

Tula wasn't quite sure how she felt anymore. And she certainly wasn't sure what she should do.

She stood alone in the vast, empty space of a familiar training ground, one she had spent many hours in, honing her magic. Usually, there were others here, learning alongside her, but now, late at night, it was empty.

She pushed her magic to the surface, energy snapping through her body as she influenced the water around her, freezing it to ice and whipping the shards away, launching them as if trying to attack the wild and bubbling emotions inside herself.

When Kaldur left to focus his time on the surface, working with King Orin as Aqualad, he had left a hole in her heart. She had never admitted it to him, of course, never told him how much it had hurt to see him go. After all, she barely acknowledged it herself, but he had been one of the few rocks she had latched onto when she had been struggling with the academy. When he left, she was sent adrift, caught in a current of emotion before Garth could catch her. Over the weeks and months following his departure, it began to feel like she and Garth were becoming even closer, and with Kaldur still gone, seemingly too busy to even visit, she promised herself not to just sit back and wait but to wade out into the deep waters herself.

But it was impossible not to notice how things had shifted. The three of them had been best friends for years, and with Kaldur gone, they felt unbalanced.

Before she could figure anything out, before she could work up the courage to talk to Garth about anything, though, Prince Orm's betrayal was revealed, and everything changed.

Overnight, Atlantis was turned on its head as King Orin and Queen Mera, as well as everyone they trusted, worked desperately to combat the traitor's influence. The purist party was thoroughly investigated, exposing a deep corruption that was beginning to fester and shift the waters of Poseidonis. Suddenly her studies were put on pause as she was sent out on task after task by Queen Mera. She was honored that her queen and mentor trusted her with the responsibilities that she did, but the extra work left very little time for anything, least of all a much-needed conversation with Garth.

And now, just when things were starting to calm down, when Queen Mera was finally able to give her apprentices a break, Kaldur called for a favor, and she saw him again. Garth wouldn't admit it, but seeing their friend again had left them both off-kilter. Fighting alongside him, as they had trained to do, had felt right in a way that was difficult to describe. When he left with nothing more than a simple goodbye, it broke what little resistance she had built, old feelings of betrayal, inadequacy, and self-doubt pouring back into her like a raging current.

And then he returned a week later, all but begging for forgiveness. Swearing that he hadn't hurt them on purpose, that he had just gotten caught up in his work, and that he was an

idiot. The amount of emotion he showed, his usually stoic face cracking completely... how could they not forgive him?

They accepted him back and spent hours catching up. It felt right, perfect, all of them together, talking about everything that had been happening, all of the changes going on around them. They talked for hours, continuing into the next day, Kaldur eventually promising that he would never disappear again, that while he had a life on the surface, he would never forget about his friends again. Everything was right again. They were all together again.

So then, why did her heart hurt as it did? Why did it feel like this was all temporary? Like it couldn't last. Like she had to make a choice?

The usually calm young woman lashed out, blasting one of the magic targets located on the training platform just outside the academy. She had come here looking for an outlet for the energy bubbling inside her, threatening to drown her. She let her magic run wild, eviscerating target dummy after target dummy with the water under her control.

"My, I don't think I had ever seen you put so much frustration and energy into an offensive spell before," A familiar voice said from behind her, Queen Mera stepped out into the clear space.

"I apologize, my Queen," Tula responded, looking down at her feet. "I was simply-"

"My apprentice, I am well aware of what you were doing," Her mentor assured her. "I have done it plenty of times myself."

"You... You have?"

"Of course, combat magic is an excellent way to let off some steam," She responded before smiling. "I have also found that talking about the problem can help as well."

"Oh, I don't think...."

"Tula, while I may be your queen, I am also your teacher," She said softly. "And teachers worry about their students. Tell me, what has you in such turmoil?"

"Well... As you know, Kaldur has returned...."

"Ah, yes, I suppose that would cause some interesting emotions," Her mentor said, chuckling at her apprentice's shocked expression. "Please, my student, do you think I do not pay attention? Besides, you three are hardly as subtle as you think."

Tula blushed, years of subtle glances and smiles rushing back through her head, quickly realizing her teacher was correct. She was silent for a long moment, which prompted Queen Mera to continue.

"You care for them both, don't you?" She asked quietly.

"Yes! They... they are my anchors, they..." She stopped, looking down at her hands. "They are my home. I lived, fought, trained, and studied with them. I know we are young, but..."

"Tula, I have taught you for many years now, and I have never known you to be frivolous or compulsive," Her teacher responded with a kind smile. "You are young, but that doesn't invalidate how you feel. As long as you are cautious and understand the dangers."

"Then... what do I do?"

She looked up at her queen when she didn't respond for a long moment, only to find her looking back at her, considering her words carefully before finally breaking the silence.

"Sometimes, when swimming with a school, a fish must struggle to swim against the rest. You must find your own way, even if it is counter to normality or what people expect," She said, crossing the short distance between them to put her hand on her shoulder. "What do you want? Deep down, in your heart of hearts, my student?"

She looked back up at her mentor, the woman that she considered to be her hero, someone she aspired to be like quite frequently. Eventually, she opened her mouth to answer.

"No, you don't need to tell me, for now, that thought belongs to you," Queen Mera said, stopping her apprentice's words before they formed. "But know that to make what you want a reality, you must strive for it. The world won't simply hand you your heart's desire because you ask. You must make it a reality. Yes, it could fail. Yes, it could go wrong. But if you do nothing, then nothing is all you will receive. What does your heart say to do, my student?"

For a moment, the woman, the queen, was afraid her student had caved, given up, and accepted her fate, a look of sadness settling on the younger Atlantean's face. But, after a few seconds, it passed, replaced by a look of determination, her student's fists clenched as she nodded.

"Thank you, Queen Mera," She said, nodding in understanding. "I know what I have to do."

Roy Harper let out a long, slow breath, releasing the anger that threatened to overwhelm him. Shooting the bow took precision, patience, and a calm mind. Letting his anger and frustration get the best of him would only make this more difficult.

With a thwack, he released the arrow, which turned into a red and yellow colored blur before slamming into the target thirty meters away.

Barely hitting the inner blue ring of the target.

His hand twitched, and once again, he focused on releasing his anger. After a series of long breaths, he took out another arrow and repeated the process. Just as he had done before that shot and the one before that. Just as he had been doing almost every day since the doctors gave him the okay to practice.

He had a long road ahead of him. He knew that. Having your hand removed, treated as poorly as his had been, and then reattached would set back any archer for years, if they ever got back to it at all. Add in the issues of being stuck in cryo sleep for so long, the atrophy of muscles, and the damage to his nerves, he was having to relearn everything. He had to learn how to feel the arrow through pressure because his fingertips were numb, had to learn how to fire an arrow without his middle finger, as it no longer worked properly.

Another thwack echoed through the firing range, this time the arrow just crossing into the first red circle.

Worse than all of that was the pure frustration he felt. Still felt, despite talking to his therapist for hours about it. He had lost years, frozen in time, completely helpless. It followed him now, every step of every day, bubbling under the surface. He could feel himself as he talked to people, the desire to lash out, to be angry with his friends, the people who supported him, the people who cared, because deep down inside, he still felt helpless. The fact that Oliver, every time he said something snarky, every time he fired back at an innocent joke with a comment he knew would hurt him, just smiled and took it without complaint, knowing he was just lashing out.

It was one of the few reasons he could handle all of this. That Oliver still cared enough to take all that abuse with a smile. It's why he worked so hard to control himself.

When he had first woken up, he had hated him, had blamed him for everything. It still shocked him how much he hated a man who only wanted to help him and had done nothing wrong. And Oliver had just forgiven him for it, brushed it away with a joke and a pat on the shoulder.

That had been a hard pill to swallow as well.

The real tipping point had been his escape attempt. He had gotten pretty far before Oliver had caught him, and he refused to return. When Oliver had refused to let him leave, he snapped and started swinging.

And he just took it. Oliver refused to defend himself and refused to fight back, which had only made him angrier. It wasn't until Batman came along and knocked him out with a tranquilizer that he stopped. According to Dinah, the injuries were bad enough that Oliver took actual time off from patrolling for the first time in three years.

When he saw the pictures of what he had done in his anger, he immediately agreed to go to therapy.

A third arrow slammed into the target, back in the blue, causing him to pause and slowly let out a long breath.

"Your patience is better than mine," A very familiar voice said from behind him.

Will Harper, his clone, his brother, was sitting on a bench behind him, probably had been there for a while. He hadn't exactly been paying attention.

"We have the same patience," He said, drawing another arrow and nocking it. "It's shit."

After weeks of therapy and talking, what would have once pissed them both off was now an open inside joke, a taunt between brothers. Roy fired his arrow, this time managing to hit the first yellow ring.

"You're getting better. I know it doesn't feel like it, but you are," Will said, standing up and walking to the firing line, stopping beside the shorter version of himself. "How do your fingers feel?"

"They don't," He responded, letting the bow hang down. "Doctor says we should give it a few more weeks before starting to look into options to help it heal. Oliver is ready to bankrupt Queen Industries to find a way to fix it."

"He is overcompensating," Will responded, Roy nodding in agreement.

If there was only one positive thing in all of this, it was his brothers and how easy it was to talk to them. Something about understanding how they thought, about having the same history, even if it was his originally, made talking to them about stuff as easy as breathing. It was something their therapist was quick to encourage.

"Somehow, it makes me feel guilty," Roy admitted crossing the firing line to walk to the target, Will following behind him. "It wasn't his fault. I screwed up. I shouldn't have gone to that

warehouse on my own, and Luthor is the one to blame for kidnapping me. None of this is on him."

That was another thing that he had spent and was still spending a lot of time working on. He had been the one to go off on his own and investigate Luthor Corp, despite it being a bad idea. His bad choices had led to his time in suspended animation, but that didn't mean it was his fault. The blame fell on Lex Luthor's shoulders, and he was in prison for it. It wasn't even one of those cushy prisons, either. Turns out getting caught kidnapping a child has a way of making your friends in high places forget they know you.

"Yeah, I'll talk to him. Maybe get Dinah on board," Will said, holding up his hand to stop Roy before he could complain. "You have enough on your plate. Let me handle it, alright? Having you there... well, it's better to keep that kind of conversation as simple as possible, right?"

Reluctantly Roy nodded, pulling out his last arrow and sliding it into his quiver. He pulled the quiver off his back as they returned to the firing line. His hand was starting to hurt, so it was time for a break.

"Did Jim make up his mind yet?" Roy asked as he put away his gear and hung up his bow.

"He is leaning towards saying yes, as of yesterday," He answered, the two of them leaving the range and walking down the hall. "He has changed his mind a few times now."

They were staying in a large mansion, one owned by Oliver, along with their therapists and Roy's doctors. The halls were mostly empty, the occasional maid walking by, tending to their duties. Oliver had taken the fact that Roy's treatment was his responsibility and ran with it, turning the remote mansion vacation home into a top-of-the-line recovery clinic.

"He should go," Roy said. "It's a good solution to his problem. He wants to help, but he clearly hates the idea of being Guardian again."

Jim's situation was even worse than Roy's, though frequent meetings with Martian Manhunter were definitely helping. He had *two* sets of memories implanted into his head, a copy of Roy's, as well as another fake set that told him he was the grandson of the original Guardian. Martian Manhunter was helping him by pushing the memories of being the Guardians' grandson away and integrating his copy of Roy's memories. They had chosen that path mostly because Roy had said it was okay.

"He wants to wait a bit longer."

"For me to get better?"

"You're not the only one recovering," Will pointed out, prompting Roy to wince.

The truth was that all of them had PTSD of some sort, and while they were slowly getting better, it was an uphill battle.

"I know we can't rush this. I know we need to give it time," Roy said, repeating what his doctor and his therapist had both been saying. "But we can't just sit here forever. We need to leave at some point."

"I know. I feel it too, same lack of patience, remember?" Will said with a smirk. "I think we are getting there. If Jim leaves, I don't think we will be long behind him. If he doesn't, we can all leave together soon. We don't have to be perfect to leave. We just need to be ready."