

Interwoven

RESPONSIBILITY: PART FIVE

30th Day of the Shining Light, 18 AoE

The training sword, heavier in William's paws than the weapon he'd taken on deployment, rose to block the withering blow delivered by Daniel's. Tired muscles that burned with fatigue barely kept the wooden length steady as William forced the bear's blow back and pivoted. His weapon dipped to parry a strike from Lyle, and then he almost tripped as he twisted about to fend off a third blow from Victor.

He panted for breath, rain pouring down his face and his headfur an absolute mess as he turned and swung, fighting to even lift his sword anymore as Lyle made for another attack. The blow knocked William back, but he used to momentum of the impact to drive him toward Victor; his sword swept up in time to force the older coyote to abandon his attack and move to block. That did, unfortunately, leave him open to Daniel.

The bear however didn't press the attack, and as William turned back toward him it was with an irritated glare on his face. Daniel had stepped back, his weapon pointed toward the ground as he stilled. Rain ran down the length of the blade as it pelted down from the heavens, dripping to the soaked ground "What are you doing?"

"No more." The bear shook his head, though William briefly caught his glare before he buckled over under a cheap swing from Lyle that hit the back of the hyena's knees. He stomped forward a step. "Oi!"

"Stand down." Victor's voice boomed out even over Daniel's indignant shout, but it wasn't directed toward the ursine warrior. Instead, a glance up from William's buckled position on his knees showed his lieutenant's eyes fixed on Lyle. "This is training, not punishment. What was that?"

Lyle gulped as William turned his glare on the tiger instead. "He got distracted. He wanted us to go hard!"

"Daniel had stopped, and Will was chatting instead of fighting. What did you think was going on?" He growled at Lyle, who shrank back from his trainer's rebuke. "Go dry up. Right now."

"Sir." As William continued to pant on the ground, Lyle stiffened and saluted Victor. He paused long enough to look down at William, brushing the rain out of his eyes. "Sorry, mate."

The hyena just waved a paw at him and shook his head as thunder boomed overhead. "I wanted you to go hard."

Victor's growl returned as William hung his head. "Don't you go undermining me after I just chewed him out, boy. I'll get to you in a second." He looked back up at Lyle. "Dry off. Now."

The tiger nodded and hurried away. William closed his eyes as he took the moment to catch his breath. He knew he was in for it, but it could wait. He needed to do better. Be better. Be more. With a growl, he planted the tip of his weapon into the ground and forced himself back to his feet.

He didn't make it. No sooner than he started to rise than Victor flicked his sword forward and knocked William's out from under him. Without that leverage he was swiftly dumped back into the mud with a grunt. Again, he heard Daniel's shout.

"What are you doing, Will?" The voice was Victor's, sharp but concerned as the hyena rolled onto his back. "The dedication's impressive, but you got nothing to prove."

He snarled back up, but not at Victor. More at the sun itself. At everything up above him. "Not to you, sir. No." He sat himself up and quickly batted aside Daniel's offered paw as the bear leaned down toward him. "No, I can... do it myself."

The hyena watched as Daniel looked up at Victor, who nodded back to him. The coyote sighed as Daniel stayed put, paw extended. "Point is you don't *have* to, cub. I don't expect any of my boys to stand alone. Why should you?" When William didn't answer, he sighed again. "Fredrick, right?"

William's blood surged hot at the name; the rain almost boiled off his fur. He grunted as he forced himself back up to his feet and looked Victor in the eye. "I'm here for a reason, sir. I need that promotion. I need the crowns that come with them if I'm to look after my mother."

"Your mother earns her keep the same as all of us." The blunt, matter-of-fact line almost knocked William flat again. He shook his head; how could the lieutenant say something like that? "You think it's gonna do her, or you, or any of us any good if you work yourself half to death? Eh?" His eyes narrowed. "How bad do your arms hurt, boy?"

"They're fine, sir." Again Victor growled; the sound was deeper than any thunder, and that time even Daniel took a step back from the coyote. William winced and felt his eyes dip. Victor hadn't been angry at him in as long as he could remember, and he didn't want to change that. "I... sorry, sir. They're sore. But I can-"

"I don't care if you *can*. I care if you *should*." He stepped forward and gripped both of William's soaking shoulders in his paws, just the way his father had when he was younger. Victor was much shorter, but still had the same concern in his eyes. "Yeah, the crown prince's an arse. The shit that pours from his muzzle's proof enough of that. That doesn't mean you should work yourself to death to prove him wrong. It just means you're a better person than he'll ever be. Alright?"

William felt his jaw lock, and any words he might have replied with were trapped behind it. He settled for a nod, and Victor reached up from his shoulder to cup his cheek and nod back. "Good lad. Now listen up and listen good. I want you to do yourself a favour and take the day. No more high-pressure training. No more fighting off multiple attackers. No more

getting yourself beat on in the rain. No more of this nonsense, if for no other reason than I don't want us all catching cold for this shit. I'll make it an order if I have to."

"That's not necessary, sir. Thank you." He nodded again as a sigh of relief left him. His training wasn't done, but Victor was right. He could pick it up again later... and he was exhausted.

From the palpable relief on the coyote's face, it seemed he'd come to his senses just in time. William's own relief turned to dread as he watched Victor's eyes fix on something behind William, and he stiffened right to attention. "Form up, lads."

Daniel swung in to Victor's right side, and William hobbled quickly to the coyote's left. He straightened to attention, but almost fell out of it again as he saw Zane approaching them. The wolf didn't bother protecting himself from the rain in any capacity. William forced himself to stay put, the picture of military discipline for the kingsblade's approach. If it was a social visit, he'd know soon enough. If not, he needed to be on his best behaviour.

More than a few of the daring soldiers in the rain-slick training yard turned toward them as Zane stopped in front of Victor, Daniel and William. He nodded once to the coyote, but his eyes lingered for a second on Daniel before they found their way back to their leader. "Lieutenant."

"Kingsblade." The coyote bowed his head briefly. "How may we be of service, sir?"

"By being at ease, please." He waved a paw, and Victor, Daniel and William all relaxed their stance. William even began to smile as Zane's eyes finally settled on him. "At least as much as you can in this weather. Good morning, William."

"Father." He lifted his head a little higher and steadied his breaths. They were still a little quick from the training, but the last thing he wanted was for his father to see him tired. "How are you?"

"Better. As you will be in a moment." William frowned as Zane began to smile. "I am sorry I couldn't see you during the ceremony. I know you understand, but I still hoped I could find the opportunity to speak with you as soon as possible."

"A true soldier's duty is to his liege first and himself second." William arched an eyebrow and tried a thin smile of his own. He'd heard that one a few times growing up.

Zane's smile, however, slipped somewhat even as his eyes flashed with a skyward flash of lightning. "Kingsblade Luthis, son of Gandry. You've a good memory. And while true of my position, I don't expect you to extoll the same virtue... though you may change your mind somewhat with this." He reached behind his back and unhooked something from his belt.

When his paw returned to William's view, it was with a not inconsiderably-sized pouch. It jangled with coin, and as it was placed in his paw William could feel a decent weight inside it. "I don't... father, what is this?"

As Daniel leaned around Victor for a better look, Zane's smile returned to its original size. "King Eric wasn't pleased when Tobias told him what Fredrick had done at the ceremony. You'd have enjoyed the reaming he received."

William nodded and hefted the pouch even as Victor stepped forward. “On that note sir, a personal remark if I may. Your son arrived in time to save my life, and held the enemy alone while I was taken to safety. I’m here, my wife hasn’t been left a widow, and my daughters haven’t been left without a father because of him. Whatever’s in that purse ain’t near enough to express my gratitude as well.” He placed a paw on William’s shoulder. “Your boy’s good folk, sir. I’ve thanked him plenty. I thank you as well.”

“You need not thank me. It was his courage and skill that saved you.” Despite that, Zane’s stance softened and the pride practically radiated off him as William met his gaze. “Eric can’t exactly undermine the decision his heir made in the moment. Not without weakening the appearance of the crown, and you know how these princes and royals are all about their appearances.”

William frowned. “All too well.”

“And so this is meant to serve as a small measure of recompense.” He nodded to the pouch. “Crowns. And not an insignificant amount of them. Eric can’t give you the medal you earned or the promotion to full soldier without making Fredrick look the fool, but he *can* compensate you quietly. Off the record.” William stared down at the pouch again. From the weight alone he knew it was more money than he’d ever possessed in his life. If he’d added every coin up it might have not come close to what rested in his paws right then!

Even as he opened it up to begin counting through it, Zane stepped forward and placed a paw over the top. “Not in the open. Not with so much on you.”

There was wisdom in those words, but William shook his head. “I was just counting. To see how much I could send back with you for mother.”

At that, Zane’s other paw lifted to cup under William’s, encompassing both of his son’s paws and the pouch completely. “That will not be necessary. You don’t understand how much has been given to you, boy. This is not just a reward. This is *real* money. Crowns enough to purchase a home.”

William’s jaw dropped as he looked down at his father’s paws again. He’d known it felt like a lot, but to be that much... it was unthinkable! It was insane! The air rushed out of him all at once as he gaped at those paws and what they concealed. “I can... I can get her out. Out of the castle for good. Free.”

“As long as you kept sending money to her, yes.” Zane nodded again as Daniel whistled to himself. “And once your promotion does come through, you will be able to afford someone to stay with her when you deploy. Someone who can look after her for you.” He let his paws fall away again, and William hurriedly pocketed the pouch. “And if you choose wisely, it may even be on useful land, perhaps outside the city. Something for you to pick up later in life, if you decide to trade your sword for a hoe.”

William almost stepped forward, but there was the matter of decorum and standing to consider first. He straightened up, tears welling up in his eyes. This was better than any medal. This was worth the humiliation at the ceremony. This was worth Fredrick, and Tobias. “Permission to hug, sir.”

“Permission granted.” Zane met him halfway and wrapped the soaked hyena up in a tight embrace. William gasped and squeezed him back as best he was able. Sore and overused muscles cried out in regret, and he paid them absolutely no mind as he leaned into his father. “I have said it before, and I will say it again now: I am so proud of you.”

The tears in his eyes mingled with the rain as William leaned his head against Zane’s shoulder. “Thank you, father.” He felt a large paw patting his back; it had to be Daniel’s, and it drew a broad grin from William’s muzzle.

Zane gave him another quick squeeze before he stepped back and brushed down his waterlogged uniform. William did the same as his father looked up into the dark, cloudy sky in time to catch another flash of lightning. “I’m not due back for some time. Would your fellows be able to spare you for a little while so that we may catch up?”

A glance back showed a smile on Victor’s face. “Just so long as you have him back before we bunk down, sir. And if you can make sure he doesn’t go exerting himself too much.”

“That I can promise you, Lieutenant. Thank you.” Zane nodded to William as he glanced back at his father. “Shall we?”

“We shall.” William paused before he turned to Daniel. The big bear was grinning ear to ear as he held out both of his arms expectantly. “Thank you, too.” He lifted his training sword and delicately lay it across the bear’s arms.

He mock-frowned and chuckled. “I was waitin’ for *my* hug, but that’s fine. You go have fun now, right?”

That was something William didn’t much doubt the chances of. It’d make for a brilliant bit of rest after... well, everything. “You’ll get your hug when I’m back, if you can wait that long.” Daniel chuckled again as William turned to salute Victor. “Sir.”

“Have a good day, lad. A good, *quiet* day. That’s an order.” He smiled and stepped back, and Daniel nodded before he did the same.

William watched them head back across the yard before he turned back to his father. Zane looked back down at him with a knowing little smile. “What?”

“Our first topic of conversation, once we find someplace dry and quiet to talk.” He waved for William to follow him, and the hyena fell into step beside his father with a frown. “Perhaps the most important conversation we will have today, in fact. You, telling me a lot more about *him*.”

The frown deepened. “Him? Who do you mean?”

“You know precisely who I mean.” He glanced back the way they’d come, and without even looking William knew that his father was looking at Daniel. He gulped and he felt heat flush his ears as he brushed his headfur back from his eyes. “The big one. I would hear every detail. Now.”

Suddenly, William wasn’t certain that he was going to have all that relaxed a time at all. His blush intensified as he dared to glance back himself; Daniel was already going through

his motions with another trainee, and the poor raccoon's sword was knocked out of his paws a moment later. "It's not what you think, father. I swear it."

"Then I find myself even more interested, because my thoughts were pure as the rain." He ruffled William's sopping headfur, though winced when his son's headfur grew awkwardly mussed. He did hold back at least while the hyena brushed the thick, rain-matted locks back into place. "Must I pull rank to learn more of one who has caught your eye so?"

Of all the things his father could possibly have wanted to talk about, that was what he'd decided. William sighed and shook his head, even as he started to smile. Why he was smiling he didn't quite know, but it was there nonetheless. It was a nice change after everything.

But still Zane was waiting, and he wouldn't wait forever. "His name is Daniel, father. And the rest... is a bit of a long story. You see..."

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The storm that had arrived during the training in the yard before Zane's arrival had come in full force later in the afternoon. After spending much of the day simply talking — at first hesitantly and then with uncontrollable vigour — he and a thoroughly pleased Zane had waited out the worst of the storm before they parted ways. It picked up again as he reached the barracks, but by then he was inside. A quick stop off on the way back to his quarters to dry himself and change into clothes that wouldn't see him catch his death of cold, and he was ready.

The little room that William shared with his training squad was lit only by a small oil lantern when he arrived at last. Victor's and Lyle's cots were neat and tidy and empty, but Daniel's much larger bed was most definitely not. The soldier was on his back, bare chested and covered only in a loose pair of trousers. He looked up from the book in his paws as William entered, and smiled. "Hey, there he is. The richest soldier in the whole damn army. How's the day?"

William glanced at the book for a moment. He couldn't make out the title in the dim light from where he stood, but he closed the door and made his way over nonetheless to unceremoniously drop his backside on the side of Daniel's cot. "Exhausting, if I'm honest. You and Victor were right. I pushed too hard." He smiled anyway and shook his head, paws rubbing down his legs. "Even with the rain keeping us inside, I'm so sore. It was good to just talk with him though, about... well, everything."

Daniel nodded as he shut the book and set it down on the floor beside his cot. It looked like the book of fairy stories he'd bought Daniel to help teach him his letters. The bear scrambled slowly up along his bed to give William more room, and the hyena drew himself up to sit cross-legged, opposite to him. "Well, you hadn't seen him in a while, yeah? How's he been? How's y'mum? She doin' okay?"

The hyena smiled back wide. Daniel had no idea. "She's doing very well, all things considered. She's still struggling a little with her work and breathing gets a bit difficult sometimes, but she's fared a lot better than some others." He glanced at the oil lantern for a moment. "Where's the other two?"

“Vic weren’t happy with Lyle’s cheap shot. They got some rest earlier and he got the commander to stick them on a night patrol.” Daniel shrugged as he leaned back, paws folded atop one raised knee. “Got the place to ourselves until dawn.”

“Sounds perfect.” Daniel blinked and quickly adopted a flirty little grin, but for how unusual the words were from William it lacked a little of its usual charm. That was, in its own way, all the more charming. It was adorable. “Father and I did talk about a great many things. You came up pretty early in the piece.”

Daniel’s legs splayed out as he shuffled up a little higher on the bed. The smile remained, but he seemed surprisingly unsure of the situation he found himself in. “All good, I hope.”

William smiled as he slowly uncrossed his own legs. The look on Daniel’s face was worth it, after all of the teasing and the flirting and the suggestiveness and whatnot. The hyena rose up onto his knees, resting there on his forelegs for the moment. “That came up, too. I realised I didn’t have a single bad thing I could say about you.” He tilted his head and tried a little smile of his own. “He was convinced that we were sleeping together.”

That time, Daniel cleared his throat loudly enough that the sound echoed off the walls. “I mean, we’re *not*, so hopefully I won’t wake up tomorrow with an axe in m’back.” He frowned as he leaned forward a little. “I’m... *not* gonna wake up with an axe in me, right?”

“Your back’s safe, I promise.” William started to crawl forward and between the bear’s massive legs, and Daniel found himself immediately and completely frozen in place. William kept his eyes up, locked on the bear’s face. “You see, he started me talking about you, and... well, I tried to stop, and I couldn’t. I just wanted to keep on talking about you. Everything I could. And when I had nothing left to say, he said he was happy for me.”

The bear’s smile flickered a bit brighter at that, and William’s did much the same in turn. “When I told him that we weren’t... *together*, he was surprised. Gave me a quote from some Ingsbren poet from a thousand years ago that I don’t remember. Do you know what the point of it was, though?”

When Daniel shook his head, William took his chance. He crawled closer, heart pounding out of his chest as he all but climbed up along the bear’s chest, cupped his cheek, and kissed him.

He had no idea what he was doing, of course; he’d never kissed anyone in his life, and William had only ever seen it done. He didn’t care. He leaned up as Daniel met him, the bear’s arms immediately wrapping around him to hold him tight. Daniel’s taste danced across William’s tongue as they met one another, and he blushed as a moan passed between them. He melted against the bear.

When he found the strength to pull away, he licked his lips slowly. Daniel’s head rolled back to rest against the wall, and William could feel his chest rising and falling that much faster than it had. “That’s... a good point. I like it.”

“I did, too. I’m glad.” He smiled as he leaned back in to gently nuzzle against Daniel’s cheek. “I was worried I’d have to repeat it a few times so you understood.”

“Practice makes perfect, and I’m more’n happy to help.” He chuckled quietly as he nuzzled back against William, paws rubbing at the hyena’s back. “Hey. Look at me a sec, okay?”

Blinking, William did so. He let himself rise back up, reluctant to move away from the warmth of Daniel’s body. After the cold rain, it was doubly delightful. Eyes met eyes, and one of Daniel’s paws reached up to brush down William’s cheek. “You sure this is what y’want? I know that... you’ve been not really y’self the last couple days. And now this... I mean it’s *nice*...”

William swallowed hard as he nodded back to the bear. “I know. I’m sorry. Father and I talked about that too... about how to work off stress and how to not let things get to me, but... this hasn’t got anything to do with that.” He let himself sit back from Daniel for a moment, but yipped as the bear pulled him close again.

He didn’t struggle as those big, fuzzy arms encircled him and turned him about. Within moments he was seated in Daniel’s lap, reclining against his chest with a sigh. Those strong arms draped around his shoulders, rubbing at William’s belly through his tunic. “I wasn’t talkin’ just about the training. Y’know what I meant.”

“Yeah. I know.” He leaned his head back, nuzzling against Daniel’s chest with a sigh. Years ago the strength of the bear’s scent would have bothered him. Right then, though... he smelled like home. “Tobias... was everything to me. He was.”

William frowned as Daniel nodded. He hugged the arms around him tightly as he leaned back. “But he can’t figure out what he wants. Or... that he could get it. Could have got it.” The hyena shook his head and looked up. “I’m not like you. I don’t think I could just do... *that*... sorta stuff with anyone. Everyone.” He frowned and squeezed those arms again. “Is it odd? Strange that I just want... one person?”

Daniel leaned down to rest his chin gently on top of William’s head. “Nah. Not odd at all. He was y’only friend for so long. Makes sense y’want him.” A sharp slap to his arm made the bear lift his head again. “Hey!”

“I wasn’t talking about wanting him, you brute.” William shook his head as he looked up at Daniel again. “He *could have* got it. Not anymore, because I don’t want him to get me.” He watched as Daniel began to smile again. “I want... *you* to get me. Just you. Not because of Tobias, and not because of anything he did or didn’t do. Because of you, and only because of you.”

“I just wanna make sure y’know what it is I’m hearin’. That y’mean what it is y’words say.” A paw lifted to gently stroke over the hyena’s chin and William nuzzled into Daniel’s grip. “Doesn’t sound like you just wanna fool around, let off some stress. You’re talkin’ about more than that. Am I right?”

The question sent a shiver through William. “I mean, if that’s all you’d like, then-”

“That ain’t what I asked and it ain’t what I’m sayin’ neither.” He leaned over William’s shoulder and nosed in lightly against his cheek. “I told y’before. What I do with those other guys is jus’ all in good fun. That’s what I’ve always done. I’m, what? Six years older’n you?” William nodded; that sounded about right. “Y’barely came of age ‘fore you were forced into

this life. Good reasons, but y’knew there weren’t anythin’ else that y’could do to earn those crowns quick. Will...” He sighed and let his forehead come to rest against the side of the hyena’s head. “I like you. A lot. You *sure* you want... this?”

Even as the bear waved a paw down to indicate his body, William shivered again. How much seed had he spilled into his own paw at the thought of exactly ‘that?’ “There’s nothing else I have in my life to do. Just look after my family... but I don’t have to be alone doing that.” He turned himself back around again until he was facing Daniel and leaned up to let his forehead come to rest against the bear’s as he closed his eyes. “I’ve *been* alone. I’m not scared of it. I’m scared of *not* being alone, really.” He sighed. “I don’t know what it means. What to do. Who to be. But I’d... like to find out. With you.”

“Even though we keep gettin’ into scrapes? Sent to war? Fightin’ and killin’ and maybe dyin’?” Daniel tilted William’s chin up with a clawtip. “That somethin’ you thought about? What it’d feel like to see me die in front of you?”

The thought immediately turned William’s stomach, but he nodded anyway. It’d been on his mind since his own recovery. “It’d be... awful. And I don’t want to think about that. Not at all.” He shook his head and lifted a paw to quickly cover Daniel’s muzzle before he could speak. “But I’d rather deal with that if it comes, and fight all the harder to stop it from ever happening, than to never even try.” He leaned up to gently kiss the tip of the bear’s nose. “Tobias is so afraid of who he is that he just won’t try. I got to see how much it hurt him... and I got to see how much it hurt others. I don’t want to be like that, Daniel.”

He watched as Daniel’s gaze met his own once more. William felt as though he might have been able to drown in the oceans of the bear’s eyes if he’d tried hard enough. It was as though Daniel saw right through him, to the core of him. He hoped that was true. He hoped it would be enough to prove what he was saying. “If... I mean, if you just *don’t* want me, that’s okay. It’d hurt, but I’d live.”

“I want you.” The words were a husky growl that turned William’s legs to jelly. He all but swooned as Daniel’s paws slid down to his hips, squeezing them tight as his fingers splayed out and up under the hyena’s tunic. “Don’t you mistake me now. *I want you.*”

William tried to say the words, “I want you, too.” What came out was a pitiful whimper that he didn’t feel an ounce of shame at uttering. He couldn’t tear himself from Daniel’s eyes as the bear’s paws roamed up under his shirt, through his fur, sending sparks of *everything* shooting down through every follicle. His touch was life itself. There were no words that would express them.

The shirt crumpled as the bear’s paws rode it upwards. William obligingly lifted his arms with them, barely able to move until Daniel helped them move up and out of the way. His tunic came free with it, tossed unceremoniously across the room as Daniel placed one paw back on the small of the hyena’s back. His other cupped William’s cheek and chin, stroking slowly back and forth. “I jus’ want you to be *sure*.” He enunciated every word, the laziness of his usual speech all but gone as every word rung out with the clarity of the morning bells. “Absolutely sure. If you truly want this — you’n me and all that means — then we can do nigh-on anythin’ you like. Just be sure.”

For a brief moment, William froze up. It wasn't any flagging conviction that drove it, but instead honest, fair consideration of Daniel's words. He owed the bear that. He owed *himself* that. And so he nodded, and thought about it until that warm paw on his cheek was just too much for him to resist. He'd already thought it through. He'd *been* thinking about it for more than a year. Every ounce of want and lick of desire had built to this point, and there was no more time to wait and think and consider. He'd done that. It was time to act. "I'm sure."

"Then I'm all yours." Daniel leaned up to lick gently across William's lips, and the hyena shuddered again. "Guess you finally get to use up that favour. Whatever you want... here I am." The paw on William's back continued to rub slowly up and down.

It was only then that William realised that he... didn't actually know what he wanted to do. He looked up at Daniel's smiling, eager face, and his mind went completely blank. The confidence left him all at once. All the bluster and bravado and surety that he'd approached the situation with evaporated. "I... uh..." He'd imagined and he'd fantasised and he'd wondered for years, but now, with it all in front of him...

... how, exactly, was this meant to work?

"Don't know where to start?" The words were a relief, and Daniel's grin wasn't mean or mocking. It was reassuring and warm, soft and gentle as William nodded. "That's okay. Tell you what. How about... I'll start for us. You let me know if you wanna take control. Or if y'need me to stop." His gaze sharpened for a second as his tone turned suddenly serious. "*Epecially* if you need me to stop. I mean it; the last thing I wanna do is hurt you. If y'need to stop 'cause whatever we're doin' is too much, or if you're hurtin'... promise you'll tell me. I'll live if y'leave me wanting, but if you stay silent and let me hurt you... I can't do that. Promise me you'll tell me if you gotta stop."

That was Daniel. That was everything that he was, condensed into one heartfelt plea. That was what lit a fire in William's heart, not just his loins. "I promise." His word came easily. There was no one in all the world that William trusted more in that moment. It left him exposed and vulnerable, and yet his heart pounded with excitement. Daniel wouldn't hurt him. Daniel couldn't hurt him. He was safe with the bear.

Their muzzles met again as the bear leaned forward. The kiss was delicate, much like their first had been, and William's sigh of contentment could have easily passed for a moan of wanting. That wouldn't have been out of place as the paw on his cheek fell away, trailing fingers down his chest. It reached the waist of his trousers, and William eased back from the kiss with a gasp. Daniel hesitated for a moment.

But when it was clear William wasn't going to stop him, his fingers began to deftly unbind them. They fell loose around William's hips, and the hyena let them sway slowly side to side until Daniel began to ease them down. His sheath was exposed to the open air, red tip peeking out and growing rapidly. He began to blush as he looked up, but Daniel's eyes were firmly down below. "I, uh..."

"Damn." The word was whispered quietly, but only deepened William's blush at the sound of it. The bear sat transfixed as he watched William's malehood throb and pulse its way to full hardness. His nostrils flared as he leaned in. Was that... good? Was he good?

William was forced to shift backward a little, moving off Daniel as the bear prowled forward, head lowered between the hyena's legs. His cheeks couldn't grow hotter if they tried, and William could do little more than spread his legs slowly to expose himself to his friend. If anything it only made his length throb all the harder to watch Daniel crawling closer, and closer, and closer. Again those nostrils flared.

And then contact; the bear's cool nose touched the base of William's sheath and the hyena gave a deep gasp. The sound turned into a moan as he heard the sharp intake of breath as Daniel breathed him in. There was that whisper of, "Damn," again before another deep breath. His paws slid up William's thighs, keeping them spread wide before settling on the hyena's hips. "You... *hrrf*..."

William gulped and glanced aside. His whole body trembled, the cool of a Shining Light storm all but washed away as hot shivers of new sensation and lust and longing all drowned it out. "S-sorry... I was... I mean, I walked all day and the rain wasn't much of a bath, so it's probably-"

"You... smell... amazing." His words were husky again, laced with a groan of delight that William had been completely and utterly unprepared for. The bear's questing snout dipped lower, dragging along his sheath to his balls, then down between and under them as William gasped again. Hot, panting breath from Daniel washed over the hyena's malehood with every exhalation; each inward breath filling the bear's nose with William's scent. "Always caught whiffs... here and there. But *right* here... at the source..." Another deeply sucked breath tickled William's ears as the tip of his shaft started to dribble. "The old gods couldn't make somethin' what smells so *good*."

Driven by an urge that William didn't know and couldn't control, one trembling paw reached down toward Daniel. As the bear continued to huff deep, ragged breaths over his musk-soaked balls, William flexed his fingers. They caressed the top of Daniel's head, encouraging his efforts for a moment before they reached the back of his head. Legs spread. Muscles tensed. Paw pulled.

Daniel's moan echoed off the walls as he felt his face dragged up and through William's scent. He nuzzled down as low as the base of the hyena's tail, head tilted up and down to sample every last variant of William's musk that he could. He was more than happy and William could tell; if the thick spire of flesh dangling between the bear's legs wasn't an indication, the familiar scent of his own arousal gave it away. He really did like it. He really did want it. He really did want *William*.

And even if it was just the teasing grind of Daniel's nose against his most sensitive regions, that was enough for William. It was the *wanting* that was driving him wild; that sent his shaft to pulsing and drooling with mounting need. It was the way he could shift Daniel's head and the bear would move in an instant, repositioning to put his nose exactly where William wanted it. Balls. Sheath. Tailhole. Cocktip. Whatever he did and wherever the bear's nose went, deep breaths were sure to follow. If William could have drowned in Daniel's eyes earlier, the bear was utterly submerged beneath the hyena's scent. Nothing, William thought, could get better than that.

Then he felt Daniel's tongue.

It was like he'd been hit by lightning. William groaned as he pre that was running down the underside of his shaft was collected by the bear's tongue before it could soak into his sheath. That tongue dragged right up his length, teasing his pulsing malehood all the way until he reached the tip. There Daniel's tongue coiled back into his muzzle and he ran it all over the inside of his muzzle. "You better be careful, Will."

"I... wha...?" Words were beyond William. He may have just been his cock at that point, for all the rest of the world and the greater whole of himself had fallen away.

"If the full load tastes that good, y'might never get me out from 'tween y'legs." He flashed William one of those naughty little grins that he'd seen a hundred times, but this time it came as Daniel's muzzle descended along the length of William's malehood. Inch after inch of throbbing flesh sank into the tender suckling of the bear's mouth, and William's eyes went wide as he in turn fell back against the cot. A paw lifted, running on some last vestige of conscious thought to stifle his moan before he all but screamed out for all the barracks to hear.

Part of him wouldn't care if he did, as the bear's muzzle began to ride up and down his shaft. Every twitch and pulse of him was wrapped up completely in Daniel's muzzle, the bear's teeth just barely tracing along him with practiced ease. It was amazing. It was astounding. It was more than William had ever imagined, and it was entirely, entirely too much. His mind went blank; the hyena saw stars as he writhed, all but biting down on his paw to stay quiet as his eyes rolled back in his head.

He'd died, he thought as Daniel's weight shifted around him and his lips slid smoothly about his shaft. He'd died, the old gods were real, and the heavens had accepted him and delivered him to paradise. The curl of Daniel's tongue around his length was nothing short of divine, and it was almost little more than a footnote before the sucking and slurping that went on between the hyena's legs. His back arched, though he held back from jerking his hips upward. He didn't want to do anything, really; to disrupt what was happening to him would be unthinkable. Unforgivable.

Until he opened his eyes, at least. As he did, the reason for the shifting of Daniel's position became very apparent. Lit by the dim glow of the oil lantern was the bear's shaft in all of *its* glory, shining in that light as Daniel's body was supported by his knees. One already rested to the left of William's head, and the other descended swiftly. A bead of pre dropped from Daniel's tip as he did so, landing across the side of William's muzzle. His tongue slipped out apropos of nothing to swipe it away. The taste spilled across his muzzle, new and alluring as he stared up, wide-eyed, at its source. It was so different from his own flavour, and as he looked upon that tree trunk of a cock it had come from, he knew he wanted more of it.

He all but leaped up at the offered shaft, the pleasurable waves rolling out from between his legs lost to his mind as he wrapped his arms around Daniel's middle. His muzzle bumped awkwardly against the head of the bear's malehood, earning him a grunt from down his body. William could only offer a brief, breathy, "Sorry," before the word and the head of Daniel's pre-soaked cock both were swallowed up by the hyena. Months and months of fantasy and imagination and lustful curiosity met hot, slimy reality as he opened his muzzle wide and carefully closed his lips around the bear's shaft.

Daniel twitched above him, though whether that was from pleasure or the accidental grind of the inexperienced hyena's teeth William wasn't quite sure. He *was* sure enough that

he liked the flavours that assaulted his senses very much. He'd sampled his own, of course; loads spilled in his paw almost always wound up on his tongue in short order, and he'd grown as fond of his own aroused scent as surely as he had Daniel's. But there, with the head of the bear's shaft stretching his muzzle wide and all but begging him to rise further along it, William's eyes lidded. His own malehood pulsed hard, soaking the roof of Daniel's mouth with a spurt of pre.

He fought to keep his teeth back, but it was a difficult ask with the considerable girth of what the bear was packing. Even as the larger, more experienced male worked himself hungrily down William's flesh, the hyena struggled undaunted to cram more of Daniel's length into his muzzle. Breath puffed up and into the bear's belly as William settled instead for nursing on what he could manage. A paw lifted, squeezing and bracing at the base of the bear's shaft while he slurped and suckled nosily on that fat head.

On a whim he brought his other paw around to rub and gently squeeze at the bear's balls. That earned him a sharp, toe-curling slurp a moment later. Daniel's muzzle popped off of William's shaft for a deep, primal moan in turn. "Shit... yeah, gentle... jus' like that..." There was a brief moment of rapid breaths from the bear before he dove back down again to once more swallow around the hyena's shaft.

That surge of pleasure let William feed him another slick splattering of pre. He squeezed back at the bear's orbs again in turn, running his fingers over them and feeling their weight as they twitched along with his ministrations. Pride at discovering something Daniel liked was rewarded as the bear's tip drizzled his tongue with an offering of its own. That pre too was guzzled down eagerly, and William closed his eyes once more as he resumed his efforts. Briefly he wondered why in the world he'd not taken Daniel up on his offer at the first opportunity. So many wasted nights, but it just made the reality in that moment all the more striking.

Even as he lay splayed out, head tilted up to nurse on his larger partner's length, Daniel's paws were busy. They shifted down William's thighs, spreading them and his legs further apart. He shivered as he felt a fat finger stroke down between his cheeks, rubbing at the base of his tail in a way that set him tingling. His muzzle was too full to say anything positive or negative, but when another finger moved in, slick with spit he suspected from the wetness of it, he knew exactly what Daniel was doing.

It was the same thing William had done on a few occasions, after he'd seen some of Daniel's escapades. The finger teased at his tailhole, stroking and rubbing gently, smearing that spit across his entrance as William gave a sloppy, wet moan in turn. It obviously was taken as a sign of encouragement by the bear, and he massaged that finger in just a little harder. That tight ring of muscle flexed against his damp finger, sucking at it much as William suckled at the bear's cock tip. William knew what was coming; he *wanted* what was coming. His tail was flat, his legs were spread, and the most wanton whore in the kingdom wouldn't have made the whimpering, begging sounds he knew he was. He gave Daniel's balls another little squeeze.

That was all the assent that the bear needed. Even as he sealed his lips at the base of William's shaft and worked his tongue around the head, his finger pressed forward to slowly, deliciously open William up. The hyena's back arched as he almost fell completely slack, barely even able to keep his head tilted up. Daniel helped of course; the bear's hips descended, easing a couple more inches into William's noisily suckling muzzle as the hyena fell flat on his

back. The scent of that ursine arousal overwhelmed his own as William's nose drew closer to Daniel's belly.

It was too much. It was all too much for William's inexperienced body to handle. The bear's muzzle knew just what to do to him. The finger under his tail teased him open in a way he'd never been able to do for himself. The feel and taste of another male's cock in his mouth was itself so much more exciting than he'd dreamed. Everything, together, was far, far too much. He loved it. He loved it all, and all the more for who it was with.

And so he utterly gave in. The fingers William used to grip the base of Daniel's shaft shifted to the bear's hip, squeezing him tight and keeping him right there. He began to bob his head shallowly along the shaft straining his jaw wide, mimicking as best he could the motions working his own length. That wriggling, questing finger was squeezed on; the hyena's body tugged at it, pulling at it with desperate abandon. William didn't care to think anymore. He was lust given flesh. He moaned, the sound more of a gurgle given his full mouth.

Whatever he was doing it was clear to the hyena that he was positively impacting Daniel. The huffing and groaning of the bear around his own filled muzzle was sweeter than any music, and William's efforts clearly coaxed more vigorous motions of Daniel's paw as well. The bear's finger curled up inside him. Stroked.

William's climax hit him before he even knew what had happened.

He shuddered into an overwhelming orgasm. If it wasn't for Daniel's malehood, the whole of the barracks would have been able to hear his howl of pleasure. His hips bucked, completely out of his control as his malehood twitched and flexed, balls drawn up tight to empty themselves. Time may as well have frozen as William let everything conscious and rational fall away from the cascading waves of bliss pumping up along his shaft.

And Daniel didn't stop for a second. His finger continued to work back and forth, rubbing at that spot inside the hyena's body that had tipped him so completely over the edge. It amplified every single spurt of his length, surge after surge of his seed erupted up into the bear's thirsty muzzle. No warning could have been given, but it didn't seem to be necessary. Daniel's muzzle just sank all the way down, lips kissing William's sheath as his tongue coaxed every last drop he had to give. Years of pent up desire and need and lust spilled into him. William held nothing back and Daniel took all that he offered.

At some point – he didn't know precisely when because far more important things were happening – he became aware of the fact that he'd fallen completely off of Daniel's shaft. His whines and groans and moans and gasps of absolute rapture were loose in the room, whispered and bellowed in equal measure as fulfillment of the flesh long denied was finally, gloriously met. His arms fell slack; his whole body fell limp save for a few very select inches as the bear sucked him bone dry. Muscles twitched and squeezed at the finger still coaxing his orgasm on, William left as nothing more than a husk of himself completely surrendered to the pleasure of the moment. The spurts and splatters of Daniel's pre across his face and neck and chest didn't bother him. Let it soak him, he thought. Let him be coated, ears to tail. Let it sink into his fur and make him stink of bear-lust; he moaned anew.

But then the bulk of it was past, spent as pleasure so often was. Sensitivity overwhelmed his malehood; Daniel's thirsty slurping relented after a couple of near-uncomfortable suckles.

He popped audibly off of William's shaft, sensitive flesh redder than he'd ever seen it and still pulsing. It glistened in the lamplight with spit. Daniel's spit. His Daniel's spit. William shuddered again. He couldn't speak. He could barely make sounds as he panted for breath. Every pull of musky air reeked of sex and need and *male* and only kept his blood pumping all the harder. On a distant level of his mind he felt like he understood why Daniel so enjoyed scents. Maybe he would, too. Maybe he did.

"Damn." Daniel's whisper came as his shaft continued to twitch above William. The hyena's eyes were locked on it as it bobbed enticingly, still equally too much for his muzzle to handle and too much desired to ignore. "Thought you'd stop me, buhnnng..."

William's lips closed back around the head of the bear's shaft again hungrily; eagerly; needfully. It wasn't about reciprocation or fairness or anything quite so altruistic – the hyena would have gladly admitted so well after the fact but in the heat of the moment was quite a bit more selfish than that – but it was entirely necessary. There was nothing left in William's head and heart than want. He'd given Daniel his seed, spilled it in the bear's mouth. His muzzle watered and jaw ached for the bear's load in turn, and William wasn't going to stop until he had it. He knew how good it had felt to spill for Daniel. He wanted Daniel to feel that pleasure in turn. Nothing less would do.

Any further outburst or concern Daniel might have voiced faded away to a deep moan of pleasure as William's tongue once more slathered its way across the head of his broad cock. When the hyena's paws returned to his base and his balls, those moans turned into an animalistic, primal grunt. His hips twitched as his body tensed. William swallowed down a fresh spurt of pre. Thicker. Richer in flavour. He wanted more. He *needed* more.

"You don't... *shit*, Will, I... fffffffugettit, jus' don' stop..." The bear's babbling spurred the hyena on even as Daniel's finger freed itself from his tailhole. William might have gasped, but the widening of his muzzle with the sound gave him the chance instead to press more of Daniel's length into his suckling mouth. Fingers played along the back of Daniel's balls, feathering their touch up and down those fuzzy orbs, revelling in the way they twitched and the bear writhed with his efforts.

Even as he slurped away on what all of the bear's cock he could reach, his other paw feverishly worked the rest of Daniel's length. Spit-soaked fingers teased from scrunched up sheath to William's own lips, stroking and rubbing desperately as Daniel panted over the hyena's spent malehood. He groaned and buried his muzzle back down between William's legs in turn, Daniel's quick breaths huffing away once more at the balls he'd just sucked dry. There was an almost immediate throbbing that William felt in his lips. If he could have blushed, he would have. That was his scent. That's what it did to Daniel. He was doing that to the bear.

It had been one thing to hear those breathy words, but it was that moment that William truly knew what it meant when Daniel had said that he wanted him. Whatever else he might have felt – *they* might have felt – there was no doubt of the desire. That sensation of *wanting* flooded through William and buoyed him up. Confidence surged. He leaned up further. Further. Further still. Inch after inch vanished into his muzzle. His eyes went wide as he bumped his nose right up against Daniel's belly. The bear moaned. William gagged and fell back, but it'd done the trick.

If his cries had been those of a wanton whore, then Daniel's were the bellows of a god of pleasure. His balls jumped against William's fingers as his malehood began to pulse, and William knew in an instant that he'd done it. Pride filled him along with the bear's seed; hot, sticky spurts that overwhelmed his muzzle within seconds. He was forced off, unable to handle the burst dam of Daniel's lust. The paw on the base of Daniel's length spurred into motion, rapidly pumping up and down that thick length of twitching meat in the way that William himself always liked. The hyena swallowed hard, clearing his muzzle as the second and third spurts erupted over his face and chest. The fourth he met with his mouth again, as his lips sealed around the head of the bear's shaft once more.

There he remained, and not for a moment did William entertain the thought of lifting off again. He swallowed dutifully, eagerly as Daniel emptied himself into the hyena. Satisfaction and pride mingled as that heady, thick, *salty* flavour rolled over his tongue again and again. The bear didn't relent, his hips twitching as he fed pulse after pulse of his essence into William. As the shots he'd missed soaked into his fur, the hyena struggled mightily to swallow all of it. His muzzle leaked; white streaks drooling from the corners of his muzzle when he couldn't keep up.

But he didn't shift away. He stayed there under the bear, drinking him down like he might guzzle water on the hottest day. He didn't stop until the flood of Daniel's seed relented, and even then he found himself almost unwilling to let go. His paws slowed their efforts, but his muzzle remained locked around the head of Daniel's still-throbbing shaft. He groaned around it, nostrils flaring with his breath as he fought for air without relenting.

It wasn't until one of Daniel's paws shakily slid down to push at William's head that the hyena finally opened his muzzle and allowed himself to fall back atop the cot. He coughed once before he closed his eyes, sighing and licking around the inside of his muzzle. The bear's flavour was still there, soaked into every part of his mouth. "I like it."

He didn't realise he'd said the words out loud until Daniel's head lifted up from between the hyena's legs. He slowly, shakily, lifted one head over William's head and turned himself back around to slump down on his side next to him. "Hmm? You like... what?"

William rolled his head to the side to see Daniel already staring back at him through hazed eyes that betrayed how spent he was. He was *beautiful*. "Uh... I dunno. Everything?" He flashed a dopey smile that Daniel almost immediately returned. "I just... wow. That was a lot."

"Sorry 'bout that." Daniel shook his head a little as he shuffled closer and draped one meaty arm over William's side. "Didn't mean t'drown you."

"It's fine. I didn't want it to stop." He sighed and licked at his lips as the inside of Daniel's ears turned bright red. "Could have just... kept drinking. Better than any ale or wine I've ever had."

The bear chuckled at that, though the blush didn't fade in the least. "You sure know how t'make a fellah feel good. Damn, Will... you been holdin' out on me."

"Never again. He rolled to the side and shuffled forward under the bear's arm to press his whole body right into Daniel. His head lifted and licked at his friend's lips. "I... I don't even know what to say. I didn't think it'd be so..."

“Good?” When William nodded, Daniel laughed. “Oh, that’s nothin’. Jus’ you wait ‘til we work you out a bit and get me under y’tail. Or get you under mine. Y’world won’t ever be th’same.” He sighed too and leaned in to lick some of the seed that still stained the hyena’s muzzle. “Damn... took everythin’ I had to stop at a finger. I wanted t’just roll you over and...” He sighed.

A shiver wound through William at that. How much more could he have taken? His muzzle had barely handled a third of the bear’s shaft, and the whole thing had pushed him to his limits after barely a second. And yet, despite that, renewed desire surged through his body. His still-hard shaft twitched in response and Daniel chuckled as it throbbed against him. “Someone like that, does he?”

“Y-yeah. A lot.” He let his eyes fall closed as fatigue hit him all at once. Lust and desire and years of longing for an outlet were finally sated – for the most part – and the exhaustion of the day was back. “Can we just... stay like this? Forever?”

“Forever? Nah. We’ll have to move ‘ventually. We’ll have trainin’ and patrol. And if we don’t wash you up, you don’t even *know* how crusty y’fur will get.” He smiled as he leaned in and planted a soft kiss on William’s forehead. “But for now? Yeah, you’re not goin’ anywhere. You’re stayin’ right here.” The arm draped over William’s middle squeezed him tight. “You’re all mine now.”

Again came a shiver, as William turned that idea over in his head and decided that he liked it. One of his arms slithered up between them to return the embrace with a warm, happy smile. “And you’re mine too.”

“Damn right I am.” Daniel nuzzled in tighter as William kissed his neck. This, he realised, was it. The perfect moment. Nothing in his whole life had ever felt more right than right there, in the aftermath of more pleasure than he knew a mortal being could comprehend. In the arms of someone who cared about him. Who wanted him. Who he cared about and wanted just as much. This, finally, was what happiness must have felt like. What it was supposed to be.

And William rather thought he liked it.