

## Chapter 8 – “A Tussle in the Mud”

Sitting around a fire, Kai rubbed his hand together eagerly. He had finally gotten a fire going, and dinner was ready.

"Bon Appétit~" He said to himself merrily, grabbing the roasted toad leg from the fire pit. The cooked meat seemed extraordinarily savory to his gluttonous self, and he barely even noticed himself practically drooling at the sight. If anything had always remained true for Kai without fail, it was the reality that he could pretty much eat anybody out of both house and home.

In fact, he had ended up being booted to the streets for that exact reason a few times before. Mostly by some of the less than... *savory*, foster parents. But just as he was about to bite into the food, he was stopped by the snapping of a twig.

With his head snapping to the side, he was about to bolt up, but the knocked arrow pointed directly at his face from less than a meter away stopped him in his tracks.

Emerging from some dense foliage and bushes, a young guy, barely older than Kai himself, was warily staring daggers at him. He had a longbow knocked with an arrow in his hands, making Kai freeze - not particularly wanting to meet the same fate as another unfortunate individual he had met in the swamps.

The atmosphere was tense, and Kai knew that he couldn't be the one to break it as an arrow through his face would more than likely be the only response.

Scanning the man with his eyes, Kai saw that he was clearly clothed differently than the dead native he had originally found. Whereas he had clothes that were thin and flexible, even specialized for camouflage, this young man wore normally woven clothes from brown and orange fiber.

More than that, furs were also sparsely decorating his clothing, surprising Kai since he had yet to see any large animals other than reptiles and toads in these damnable swamps. *Did he hunt those beasts of the night?* Kai thought, but he couldn't contemplate it further as the words of the young man invaded his thoughts.

"Weapons." He simply stated with the nick of his head, the indication clear of what he wanted Kai to do.

Since being dropped in this alien world, Kai didn't have the company of anything else than his own voice. So when this man spoke, he ended up a bit stumped for words, but mostly by the odd fact that this man wasn't speaking any language that Kai himself knew.

However, he still understood. Remembering how the trait [**Interface**] that he possessed supposedly translated any language he was exposed to, he could only attribute it to that, but it was still quite off-putting by simply how seamless it worked.

He could hear it was a different language but still understood as if it was his own mother language. *How weird...*

Not responding, the man took Kai's silence as reluctance to give his weapons up, so he pulled back the knocked arrow even further to pointedly indicate what would happen if he didn't comply. Not moving his body an inch, Kai shook his head.

"No weapons," Kai said, attempting to indicate that he was actually unarmed with a slight shake of his head. "Don't have any."

It yet again struck Kai how odd the language ability was, the words spilling from his mouth both alien and familiar.

Scrutinizing Kai was an unkind glare, the young man was seemingly searching for anything that Kai might have concealed. Kai thought hopefully that the man could realize that he was indeed without a weapon and that they might find some peaceful way out of this situation, however, once he looked into the eyes of the young man, Kai saw something that he desperately hoped he wouldn't have.

Kai had already long realized that the arrow knocked on the man's bow was of the same fashion that the arrow that had killed the man by the tree that he had found. But that didn't necessarily mean that this young man was the killer. But as Kai looked into the eyes of the bow-wielding man, he saw the resolution and determination of somebody who had already made their decision.

There was the exact same look that every single person had in their eyes when they were determined to finish off someone.

It was only on a few occasions that Kai himself had witnessed this look before somebody actually did the act, however, it was unmistakable to Kai's experienced gaze. Acting before the young man even had a chance, Kai sprung into motion.

Ignoring the pain that flared in his hand, Kai plunged his hand into the embers of the fire. Throwing the red hot ash and cinder into the face of the bow-wielding man, he elicited a panicked yelp, vision obscured.

Without missing a beat, Kai bolted towards him. The twang of a bowstring and swooshing of an arrow going loose, only to make a dull thud into the ground coupled with the thin streak of blood on Kai's left shoulder indicated that he had barely dodged the desperate shot.

Tackling the man, they rolled in the mud, desperately struggling for supremacy. However, Kai was no chump. He had fought and grappled his whole life, so with barely any effort, the young man suddenly found himself bound in a rear-naked chokehold.

With Kai's thick and strong legs wrapped around the man's torso and Kai strapped to his back with an arm locked firmly around his neck, the bow-wielder had absolutely zero chance of brawning his way out of the situation. Kai needed only to apply some pressure, and the man would be knocked out in seconds.

"Calm down!" Kai grunted, still attempting to diffuse the situation. "I don't wish to harm you, I'm lost and I need help."

Although Kai was already thoroughly pissed off by the fact that the man had tried to snuff out his life, and Kai wanted nothing more than beat this man to a pulp, he really did need help rather than revenge.

Lost and alone in these god-forsaken swamps, he wasn't sure that he would be able to last much longer. One fatal mistake out here in only who-the-fuck-knows-where could very easily spell his end.

The man struggled under Kai's hold, but he didn't budge in the slightest. There was no response to Kai's plead, however. And just as he was about to growl out his words once again the sudden feeling of something hard piercing his right leg stopped whatever he was about to say.

For a second, there was simply nothing but a cold and numbing feeling in the leg, but sensation quickly returned with the flare of horrid pain.

In the hand of the struggling young man, a bloody knife could be seen. The suddenness of the situation struck Kai like a truck, his muscles tensing up and panic flooding his mind.

This was too real, too familiar. In that one moment, Kai was back in the alley as a mere teenager, warm blood spilling through his fingers, and a knife in his gut.

Kai's mind shut down, the panic of dying like how he almost did that one time too great for even him. His instinctive reflexes made his muscles tighten with a vice, applying pressure to the man's trachea, desperate to make him fall unconscious. Kai wasn't sure what happened next, but the sudden change in the young man's desperate struggles caught him off guard.

It was first then, that Kai noticed the loud snapping of bone...

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Limply laying Kai's grapple, the young man stared listlessly out into the aether, eyes glassy.

His face that was caked in mud and grime from their tussle coupled with the line of saliva running unhindered down the side of his cheek made for a chilling sight.

Kai just laid there, unmoving as the seconds ticked by, not fully able to comprehend what had just happened.

But as the surge of adrenalin left his shaken and addled mind like a dam broken, the pain from the stab wounds in his leg came with a sudden onset of extreme vertigo. Letting go of the man's still warm body, Kai rolled to the side only to throw up a deluge of chunky toad meat and swamp water.

"Burgh..." He groaned, wiping the puke off his mouth with the back of his hand. On all fours, Kai just stared down at the remains of yesterday's hunt and dinner. To his side, the sprawled and limb form of the young man lay, still wholly unmoving.

Throughout his life, Kai had seen many people die, be it by natural causes, accidents, or even murder, Kai had witnessed it all in his short but tragic life.

Death had never been a stranger to Kai, something that had lingered as close bedfellow as he walked the tightrope of survival. However, the one thing life had never thrown at him was taking the life of another person.

There had never been a need for it, the farthest he had ever gone in hurting someone being beating their face in so hard they were left disfigured.

But no, he had never killed.

Sitting there, Kai looked around, almost as if expecting something. For his whole life, he had been told by various people that killing another human being was one of the greatest sins you could commit.

-You would go to hell, you would become traumatized, the heavens would scorn you for your horrible transgressions.

However, Kai simply sat there, waiting for... something to happen. But nothing did. No divine retribution, no sadness, and most of all, no guilt. Not even a sliver.

It had been a long time since Kai had given up on unconditional fellow human love and care. He, who had seen every side of humanity possible, both sickening and kind, no longer adhered to the illusions of good and evil. Such concepts to him were incoherent as they bounced uselessly off him after everything he had seen and been through.

Marred by the twisted reality of humanity, Kai did not follow such imposed morals of society. Some might call him nothing more than an animal, however, Kai, in fact, respected the non-sapient creatures the most. They didn't follow the illusionary notions of good and evil. To them, there was only family or enemy.

That was how Kai had conducted himself ever since becoming abandoned by society. Those he held dear, he protected with his life. And anyone who he didn't, was only to be faced with either ruthlessness or indifference. He took what he wanted, and protected only those he thought worthy.

Getting to his feet, he hobbled over to the already cooling corpse of the young man. Kai simply stared into his glassy eyes; no regret, no remorse, no guilt, he felt only disgust. Not at himself, but by the sight of another dead human being. It was revolting how easy it had been to snuff out this supposedly sacred and holy life.

"What a fucking joke..." He muttered, realizing how he had been unconsciously slung along in that notion up until now.

Beasts, animals, humans, it didn't matter. We all died the same.

Kai hadn't been able to discern it until now, but there was something else he felt as he stared down at the corpse of his would-be assailant. He racked his brain for what exactly the emotion was, but it eluded his grasp. However, he had a gut feeling that this emotion was somehow extremely important; something that would have a great meaning for his future.

Ripping some of the woven cloth of the man's clothes, Kai made two quick bandages, stopping the bleeding of his right leg and covering his slightly blistered hand.

It took only Kai a few handfuls of seconds of inspection to see that there was no immediate mortal danger with the wounds. The young man, with his movements restrained and panic taking hold of his mind, hadn't managed to do any real damage with the small knife.

The wounds were all neatly packed in his thigh, however, Kai could count his lucky stars as none of the stabs had cut or knicked the femoral artery of his leg. If it had, he would've bled out in mere minutes, and he'd not be able to do anything about it.

But luckily the cuts were all shallow and came at slanted angles, none able to go deep enough. But while there was no danger now, that didn't mean that he was out of the woods just yet.

Unable to sterilize and stitch the wounds, Kai faced the serious danger of succumbing to an infection. If he maybe had something to boil the swamp water in, he could at least wash the wound without worrying about bacteria, however, he didn't currently have such convenient tools at his disposal. Rummaging through the dead man's belongings, Kai found only a few usable items.

The knife Kai had been stabbed with, a leather pouch, some dried meat, and a small contraption that almost looked like flint and steel just without actual steel.

It was with the same flint-like rock that he had found, and the design was quite intuitive. Bundled together with the tool, was some odd, dried wood that crumbled like sawdust under his touch.

Surprisingly, the dried wood was so combustible that Kai thought that it might even have been saturated with lighter fluid or some other flammable substance. In no time, he had a fire going. Although he would've loved to get far away from the dead corpse of the young man and this place as soon as possible, he needed to take care of his wound first before attempting to move around on it.

He was quite annoyed by the fact that the bow the man had been wielding, broke in the tussle they had, but there wasn't anything he could do about it as the weapon was beyond repair for someone like Kai that had little to no experience in such regards. Other than that, there were only two serviceable arrows that he tucked into the strap around his waist holding up his pants since he might find some use for it down the road.

Letting out an exhausted sigh when he was done, he stared into the flickering flames licking the air.