

ARTUR'S COMEUPPANCE

THE EXTENDED EPILOGUE

THERE WERE A FEW THINGS THAT ARTUR FRANKFURT WAS undoubtedly certain of:

The first was that he needed to get out of the country as soon as possible. If he didn't, he would most certainly suffer.

The second was that passports were remarkably hard to forge when one had an arm that had been purposefully broken and never treated, regardless of how long it had been since said injury.

And finally, the third was that the price of ale had gone up. While it was likely the result of the borders being closed for far too long and many other awful things had happened in the Kingdom as a result of the shut down; Artur felt that the lack of ale was the most pressing problem facing Whynne.

Or at least, those were the things that I imagined Artur Frankfurt might have been certain of, it had honestly been far too long since I had last spoken to the man, and as I took him in from my corner of the bar— Artur sprawled across the counter and looking like he could barely move—I was not entirely sure that the monk knew his name, much less anything else.

Which was unfortunate because I had a bone to pick with him.

“It’s less obvious if you stop glaring, Wren,” Nikolas informed me, still in a foul mood as he eyed the piece of jewelry on my hand, but remarkably better behaved than he had been in the months prior.

Nikolas and I were well on our way to a friendship. If I gave it another four years, then he and I would likely be on the friendly terms that it seemed everyone else was on. You know, less longing gazes on his end and less feeling like I had to hide the ring on my end.

To be fair, it was a recent adjustment on his part, and Nikolas had been blindsided by my engagement.

But despite the ring on my finger, Nikolas had managed to engage in light conversation with Luka at one point, and even after that, Nikolas was more focused on staring down Artur than glaring at the Unseelie beside him, an improvement, if any.

I had a bone to pick with Artur, and Nikolas was the only person capable of finding him. It took us six months and many tips, but there Artur was, somehow looking worse than when he had trekked through the woods and turned us in. Artur had been gloating when he’d sent the soldiers to capture Luka, if their stories were to be believed.

But now? Now Artur looked just as pitiful and anxious as I had hoped he would.

He would never know what it was like to worry for someone he loved, but so long as he felt something after all of this? I could accept that. It was almost enough.

Almost.

“We’re going to get him today,” I said, nodding to myself more than anyone else. Luka had long since given up his grudge, but me? “We just need to catch him unaware this time,” I declared.

“A distraction?” Luka asked, casting me a glance and

catching the look on my face. We needed a lot more cover than we currently had if we were going to grab Artur.

“If you will,” I requested, pulling the leather gloves off my hands.

Nikolas and I got up as Luka readied himself at the table. We slipped into position and started to approach the bar, hoping that this time would be the one—we’d already lost Artur twice before. Nikolas adjusted my hat to hide a bit more of my hair with an undeniable fondness that I returned, the two of us grinning at each other as the plan swung into action, the drunk at the bar still far from aware.

“Ready?” Nikolas asked.

“Ready,” I reaffirmed with a nod, my hand brushing by Luka’s as we slowly walked away, eyeing the counter. He wouldn’t get away, not that time. Not as Nikolas and I worked side by side, his gun at the ready and my hands waiting in case anything went wrong.

I cast one good smile at one of the patrons, trying to appear more boyish as I wore Luka’s britches and button-up shirt, a pageboy cap pulled over my bob. Whether it worked or not, I did not know. I think the patron tried to smile back; I caught a hint of it at the last moment.

And then, silence, darkness, the night hanging in the air. An inevitable inhale sounded from the patrons.

None of that mattered, not a single bit of it.

What did matter was Artur’s shoulders under my palm and the way that he looked back at me, looking from side to side as he scanned both Nikolas and I, for a moment not realizing. But only that moment.

“First I get mauled by pirates, and now this,” Artur sighed, his hand on his ale and his body determined to take one last swig before he went with us.

I would allow him that at the very least, but after it?

“I have no interest in any of the young men offered to me,”

Artur muttered mockingly, recalling memories of a time long gone by. “Some statement that was, you’re wearing an engagement ring now.”

I raised an eyebrow at that, unable to bite back a laugh as Artur practically slapped his arm into Nikolas’s waiting hand, casting him an unimpressed look.

“You’ll choose a nice prison cell for me, won’t you, Wren?” Artur said, casting a glance my way. “Something with no fae, but a nice window and lots of booze provided. Nowhere near Chines either, I’ve got enemies in the prison down there. Something about lying about my name too many times to count and them picking up just about every Artur in the country.”

That far from impressed Nikolas. “You won’t be allowed alcohol while you rot in your prison cell,” Nikolas informed Artur, “and you’ll have a window if you’re lucky; did you know that you’re wanted in twenty-seven different countries? You could end up in Haldia, even.”

Artur swallowed.

“But we’ll keep you in Whynne,” I provided, patting Artur’s arm. “Because I get the feeling that you and I are far from done here,” I said, the darkness finally dissipating enough that I could see Luka from across the bar, his lips turned upwards into a smile that showed the pointed tips of his teeth. “Something tells me that we still have many more adventures to come in the Kingdom of Whynne.”