

As Beauty Burns

“Captain Shepherd!” I could hear a voice from the void, the faintly screaming voice reaching my consciousness as the darkness slowly began to fade from my vision, shaking my mind from the state of calm and acceptance it was currently in. I was unable hear nor feel anything going on around me, except for the constant ring in my ears and the pain flowing through my body. “*Am I dying? Is this what it feels like?*” was all I could think of at the given moment. “Stay with me, Sir!” There was that voice again, drawing my attention back to it rather abruptly. “Where the hell is the medic!?” Who was this voice that kept interrupting me from my slow fade into the abyss?

The feeling of daggers ripped through my eyes as I attempted to open them, a bright white light instantly filling my vision and forcing me to close them once more. Willing myself to push through the pain, I found myself looking up at a dark, shadowed figure above me, his body silhouetting against the bright light. As my sense of smell began to return to my body, I could pick up the faint, all but familiar scents of burning wood, flesh and blood. “*Maybe I am in hell after all.*” I thought to myself as the memories of my mother always speaking to me about how my affection for other men would send me to the front gate of Satan’s domain. While the practice was on the verge of being deemed legal, but frowned upon, it was still against the religion we were all raised under. The sudden jerk of my body upwards shook me from my thoughts once more as I felt my muzzle pressed into the fur of another body, most likely the same figure that I had saw crouched over me earlier. The smell of the canine’s chest seemed so familiar, but in my current clouded state, I could not put a finger on who, or what species it was.

Cracking one of my eyes open once more, my vision seemed to have cleared slightly as I could now make out distinctive canine forms rushing around in a panicked state along what remained of the main deck of my ship. This vision seemed to jog my memory as to the situation that caused all this commotion. Lifeless bodies of my crew were scattered across the large surface, with a flaming hole and shattered planks filling the middle. It was a miracle everything was still being held together. As another jolt of pain shot through my body, I looked down with my one eye to inspect what the cause was. Around my abdomen and on my chest, I could see that my white fur and grey tribal markings were stained with the distinct crimson colour of blood, though I could not tell if it was mine, or of another’s that I had slaughtered in the previous battle. I could taste the iron flavoured blood around my lips, but had no energy to spit it out at the moment.

Not having any visible wounds, I began to let my eye rest once more, which was quickly met by the figure holding me to grasp my torso tighter and sent more waves of pain through my battered body. Every time I attempted to speak up and voice my thoughts at the figure holding me, my mouth would only open slightly, but I could not get any words out. After a few attempts however, I had given up and simply allowed whatever was going to happen next happen.

“You have to let him go, Tekado!” I heard a second, deeper voice say as I began to close my eye once more, snapping my attention to the new voice. “He’s gone! There is nothing you can do for him! I’m sorry but we do not have any time left! We have to go!” This caused a fire to start stirring in my chest. I don’t know if it was my pride or stubbornness, but something inside of me began to fight off the shadows once more. “I am NOT leaving him!” I heard the male beside me, whom the deeper voiced male named as Tekado, speak with desperation in his voice.

“Captain Shepherd is DEAD, Tekado! We need to get moving before this whole ship collapses on us and we join him!” These comments from the deep voiced individual only caused the fire inside me to explode out of control and crack my eye open once more to look at him and catch his gaze while looking me over. This alone seemed to stun the male as I put all of my anger and will to live into one look.

“I’m not dead yet, asshat.” I managed to croak out. The male’s shocked expression and stuttering put a slight smirk on my face as I began to attempt to move into an upright position. I had no clue what was driving my body at the current moment, but the thought of people giving up on me was something I had never enjoyed. I could feel the average build of Tekado support me as he helped me up into a standing position. While looking over his body, my memory returned as to who he was. An average built fox who knew everything about the weapons our navy used, and the history of each one. He was wearing only his ragged, burlap pants and ankle covers. He had a couple small wounds on his torso, but nothing that time wouldn’t heal on its own.

“Can you walk, sir?” he asked, shaking me from my dazed inspection and brought my attention back to his soft amber eyes. I could see the genuine concern in his eyes, which only caused me to go in a slight daze once more. This fox had always showed extra care for me. Maybe he liked me? Maybe he was like me? I had no clue since I met him a year prior.

Remembering the question that was asked however, I responded quietly, my throat dry from the smoke around us. “I think so... though I believe what the lieutenant said is true, so we don’t have much choice in the matter whether I can or cannot walk. We need to get off the ship.” Placing most of my weight on the male’s shoulder, we began to make our way off the withering frigate, boards falling from the remaining mast above us. The once great masterpiece now up in flames. I could feel the fox lift me onto his shoulders as we began to move onto the catwalk, which was at an extremely steep angle, and onto the shores below. Not only moments after we had placed our paws in the white sands of the shore, the loud crash of the main deck dropping down into the lower levels of the frigate and fed the fire below.

Once we had moved far enough away from the burning vessel, I felt Tekado slowly lower me to the ground and place me on my back. A groan escaped my muzzle as the adrenaline that had apparently been running throughout my body ran out. All I could feel once more was the pain rushing through my body. With time passing, I could tell I easily had a broken rib or two by the way a sharp pain emerged with every breath in or out. However, I couldn’t worry about my own suffering however, as my command training kicked in and I had to at least know what was going on in the situation, even if I could not do anything physically.

It had seemed as though, despite the situation, luck had been slightly on our side. After the surprise attack by the feline continent's navy, our ship had managed to stay together long enough to let the rolling seas and tide drag her ashore along the coasts of our homeland, not too far from the port we had been aiming for originally. Hopefully they had seen our distress beacons and were sending help to our location, but only time would tell for that. For now, we had to focus on recovering what we could from the wreck once it stopped burning and tend to the wounded.

I slowly pulled myself towards a nearby tree trunk and forced myself into a propped up, sitting position against it. Clutching at my ribs and wincing harshly, I was met by the gaze of my remaining crew members. They all seemed to have concerned and depressed expressions as they watched me, their Captain, looking defeated and in pain. In all honesty, I would be looking at myself in the same way if I saw the Admiral in the same state. Groaning, I forced the pained expression from my face and spoke in a plain tone as loud as I could muster, though I knew some of my struggles were noticeable in the words when I spoke. The last thing they needed to lose in this situation was their morale.

"Calm your nerves men. I am not dying any time soon, so why do y'all look so scared with your tails tucked and ears back!? We are the part of the Darrakinian Navy! We take care of our own and hold our heads high, no matter the circumstance! Focus on those who need the assistance. Focus on your brothers strewn on the beach. Get them stabilized and ready for transport for when the port aid and officials arrive! We will be losing no more lives today!" With that final sentence, I was out of energy and hung my head, more to hide the next wave of pain than the fatigue I was feeling. As I looked up once more however, those who were mobile seemed to have been enlightened by my short speech and moved with a sense of urgency, and began holding their heads up with pride once more.

Shifting my weary gaze over to the fox and Doberman beside me, I gave a weak smile before coughing up a bit of blood, the crimson liquid dripping out between my teeth and onto the white fur of my jaw. They moved towards me to help, but I immediately waved them off. "I am alright. Focus on helping the others. I've had worse injuries than this." I assured them before resting against the tree once more and closed my eyes to hide the pain in them. As I could hear the two males move away from my position, I smiled lightly as in the distance, I could faintly hear the rattling of carriages on the stone road. As I faded into a calm rest, my body was no longer able to keep itself awake, all energy regained in the short time depleted. Everyone was being tended to and the port workers had arrived. That is all I cared about at that moment.