

[Adam POV]

Holding on to anger, onto hate, is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned.

I could understand that much.

I knew Ur and Lilia meant well.

I knew they were right about many things, but that didn't make it any easier for me.

Some say that revenge and retaliation only perpetuate the cycle of anger, fear, and violence. But, I find that lacking, not everything can be forgiven, sometimes the only thing left to do is taking matters into one's hands.

I knew Ur meant well, I did. I truly did.

And I was sorry I had tried to hurt her, just because I was hurt.

That being said, I couldn't let those who had taken so much from me, from everyone get away with what they had done.

The pain and suffering they had caused were simply unforgivable.

I knew what I had to do, but I also knew that it wouldn't come without a cost, even if it was the right thing to do. The darkness that chapter of my life, my past had left inside me was growing, and I could feel it slowly taking over.

"We got the money," Ur said, drawing me out of my thoughts with a sharp intake of breath. He beamed and patted his pocket as if to make sure that the cash hadn't gone anywhere.

I looked up to see her holding the check for our reward.

"Good," I replied, my voice flat and emotionless.

I can't do this.

I can't pretend I'm strong enough to wait any longer.

I'm not.

Now that I know I can reach them, I can't let this be any longer.

Even if I try to win this fight, my heart would overrule my mind.

Ur's gaze softened as she looked down at me, and a smile tugged at the corner of her lips. "Come on, brat," she said. "Let's go home."

"I can't do this, Ur, I tried, I really did, but I can't," I muttered, my power bursting out of control as the ground beneath me trembled, sending out invisible shockwaves of energy in every direction. Pebbles and dust scattered in all directions as the force of my power pushed everyone around me back, knocking most out of commission.

"You don't have to do this alone," Ur stepped forward and grabbed my arm, forcing me to meet her gaze. Her eyes pleading me to stay with her, to turn back towards the guild with them. I could see her body was tense, ready to spring into action if I made any move indicating I intended to proceed.

Despite the urgency in her voice, despite the worry clouding her eyes, I could see that she wasn't willing to actually fight me.

"Tell the old man I will be gone for a while," I replied, pulling my arm away from her grasp, and with a heavy sigh, I turned around.

Ur stepped forward, a fierce light in her eyes as she thrust out her hands and the air around them coalesced into shimmering crystals of ice.

However, before she could do a thing, I moved behind her, blurring in and out of sight.

"Bakudo #61. Rikujokoro," I muttered inches away from her, pointing my index finger at Ur, as a spark of yellow energy ignited at its tip, summoning six thin, wide beams of light that rushed towards her midsection, leaving her unable to move.

"Adam, don't!" Ur said, her voice coming out as a choked whisper as she struggled against the spell, but I had already turned and began to walk away, leaving her alone.

Lilia would find her.

Or Ur would find Lilia the moment the spell wore off, which would happen in a minute or so.

I moved through the vast terrain between towns, blurring in and out of sight with each step I took, as I made my way to the meet-up location I had gotten out of the ones I had tortured, knowing that in there, I would find what I was looking for.

Hopefully.

Pushing those thoughts aside, I continued moving, the miles adding up beneath my feet with each passing second. The further I went, the longer the shadows stretched in front of me until eventually, a small town came into view on the horizon.

The place I had been looking for.

Entering the town, I made my way to the place the old bastard had said his contact would be.

A small bar that was apparently popular amongst criminals.

The bar in question sat snugly near the port of the small town, its rough-hewn stone walls and thatched roof giving it an ancient, rustic charm.

The scent of saltwater and fish wafting through the air, mingling with the aromas of roasting meat and freshly-baked bread that emanate from the bar's open windows.

If it weren't for how I felt right now, I would've appreciated the scene, how ironic.

Taking a deep breath, I approached the bar, and as I did, I noticed a group of sailors sitting outside, their rough hands clasp ing flagons of frothy ale as they regale each other with tales of the sea.

Walking past the group, that for the most part seemed to ignore me, I entered the bar, walking into the dimly-lit tavern, seeing the warm fire crackling in the hearth and wooden tables and benches filled with people all around.

The walls were adorned with tattered banners and weapons, and the air was thick with the sounds of jovial chatter and lively music played on a lute and drum.

Watching me enter, the barkeep greeted me with a friendly nod, gesturing to an empty table in the corner, before bringing out a steaming mug of ale and a hearty stew filled with chunks of tender beef and root vegetables before I even took a seat, or ordered for that matter.

On that note, the guy didn't even ask for my age before giving me a mug of ale.

"How much?" I asked the barkeep, taking a sip of the ale and feeling its warmth spread through my body.

He gave me a toothy grin, waving me off. "Minors eat on the house, lad. Enjoy it."

I raised an eyebrow. "Are you sure about that?"

The barkeep chuckled. "Aye, I'm sure. You look like you could use a bit of warmth in your belly. Besides, I already serve enough bad folk around, so this is my one good deed."

"I see," I replied, looking at the food with an empty gaze as the guy walked back to his post.

Now, all I had to do was wait for the man wearing a purple hood.

I would tear them down, without mercy.

I just had to wait a little bit longer.

As the hours went by, I waited patiently, taking small sips of ale and picking at my stew as I kept my eyes peeled for the man in the purple hood.

The tavern was starting to fill up with more people, and the noise level had risen considerably.

Suddenly, I felt a light tap on my shoulder. I turned to see a tall, broad-shouldered man with a thick beard and piercing blue eyes, wearing a leather tunic and had a sword strapped to his waist.

"Excuse me, lad," he said in a deep voice. "But I couldn't help but notice you sitting here all alone. Mind if I join you?"

I could feel magic within him, not a lot, but enough to make it obvious he was a mage.

Maybe he was the guy I was looking for or just a random person, I guess I was about to find out.

I nodded slowly, gesturing for him to take a seat.

He pulled up a chair next to mine and signaled for the barkeep to bring him a mug of ale. "My name is Brandon," he introduced himself.

"Adam," I replied.

Durin took a swig of ale before leaning in closer to me. "You look like you're waiting for someone," he said in a low voice.

"And that's your business how exactly?" I asked, my tone sharp and to the point.

Brandon held up his hands in a gesture of peace. "Easy there, lad. I was just making conversation. No need to get all aggressive."

I remained silent, taking a sip of my ale before turning my gaze back to the crowd of people.

"So, if I might ask, who are you waiting for?" Brandon asked, his eyes scanning the room as if searching for someone himself.

This guy is either someone too noisy for his own good, or just a terrible criminal with no sense of self-preservation. Then again, I was sealing most of my power.

"Just someone I have business with," I replied vaguely.

"Aye, I understand," Brandon said, nodding knowingly. "I'm here on business myself, truth be told."

"Oh? What kind?" I asked, wondering where this would go.

Brandon leaned in even closer, lowering his voice to a whisper. "Let's just say I'm looking for someone who owes me a debt. And when I find them, they'll regret ever crossing me."

How strange... even though the level of power I was feeling from him was below even Lilia's. There was something dangerous about him, something that made me keep my guard up.

"Well, I hope you find whoever you're looking for," I replied with a nod.

Brandon chuckled, finishing off the rest of his ale. "Oh, I will. That I can promise, lad."

As Brandon signaled for another round of ale, the door of the bar creaked open, and a figure draped in a dark purple hood stepped inside, freezing my heart as the air around me grew still.

The man I was looking for.

He was here.

He was finally here.

Silently, and still processing what was happening, I watched as the man sauntered over to the bar, his movements smooth and measured, before taking a seat on a stool.

I rose to my feet, my muscles tensing as I felt an icy pulse of anger course through me.

However, before I could take a single step, I felt something.

Brandon bared his teeth in a snarl, his face contorted with rage. With a yell, he brought the mug of ale up above his head and crushed it into pieces on the wooden floor, "There you are, bastard!"

The man in the hood merely chuckled, his voice smooth and oily. "Ah, it's you. So good to see you again. I was wondering when you would come by."

"I will kill you!" Brandon roared, drawing his blade as he rushed at the man. "I'll cut off your head and send it to your mother as a message that there are no second chances, you bastard!"

"That sounds lovely, but I'm afraid we are out of time," the man in the hood said, his voice chilling to the bone.

At this, I began to sense something in the air, something faint, yet noticeable, like the glowing embers of a fire that was never there.

Realizing something was wrong, I reacted quickly and grabbed Brandon and the Barkeep by their shoulders, yanking them out of the tavern as the air shook with a deafening boom, with the building exploding into a thousand pieces.

At my side, the barkeep and Brandon lay out unconscious thanks to some sort of spell that had affected them before I had taken them out.

"Hm, I did not see that coming," The man in purple muttered, walking out of the now-demolished building; completely unscathed. "You saved two people, how honorable of you."

"I have but one question, do you work for the Tower of Heaven?" I asked, my voice low and icy.

The man in purple smirked, his eyes flashing. "Why is that important to you?"

"It is because if you do, I will make sure your death is as painful as possible," I replied without hesitation.

"Oh, in that case, yes, I do work for the Tower," The purple man chuckled mockingly. "So by all means, do try to kill me, I wholeheartedly welcome the challenge."

"As you wish," I replied, taking a step forward.