

## Interwoven

### RESPONSIBILITY: PART TWO

**63<sup>rd</sup> Day of the Pure Snow, 17 AoE**

Juni's legs wrapped so tightly around Tobias' waist that the tiger could barely move. The hyena was sprawled out before him atop his bed, dress bunched up around her waist and fistfuls of the sheets balled up in the deathgrip of her paws. Her back was arched, jaw slack as she gasped for breath in the thick, musky air.

It reeked of sex, as they did. The pumping of the prince's hips only helped intensify the sights and sounds and smells visited upon him; the thick humidity of the air; the wet, dirty squelches of his shaft as it slid between her folds; her moans and his intermingled like a lewd duet in some dingy whorehouse. He hunched over her, breathing heavily of that intoxicatingly thick air.

Until, that is, one of the hyena's arms wrapped up around the back of his neck and tugged him down. Their muzzles met, tongues tangled in a desperate, hungry kiss as he slammed himself down inside her. Sharp whimpers and moans were stifled by his muzzle as he rammed himself as deep into her as it could go, his sheath scrunching up and grinding her sensitive little nub with each needful thrust.

Tobias rolled his hips, shifting the angle and intensity of each thrust in new ways as those legs around him shook and clenched around him. Her insides followed; muscles milked at his pumping shaft as it throbbed threateningly inside her. The tiger broke the kiss and arched his back, slowing his thrusts for a moment with a long growl of pleasure, teeth clenched as he fought to stave off the pleasure boiling away inside him. Tobias staved off his release as even Juni relented a moment, gasping for breath beneath him and flopping back, writhing and grinding herself down on his malehood. Her jaw fell open again, but no coherent words emerged.

Her eyes spoke volumes, however. They were hazed over, lidded with lustful need and intent as she sprawled out provocatively before him. It was almost the same position she'd laid in when he'd entered the room, dress hiked up and with her dripping slit on full display. He'd stared at it and known in an instant that she'd been working herself up before his arrival. Waiting for him. Waiting for what she knew would come next. What they so rarely dared do in the prince's own chambers.

As the pressure that built inside him abated a bit further and he felt safe to resume the fullness of his rutting, Tobias leaned down to nip and nibble at the side of Juni's neck. The servant moaned, louder, as she bore back up into those thrusts, forcing his malehood as deep within her as it could reach. She whispered in his ear but the words were of no language but perhaps the most primitive ones. He knew them as begging and need and knew what she wanted. What his body wanted. What they needed.

And so with that much permission given, he bit down harder. She gasped as his teeth dragged across the flesh of her neck, her arms joining her legs as they wrapped tight around him. She held him close and tight, tugging him deep inside her as he fought to buck his hips harder still. Her grip couldn't be broken, only loosened, until she got what she wanted. The pressure mounted again as he pounded away, drenching her thighs and his with the combination of their fluids.

Each time her moans grew louder, his teeth dug in just a little harder. It never failed to turn her breathy moans to quavering whimpers, and her insides squeezed and massaged at his shaft all the harder. It teased him on, begging him in no uncertain terms to spill his seed. Her body demanded it and with every thrust between those soaked folds, so too did his. Tobias felt himself rushing once more toward the edge, but this time he didn't even bother to try and stave it off.

She was close. He was close. Hips ground upward, shifting his thrusts just right; just in the way he'd learned she loved. She began to howl. His jaw clamped down. Her legs twitched and locked around him. She pulled him down to the hilt, every inch trapped inside. Her body rose against his, meshed and mingled as a whistling whine escaped her throat. Tobias growled as he felt his balls twitch once. Twice.

Then his shaft flexed deep inside her and they were there. His growl shuddered, turning feral for a moment as he began to unload inside her. Her body soaked him up, drinking in his seed as he offered it like a flower to the rain. He held onto her tight, the tiger's malehood utterly imprisoned by Juni's snug confines. She milked him eagerly, and he desperately offered all that he had.

When at last he was empty again, he pulled off of her neck with a gasp and a shuddering sigh of relief and release. He panted for breath; Juni's pants rapidly matched his in tempo until they were breathing in time. She smiled up at him as he reached down to brush a lock of headfur from her eyes. "You... are *such* a quick study, my prince."

"I had a good teacher." He chuckled back down at her as he leaned in to lick at her nose. "And you are definitely the most attractive of them by far."

"Oh? Should I be flattered? Master Iannus is my nearest competition, isn't he?" She chuckled as she arched her back, writhing beneath him. Deep in her sex, his overstimulated and seed-drenched shaft twitched. "Goodness... *gracious* me... I never expected you would take to this... to *me*... with such..."

"Enthusiasm?" He chuckled.

She shook her head and sighed as she lay back. "That's one word for it. Oh, my..." Her eyelids fluttered closed as she reached up to run a paw through her headfur. Her chest continued to heave with her pants for breath, and Tobias leaned down to gently nuzzle between her concealed breasts. "Careful, my prince, unless you're looking to give me more of a mess to clean up."

"Mmm. Feels like most of the mess is in you." He gave her neck a gentle kiss before he lifted his head again. "I'm fortunate you're not feline. I don't think I'm ready to be a father just yet."

“I could think of worse fates than to bear your children.” She ground her hips up against him again, and Tobias shuddered and groaned in response. “You know that could still happen, my prince. Does that thought keep you up at night?”

He shivered as a sliver of reality broke through the post-coital haze that fogged his mind. Tobias had in fact thought about that. He’d tried to bring it up with her several times, but every single time it always seemed the conversation led to her spread across his bed, his cock pistoning between her legs, and his seed spilling into her body. Even then, the thought sent a twitch of fresh life through his spent malehood. “That you are not feline lessens the chances considerably.”

“Ah, so then I must be greedy, must I?” Her breathing slowed, her eyes lidded to a sultry gaze as she lifted her hips to press against him once more. One of her paws released his sheets to take the prince’s paw in her grasp, guiding it to her belly. “Take your seed as often as you can provide it? Spill it into me over and over until you see me grow with your children?”

Again Tobias felt a shiver of arousal run through him. The thought worked deeper into him than he had expected, and without thinking his hips had already begun to grind down against her, massaging his load just as deep into her thoroughly-seeded passage. He liked that thought. Liked it far more than he expected. Liked it far more than he ought to.

It was deliciously torturous that he forced his own hips to pull back. They stubbornly, stickily remained together for a moment before her legs relaxed their death grip around his waist, and his shaft popped free of her, still throbbing in the air. “You’re a damn tease.”

“As my prince desires.” Juni lazed back atop the bed, her paws left to roam over her belly with a deep sigh. “It’s only a matter of time, you know. The more we keep this up.” She peered up over her chests at him as he stretched his back. “If I’m honest, I’m still surprised. Pleased!” She moaned softly as one of her paws drifted lower. A pearly white bead of spent seed was collected from her slit and massaged back inside her. “Mmm... *very* pleased indeed.”

Tobias couldn’t help but blush; his ears ran hot as he glanced away from her. “You’ve only grown more brazen since we began this... whatever this is.” When she quirked an eyebrow at him, he smiled and held up both paws. “It’s not a reprimand. You know I enjoy it, and you know I encourage you to speak your mind without restraint around me.”

“And you know I do this because I want to.” She sat up and propped herself on an elbow, her legs curled up on the bed as she watched him. “Not because of some royal order. But because you ask. You don’t have to remind me.”

“If my coming into the room and jumping you immediately counts as asking, perhaps language has changed much in the last few months.” He smiled as Juni began to laugh, and sighed quietly to himself. It was good. The last few months *had* been good, he mused as he walked over to the window to bask in the cold Pure Snow air. It felt especially crisp against his nethers, so caked in their mixed juices as they were.

“Is something wrong, my prince?” The question sounded earnest as Tobias looked up at the stars. The night was unusually clear, and it painted a brilliant picture of the inky black sky.

Finally he shook his head and looked back over his shoulder at her. The hyena met his gaze with a smile of her own. “No. Just thinking about how much has changed, and in so short a space of time. It has been... a lot.” He smiled to reassure her as soon as the words reached his ears. “It has been amazing. *You* have been amazing. I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

She shrugged as she lazed atop his bed. “Thankfully, you don’t have to find out anytime soon. It’s been my pleasure... and I don’t simply mean what you do to me.” She chuckled and closed her eyes. “Your princess is going to be a very lucky female, come the rite of new life. I fear I will be quite jealous, my prince. You have become a very eager and very considerate lover.”

“You’ve been a great guide on that journey, to be fair.” He stretched again, arching his back and clasping his paws together above his head. “I think... I needed it. This. Whatever this is, whatever it was meant to be... I needed it.” He smiled over at her as his arms dropped again. “Thank you.”

She tilted her head slightly to the side. “You’re not about to ask us to stop this, are you?”

Tobias blinked, but his smile remained. At least he knew how she felt about the arrangement. “No, no. I wasn’t saying that. Just... expressing my gratitude. There’s no immediate need to end whatever this is that I can imagine.”

“Good, because I didn’t really want to look for a new job.” She sat up slowly and shifted to the edge of the bed, legs splayed wide to show off his handiwork. “And if you wanted to express your gratitude, my prince, you could always come back over here.”

The sight drew a groan from Tobias; his malehood began to twitch and peek back out of his sheath again. “Of all the maidservants I could have bedded, why did it have to be an insatiable one?”

“Says the prince who keeps up admirably with her.” She grinned and shrugged, leaning back on her paws with a soft sigh as she regarded his growing length. “Honestly, I’m still surprised you don’t want to tell your father. Earn some appreciation and respect from him.”

The tiger scowled as some of the arousal left his body at the mention of his father. “I told you a lot of people suggested I do something like this.”

“And that you don’t have to do what they say. I know.” She crooked a finger and beckoned him forward. The tiger’s footsteps came at once, as if possessed. “But you don’t deserve what they say about you. All those horrible things...” She shook her head as he marched right in between her legs, his tip dragging up and across her belly as he reached the bed’s edge.

“This... all of this? It’s not about them. It’s about me. And... of course, it’s about you too.” He felt himself begin to blush again as she shot him a mock glare and sat up higher. “You know what I meant. I would never speak down to you, or of you.”

One of her paws reached up. A leg rubbed slowly up and down along Tobias’ as Juni’s fingertips teased lightly at the head of his shaft. He moaned softly and closed his eyes, and finally leaned forward as he felt her guide his length back down lower. She shuddered as he

brushed down along her folds, and then the hyena's moan joined his as he slid smoothly back inside her.

It was almost loud enough to overcome the sudden opening of Tobias' bedroom door. Almost. He gasped and twisted to the side, but Juni's legs snapped up and around him. It trapped him there, balls deep in the hyena as he became helpless to watch Brett step into the room.

This was it, he thought. This was the worst possible cap to his good mood.

The older tiger didn't notice at first. His eyes were on a book clutched in his paws as he sighed to himself. "I don't know why it needed to be me running such a meaningless errand, but mother wanted you to- oh." His head had lifted just enough for his eyes to go wide. Tobias froze. Brett froze. Juni froze. The brothers' eyes met. Hers looked anywhere but at either of them. "Oh. Hello."

Juni cleared her throat but Tobias quickly brought a paw down to gently cover her muzzle. He gulped as he looked Brett up and down; the older prince still as locked in place by his shock as Tobias was by Juni's legs. They were clamped tight about his waist, and any attempt to dislodge himself from them only shifted his still hard shaft inside her. That he was hard at all in spite of being caught so exposed was probably just his own surprise, he reasoned. He couldn't move. Why should his malehood be any different?

Tobias watched, horrified, as Brett started further into the room. His nostrils flared and he looked down at the hyena servant, still doing her best to not meet his gaze. Panic hit him for a moment as his thoughts ran wild. What if *he* wanted Juni? What if he tried to take her away from him? He felt his lips curl back in a silent growl at even the merest prospect.

But then, rather than say a word, Brett dropped the book on the end of Tobias' bed. He glanced at the title – *A Collection of Sylarian Folk Stories as Compiled by Adrienne Anurra* – as Brett quickly turned and hurried back to the door. He was out in the blink of an eye, and slammed it closed behind him. And then, once more, Tobias and Juni were alone.

And the tiger's cock was still *painfully* hard.

"Well look at that." Juni's words were muffled as she slowly rolled her head to face her partner again. Tobias' paw lifted away to reveal her smile. "Guess those rumours won't last much longer, huh?"

His blood ran cold. That was a positive, yes, but... "No. Instead I'll be seen as an adulterer. Forsaking the promise made to Princess Sarina." He sighed, sagging slightly over her.

In spite of all of that, his malehood remained overwhelmingly stiff. It didn't help as Juni clenched down around him, her insides massaging teasingly at his length as he looked down at her. "You don't feel so bothered by it."

"I didn't want it!" He shook his head as he stared down at her grinning face. "If you weren't holding me down, I wouldn't even be inside you now!"

"I'm not holding you down." Juni's gaze dropped along her body to their conjoinment, and Tobias frowned as he followed suit. Sure enough, at some point during that ordeal, her legs

had fallen slack again. In the confusion, he'd somehow missed it entirely. "I let go once he started coming toward us. In case you needed to stop him."

Her hips began to grind in long, slow circles against him, teasing along the full length of his shaft. It sent tingles all the way up and through his body as the fires of his lust, briefly slaked, roared back to life again. "You don't *feel* like you've got a problem with it. If anything, you feel like you a-ahh!"

The grind and thrust stole her words well, but the kiss he leaned over her body to plant sealed them firmly away. He gripped at the hyena's sides as he allowed himself to be carried away on that hot tide, Juni's muscles falling slack for a brief moment as he ground himself down harder inside her.

She was right. He wasn't as bothered as he'd thought. It didn't matter. None of it mattered. This was what everyone wanted? This was what everyone had to see? This is what they needed to know? They'd know. Brett would make sure of it. They'd know, and it was liberating. Freeing. He moaned into Juni's muzzle.

Her shaky paw reached back up around him, cradling the back of his head as she leaned up into the kiss. Her hips rose with them, pushing back against Tobias and teasing him into a rapid-fire series of quick, deep thrusts. Her moans turned ragged. His breathing quickened its pace. His shaft flexed inside her, pumping once more.

He'd deal with the situation later. He'd deal with Brett later. Right then Tobias felt more alive than he'd ever felt before, and he was damned if he wasn't going to enjoy it.

# # #

It was a couple of hours more before Juni finally left his room.

She'd taken the time to clean up before that, but there was no way after the time they'd spent together that there was any way to hide the rutting she'd received. She'd admitted with a blush that she was surprised that she wasn't leaking as she stood up to go. At the thought of his seed drooling down the insides of her thighs, Tobias had almost delayed her exit further. She had almost helped him.

He'd taken much longer to clean up. Hers was a strong scent and he'd absolutely learned in the months that they had dallied together how best to make himself presentable once more. Careful layers of perfumes mixed with a thorough scrubbing that at times set his oversensitive flesh tingling was the order of the day. Even if the rumours would fly about his lover once Brett got to talking, it wouldn't do for the tiger to walk the halls of his home reeking like he'd just been in a whorehouse for a full hot, Shining Light day.

No one seemed to give him any sorts of odd looks as he left, however. If Juni had said anything to the servants, they never let on. None of the guards reacted to him any differently than they ever did. He passed by Master Zane in the hall, but aside from a nod of greeting there was nothing to suggest word had travelled far at all. Yet. Tobias knew that gossip leaped from muzzle to muzzle in the castle like the sparks of a forest fire. It would only be a matter of time.

Brett, however, proved more elusive than Tobias had thought. The dining hall was empty, as were the stables. His bedroom, too, was just as barren. There was no sign of him

anywhere, as if he wasn't even in the castle anymore. That wouldn't have been unusual, really, but frustrating nonetheless.

If anyone would know, he reasoned their father would. Even as Tobias stepped away from Brett's doorway and started toward his parent's chambers, he found himself practically face to face with Fredrick. Tobias recoiled in surprise as his eldest brother stared at him unflinchingly. "Wh... damn it! Are you trying to scare me?"

"Don't be ridiculous. I don't need to try." He brushed past Tobias and waved for the younger tiger to follow. "Join me."

Tobias frowned. "I can't. I'm looking for Brett, and-"

"I wasn't asking. I was telling." Fredrick's pace slowed only slightly as he glanced back over his shoulder. "Join me. Right now."

He hesitated and glanced around. Tobias tried, usually with quite great success in fact, to avoid being in close proximity to Fredrick. Nothing good ever came from anything his eldest brother had to say or do. At best, it was the heir to the throne on another little power trip as he found a new way to humiliate and degrade him. At worst... well, the beatings hadn't been repeated in years, but Tobias wasn't about to let them start again. He jogged forward to catch up.

Fredrick remained silent for a few moments, as if looking to test Tobias' patience. Test it he did, and the younger tiger eventually sighed as he followed Fredrick around a corner and into the main hall. "What do you want?"

"Can I not simply want to spend a moment catching up with my little brother?" He didn't even turn his head.

Tobias narrowed his eyes. "No. What do you want?" They weren't children. He wouldn't let himself be cowed. If Fredrick wanted to hurt him, he'd have to do better than he had in the past. Tobias felt like a whole new person.

If anything, the response must have tickled Fredrick somewhat. He laughed quietly to himself and shook his head, before he actually turned briefly to meet Tobias' gaze. "You know, if Brett hadn't sworn on his life, I wouldn't have believed it. Still didn't, really, but just *look* at you." His eyes drifted up and down Tobias' body. "I guess he was right; you do have balls after all. And you even know how to use them. What a surprise this is."

The growl came before Tobias could stop it. "Tell me what you want or I'm leaving."

The older tiger's smile vanished in an instant. A snarl replaced it as Fredrick shouldered into Tobias' side and slammed him into the wall. He turned and stepped in closer, all but pinning his younger brother there. "Balls or not, remember your place, *brother*. You don't speak to me that way. You don't *ever* speak to me that way."

Once upon a time, Tobias might have cowered and nodded. Instead, right then with balls empty of seed and a heart full of new confidence, he leaned forward into Fredrick's face and *smiled*. "What. Do. You. Want?"

Again came a growl as Fredrick's snarl deepened. All those morals and beliefs that Tobias had betrayed felt vindicated in that moment. He could see the anger boiling away in Fredrick's eyes; the older tiger's power meant nothing to Tobias in that moment, and Fredrick knew it. "Be very careful."

"Or you'll beat me. I know." Tobias rolled his eyes. Folded his arms. Fredrick grew more incensed in response, and Tobias wondered just how much better the day could yet be. "Spare me, brother. Please. I am tired, and your *whinging*... it wearies me further."

Fredrick's paw shot up, but it stopped just shy of Tobias' neck. He still flinched back as Fredrick's claws flicked out, trembling with his rage and raking through the air less than a hair's length from his throat. Those fingers lifted slowly, and gently took a hold of Tobias' chin. "You misunderstand me. I'm not the one you should be careful of, Tobias. Not yet."

Footsteps approached from some direction, and Fredrick's claws retracted immediately. His fingers brushed past Tobias' cheek and came to rest on his shoulder, patting at it as if you dislodge some dust or grime. "Congratulations. Truly, on finding someone pathetic enough to let you stick your limp, useless little tailraiser cock into. I *am* impressed."

Tobias bore the abuse with a bored expression as another maidservant walked past. He barely offered the pair of them a glance before he carried on with his duties. "It wasn't so difficult, as a matter of fact. I'll even offer you a free suggestion to help you better please your wife." He leaned forward with a thin smile. "It helps immensely if you clean yourself first."

The chuckle that had threatened to come out became a grunt of pain as the fingers on Tobias' shoulder squeezed tighter. Fredrick's claws pushed free and right through Tobias' shirt and flesh both, and he shuddered against the wall as blood began to stain the fabric. The wounds stung deep as Fredrick pushed him into the stonework. "What was that?"

Tobias groaned. "I'm sorry. I'm s-sorry..." His head lifted as he panted through the pain and flashed Fredrick another quick smile. "I'm sorry... I'm not your wife. Else maybe I'd be enjoying this. Getting penetrated a bit deeper than usuaaaahnnng..." The fingers flexed on his shoulder and Fredrick's claws dug deeper.

"This bravado you seem to have found is certainly amusing, but this *insolence* won't do." He leaned in as his other paw came up. A single claw extended to drag across Tobias' throat. He shuddered in response. Had he gone too far? The confidence and surety that had filled him so completely drained away as if it were tied to the blood that spilled down his chest, arm and back. "Now. How many holes do you want? I can open up *so very many*."

At that, Tobias finally relented. He tilted his head up until he could feel the stone wall with the tips of his ears, throat bared toward Fredrick. His brother wouldn't kill him; he knew that. But as his heart beat faster under Fredrick's threat, his body didn't agree with his mind. "Good. A little compliance at last.

"Your whore. Do you think that I don't know what it is you're doing with this little toy you've found?" He leaned in closer. His breath was hot and laden with the scent of wine, but Fredrick's glare and paw were equally steady. "I want you to understand something. I want you to know it, inside and out.



“I know what you are. I know what you have always been. And... this?” He waved his other paw up and down toward Tobias, “This is not changed by rutting one harlot. No matter how many times you seed her or how many bastards you sire... the *stink* of what you are will linger until the end of your days.”

His paw tightened its grip again, and Tobias squeezed his eyes shut against the surge of pain. One of his own paws lifted to grip at Fredrick’s wrist and pull it away, but the older tiger had always been far stronger than he. “This is what you’re going to do, Tobias. First, you’re going to run to the physician. You’re going to tell Ocher that your precious little whore wounded you in the midst of carnal activity. You will make him believe you or I will give you matching wounds on the other side. You wouldn’t want that, would you? No.

“Then you are going to go back to your room. You are going to stay there the rest of the day. The rest of the night. And you are going to think of one thing, over and over again, until it has sunk into that stupid little head of yours.” His chin brushed past Tobias cheek as he whispered up into one of the younger brother’s ears. “The crown is not yours. It is *mine*.”

Tobias gasped at the words. Wait. Was that honestly what Fredrick was concerned about? Was that his first thought when he heard that Tobias had bedded some female? He began to laugh, more hysterically than he had intended it to sound as Fredrick leaned back again, confused. “You think... that’s what this is? You actually believe that I want...” He laughed harder.

The sound drew more attention from the others in the hall. More than a few eyes turned toward them, and it was only the twist of Fredrick’s paw – and his claws by extension – that silenced the laughter. Tobias grunted as he sagged back against the wall. “Even if... *if* I wanted the throne? How? How would this get me it?” He chuckled again and lay his head back as he let his paw fall off Fredrick’s wrist. His brother was unbelievable. “You’d have to have no heir. Die. Then *Brett* would have to have no heir, and die. You really think I’d be able to... to orchestrate all of that? By bedding a *servant*? What, do you... you think my cock is *that* powerful? A-and you call me a tailraiser?” His laughter returned, more subdued than before.

Fredrick didn’t look relieved, however. If anything he looked more angry than before, and his fingers trembled against Tobias’ blood-stained shoulder. “You have long been an embarrassment, Tobias. I know it. Brett knows it. Mother and father both know it. And I know that you know it, too. So if you humiliate us again... if you bring our family any more dishonour, I *swear* to you it will be the last thing you do.”

With a sigh, Tobias tilted his head toward his punctured shoulder. The bloody spots were deepening as more blood soaked through his fur and clothes. He shuddered to think what would happen when the claws were removed. “Don’t bed William, Tobias; you’re a tailraiser. Don’t bed the servant girls, Tobias; it’s beneath you. What do you want me to do? Visit the stables; give a gryphon a tumble instead?” He snorted through laughter as even Fredrick balked at the idea. “What else? There’s no more monasteries for me to take vows of chastity at. You can’t tell me not to bed anyone forever. I’m expected to sire at least one son with Sarina.”

“See to it that that is all you do.” Fredrick’s anger returned to his face. It banished the disgust at Tobias’ earlier suggestion. Apparently there were even lines Fredrick himself viewed as distasteful enough to never cross. Bedding males and brute beasts apparently were it. “Now. I’m going to withdraw my claws. You’re going to the physician, and quickly so as not to make

a mess of things.” His eyes narrowed. “And if you breathe a word of my involvement with your injuries, I won’t visit them upon you again. I’ll visit them upon your whore. Understood?”

Even through the throbbing pain in his shoulder and his irritation and anger at Fredrick, that threat rang loud and clear. With a wince, Tobias straightened up against the wall and growled back in Fredrick’s face again. “You touch her. You lay a *claw* on her, and you won’t live long enough to see yourself sit on that throne. I swear it.”

Fredrick actually smiled at that threat. He lifted his paw away from Tobias’ shoulder, and he gasped and slumped back. The throbbing came back stronger, pulsing as his blood spilled out into his shirt. “See to it that I don’t have to. Now. Good evening, brother.” He stepped back, turned away, and strode off.

Tobias didn’t move immediately. He lay back, still panting against the wall as he brought his other paw up under his shirt’s collar. The punctures on his back were more numerous than the one on his front, and those he clutched tight as he pushed himself off the wall. He definitely needed to see the physician. Fredrick had been right about that part. He forced himself to take one step forward. Then another.

Fredrick was insane. He had to be absolutely out of his mind to have made the assumptions that he had. To have reached those conclusions. That didn’t set Tobias’ mind at ease any more than it clearly had his brother. An insane prince was one thing. The knowledge of what could happen if – *when*, he reminded himself with a wince – Fredrick sat the throne and became a mad king? That was quite something else.

Before running into him, Tobias had felt on top of the world. Like he could do anything. Be anything. Like he could finally emerge from the shadows as something better than everyone always seemed to look at him as. A person in his own right. Worthy. The tiger that stumbled through the halls now, however? He was a different male entirely. More than Tobias had been. Not nearly what he needed to be.

Quiet, however, *was* what he would need to be for a little while. Quiet while he figured out how to handle the prickly situation he found himself in with Fredrick. Quiet while he tried to think of a way to keep Juni safe from harm. Tobias could be quiet, at least for a little while.

Hopefully it wouldn’t be too long.