued forcing essence into it.

He froze the pain caused by it shattering and the excess essence filling him.

Sebastian still hadn't moved from next to Carina's body, looking at the frail and old bodies the sorcerers turned into before the last of the essence left them.

“You really think anything can protect you from me?” Tibs asked coldly.

The muscular man ran.

Tibs switched to water and felt his body crackle with the motion of raising his hand. Then the man froze in place as the essence impacted him. He wobbled, then tipped over and shattered as he hit the ground.

Now, Sebastian backed away.

“No. You don't.”

The essence didn't impact the man. The green stones dispersed it, but that was fine. The stones only affected the essence he manipulated, not what it made once he was down. So he surrounded himself, Sebastian and Carina with a wall of ice, and thickened it, making the space with ever smaller.

“Men like you killed Mama,” Tibs said, knife in his hand as he approached Sebastian. His body no longer resisted moving, now that the essence was out of it. “They destroyed the small world I had, and they never paid for it.” He pulled the essence from the outer side of the wall so expand the inside, as he stepped toward the retreating man. He stored the excess back in his no longer full reserve. “I made a new world here, made a family. Carina wasn't special to me like you meant. But she was special. She was part of my world. She was part of my family. And you took her away from that.”

His smile was emotionless. “It's okay. This time I get to make the person responsible pay. And I have all the time to do it. Then, I'm going to make anyone who helped you do it pay, too.” He considered the man. “Them I'm going to have to make it quick. Because I'm going to take my time making you pay.”

“Don't,” Sebastian said, his voice cracking. A broche clipped to his chest flashed red and woven fire essence flew at him. Tibs batted it away carelessly, then closed the hole it made in the ice wall.

“I don't care how many enchanted items you have. It's just going to make thing go slower, and right now, I want things to be slow. I want you to suffer for a long time, because once you're dead, I won't be able to make you scream anymore.”