

Jecht was drunk, again, and Auron was furious. He could barely even stay seated: his rage kept him on his feet, tense and fuming. “He’s humiliating us,” he muttered, his teeth clenched almost as tightly as his fists.

Braska, pale and slow while his spent magic power slowly returned, looked over towards the outline of Jecht’s form, and watched its shadow be cast and recast erratically against the deep amber and ochre shades of the ground. “He’s not in a good way,” he mused, in a voice that exhaustion had drained of its usual confidence. “He’s not happy – Auron, would you –”

Auron marched forward to obey his master’s command, or come as close to it as he could bring himself to: Braska would never issue the order to fight or even scold someone who was supposed to be an ally, but what other option did he possibly have? He approached Jecht, the man’s drunkenness making stealth entirely unnecessary, and snatched the bottle from his clumsy hands.

“You’ve had enough of that,” he said, not even deigning to look at Jecht’s face; “you’re disgracing us all, you’re upsetting Braska –”

Jecht responded with a sniff so loud that Auron wondered if it was some expression of disdain, before he finally glanced towards him and noticed: Jecht was in tears. They dribbled pathetically out of his ugly, red eyes, making trails over his cheeks that pointed towards his scruffy little beard. The sight was repulsive; it was hard not to look away again immediately.

“I miss them,” Jecht heaved. “My wife and kid – what if I never get to see ’em again? I don’t think I’m gonna be able to go back –”

He buried his face in an arm and howled, too far gone to have any sense of propriety. He would certainly have no memory of this in the morning, and perhaps that was why Auron shed his defensive stance, approached Jecht, and carefully pulled him into an embrace.

Jecht squirmed in Auron’s grasp, but Auron held him tighter until his protests gave way to the occasional small spasm. “What the fuck, man,” Jecht mumbled, his voice muffled in Auron’s shoulder. “I thought you hated me.”

“Yeah,” said Auron quietly. “Kind of.”