

## Planning-45

“It’s done!” a man yelled as he entered the inn. The room fell silent as everyone looked in the warrior’s direction. “The third floor’s cleared!” Quigly raised his fist. “Soon it’s on to the fourth floor!”

“Any idea when that’ll be?” Jackal asked Tibs as cheers rose.

He shook his head. Not being able to have conversations with Sto during runs made having that kind of information drop difficult, and since his team had reached the boss room only once, he hadn’t needed to ask about the fourth when he sat by the mountain and talked wit him.

He noticed Don glance in their direction before looking at the approaching warrior. Quigly had his team with him.

“Take that, best team,” the warrior said. “We cleared it first.”

“It’s not a competition, you know,” Mez replied.

“Of course it is,” Jackal said, “and congratulations. Was the loot worth the fight?”

“Not that we got to keep it, but it was a full set of armor. Metal, and enchanted. Too decorated for my taste, but I’m sure a fighter who feels the need to look good could make use of it.”

“If it’s the same thing when the next team clears the room,” Don said. “I’m curious, how do you know it’s enchanted?”

“I felt the weave when I picked the helmet up. There’s metal in it.”

“And I could feel the weave in it’s entirety without needing to do that,” the man in the sorcerer’s robe next to Quidly said. “I am, after all nearly Zeta.”

Tibs looked at Don.

“For us to graduate to Zeta, we need to be able to tell essences in a weave apart.”

“You shouldn’t be telling them that.”

Don rolled his eyes. “You seems free enough with what you can do. And it’s not like they can do anything with the information. Only sorcerers can think in the ways needed to use more than one essence.”

“And tell me, Arabis. How are you coming along in your studies toward ranking up?”

“I’m getting there.”

“I look forward to observing your test then, as I ready to take the one for Epsilon.” The earth sorcerer turned and walked away.

“Kind of full of himself, that one,” Jackal said.

“I think it’s a sorcerer thing,” Quigly replied. “Them and knowing so much.”

“No, I can tell you that knowing more than the rest of you has nothing to do with someone’s ego,” Don said. “I know idiots who have larger egos than he does. Although, he only knows barely more than they do.”

“Yep,” Jackal said, “Sorcerers and their egos. Do have to love them. How hard was the room? We stepped in on our last run, and the first fight was tough. We didn’t risk the second.”

“It’s hard. Without giving you details, because this is one room I don’t want to risk the guild sticking to its ‘don’t talk about it’ rule and making us miss runs, it was our fourth time in, and for a moment there, I didn’t think we’d survive the boss after all those fights. I know how you feel about it, Tibs, be we got lucky.”

“You fought everything in the room?” Don asked.

“No choice. If you thought the previous boss rooms put your fighting to the test, this one makes the first time in each of the others feel like someone’s party.”

“Thanks for the warning,” Jackal said. “As unhelpful as it is.”

“Just stop up on the potions that drop. You’re going to need them.” The warrior turned and headed for the table his team had taken.

“Are you still sure there’s a way around the fights?” Jackal asked.

“Maybe be not all of them,” Don said. “The boss will probably be one we can’t avoid.”

“But the floor’s all about being clever,” Tibs added, “on top of being good at fighting.”

“So they cleared the room the hard way?” Mez asked and Tibs nodded.

Jackal smiled. “Which means that sorcerer of their and his rogue aren’t as smart that they think they are.”

“Like there was any doubt of that,” Don replied, rolling his eyes.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Not so clever, are you?” Irdian said at a guard held Tibs before the guard leader. “This could make your team miss another run.”

“You can’t keep me in a cell for nine days,” Tibs replied. He’d waited until the schedule was up and that his team was down far enough this wouldn’t interfere with this.

“I can keep you for as long I think your crime deserves.”

“It was just a pocket,” Tibs said. “And a noble’s pocket at that.” He adding, grumbling. “I didn’t even get a silver out of it.”

It had taken a lot more work than it should have to get caught. He’d picked three pockets with guards looking in his direction before one finally noticed something and acted. Then, because Tibs didn’t want to make it too obvious he wanted to be caught, he’d slipped on of the grass and realized he’d lost the guard in the crowd.

He knew these guards weren’t idiots. They were composed in large part of those who had survived both of Sebastian’s attacks on the town and his infiltration of them. But if not for Serba, even this attempt at getting caught would have failed.

She’d looked down at him, the large black and white dog that had tackled him to the ground sniffing his pockets. She rolled her eyes when he gave the dog a piece of jerky and was about to let him go when he told her to hand him over to a guard. She’d seem amused at the request, then had roughly guided him to the guard who was still searching the crowd for Tibs.

Then, Tibs had been brought to the guard house, searched and brought to the Irdian once it was determined he had no tools of his trade left on his person. Tibs had bought a pair of bracers before this that hid lockpicks so he wouldn’t risk his own, as well as a rogue’s

coin pouch. He'd secreted tools among his clothing, including a thin blade within his belt and he was pleased they'd found everything.

Except the one item he hadn't wanted them to find.

That one they hadn't found before Tibs had palmed it onto the guard searching him as she began and palmed it back once she was done, and placed the medallion in a fold of his shirt they'd already emptied.

"Are you under the impression nobles don't care when some thief pick their pockets?" Irdian asked in a bored tone.

"No. But they have to know what happened. He didn't even look in our direction when your guard grabbed me."

"And do you think you running from your capture will not go unpunished?"

"By adding seven days to the two picking a pocket gets us?" Tibs asked in dismay. He didn't expect Irdian to go that far. Unlike Harry, he wasn't all about the rules, but he was filled with so much metal he was unbending about how things were to be done. He'd add as many days to Tibs's sentence as he could justify, but not one day more. "And maybe if your guards were better I wouldn't have slipped away from him do easily."

"Insulting my people will not help your case, Tibs."

Tibs shrugged. "Think of it as me pointing out flaws in their training."

"Take him away," he told the woman holding Tibs's shoulder. "Four days in the cells. And next time, don't bother me with him. We have a system in place for handling criminals. He's to go through it the same as every other one."

"Yes, sir," she replied, leading Tibs out of the room. "Sorry, I thought he'd be more lenient."

Tibs didn't reply. He was too busy trying not to feel guilty about how what he was about to do would impact her. He hadn't thought she'd brought him to the guard leader because she was one of Tibs's supporter within the guards. Irdian had always handled him when Tibs ended up in a cell.

Of course, every previous time Tibs was brought in to pay for something his organization did. Not because of a petty crime.

They started down the stairs leading to the cells, and now that he had the medallion in his possession, Tibs saw the door on the left wall just after last step. There was no visible locks or hinges, so he hoped that whatever kept it closed so no one accidentally opened it would give way to him because of the medallion.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, then shoved her to the right, elbowing the door, which opened and running into the corridor.

"Stop!" she yelled.

Ahead, someone who looked more like a clerk than a guard turned at the sound of her voice. His eyes shimmer in the light. His element was crystal. Tibs felt essence move and slammed his will into that, undoing whatever the man had attempted to do, then he was sliding between his legs and back to running. A desk with papers on his right, on his left an opening with a table with two chairs and remnants of a meal on it along with a set of dices. The corridor ended with a door on his left. Locked, but no weave on it.

He made picks of ice, and had it opened as more voices sounded the alarm.

He ran in the room and stopped.

It was large, he could tell that even in the low light. He hadn't expected that. He also hadn't expected the number of crates stacked one on top of the others. He felt weaves in some of them, but not most.

When he'd learned this was where the guard kept what they confiscated from crimes until it was processed—whatever that meant—he'd expected a dozen boxes, or the items piled on a few tables.

Not something that looked like a merchant's warehouse.

He was pulled out of the room, roughly dragged through the halls and shoved into the cell.

He hardly noticed the others in it move out of his way as he went to the bench and sat.

This wasn't what he'd expected at all.

Was it even possible to find the armors and arms the guard had taken from him. He'd only seen letters and numbers on the crates, nothing that looked like names or what they contained.

He leaned back against the stone wall.

He wasn't giving up on getting his stuff back.

Not yet.

But it was starting to look like he'd have to consider it.