

Tibs woke with a start, saw he was covered in blood, the massacre around him, and the memories assaulted him.

He threw up.

There was a lot of raw meat in there, and he threw up again. Then he forced himself up, used Purity to stop his legs shaking, and ran.

Ran from what he'd woken among, and the wildness that he remembered. The things he'd done.

At least, it had only been to animals.

Not that it was that much of a comfort.

Dropping water in a torrent over himself cleaned his body, but did little to make him feel clean.

It hadn't been him.

It had been Fever.

Except he'd learned to remain himself while channeling Fever. And how he'd acted wasn't how he'd been the previous times he'd lost control of Fever. It had been more intense, more out of control.

The way Fire had caused him to be, before he'd learned to remain himself while channeling it.

If he controlled himself while channeling either, why had channeling both caused him to lose control that way?

He reached his camp before he had an answer.

It was mostly intact. He'd ran off to... he forced the memory down. The ripped and burned clothing was the true sign something had happened to him. He'd undone the leather, burned the other fabrics until there was nothing between him and... He didn't want to think about that.

How his bracers had survived, he wasn't sure. What he remembered of how he'd lost control, his clothing had felt wrong. Not part of himself, and needed to be discarded. But his bracers hadn't even registered as being there.

Had he worn them so long he no longer felt them? Did he consider them a part of himself, so hadn't needed to destroy them? He didn't know if he could destroy them. The ones Sto had made for him had been resilient, and Firmen had repaired them; undone the damage time had caused to the bracer's weave. Maybe done more. The work was too intricate for Tibs to sense.

Whatever the reason, he was glad.

He packed up and moved deeper into the forest. He couldn't risk people around him until he understood what had happened, and found out how to not lose control.

He shuddered at the thought he'd go through what he'd already experienced.

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He woke up and rolled onto his side to throw up before opening his eyes. He focused on what he remembered of before losing control, instead of what he'd done this time.

He'd channeled Fever. He'd been fine. He'd made etchings, moved essence around, and he felt no pull to give into the desires of his body. He'd tried to be gentle in how he channeled Fire, hoping to ease the transition. But it had roared it, consumed space within his reserve, and then...

He forced himself to think back before he'd run.

Fire had exploded within his reserve. It hadn't mixed with Fever. It had been Tibs's first thought to explain why it's lost control. If the two had mixed and made something else, he wouldn't have known how to deal with it, but just as with Earth and Water, they coexisted within his reserve, not separated the way they were in his minuscule ones. They moved against each other, but they remained distinct.

But Tibs hadn't remained himself.

What he'd done was more than what he had while gaining control of Fever. Fever was about the body, the need for using it, for feeding it. Not just his stomach, but its other needs, too. Even those Tibs didn't feel the rest of the time.

This time, and the last, Tibs had...gone wild.

He had been no better than an animal, acting without thoughts. Giving into everything his body wanted.

He shuddered and steered his mind away from those memories.

The only way he could think of it was the simplest. He'd had acted as if Fire had taken Fever and pushed it beyond what it was. The way it had done with his emotions before he gained control.

Then why hadn't Fire done the same when he'd channeled it and Water? Or it and Earth?

Something he'd learned, reading so many texts, was that when scholars tested theories, if similar set of circumstances caused completely different results, the theory was wrong.

Tibs forces himself to look around.

Look at the dead animals.

None of the fights had been fair. Tibs had been consumed by Fever. He could have thought them dead. Instead, he'd fallen on them and sunk his teeth into their flesh. Ripped that and fur out, ate them before they were done dying.

He fought the urge to throw up.

This was why he needed control.

If he didn't, he wouldn't be able to trust himself channeling more than one element. And now that he knew he could? Just like he'd done with Alistair when he felt he had no other choice. If he couldn't think of another way to win, he would channel more than one element.

And he'd have to deal with the fallout after.

He looked at the dead animals, all only partially eaten. As if a few deadly bites had felt enough, and he'd needed to eat from another one. Or he'd been distracted by.... He definitely didn't want to think about that.

He gathered two of the largest; wolves, and brought them back to his camp. He might as well not let everything go to waste and make leather for clothing, as well as dry the meat for travel.

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It was because they were similar.

Tibs forced himself to breathe, in spite of the smell of death around him. He hadn't been able to keep control again as Fire ignited Fever, but now he thought he knew why.

He'd tested with Fire, Water, and Earth, because he'd known he wouldn't be sent out of control, and he'd paid attention to what happened as he changed one of the elements. It had meant letting himself feel the change each brought on more, and that hadn't been as easy as he'd expected, but he'd noticed it then.

Water and Fire had been the easiest to notice. Water made him want to be calm, to soothe, and help. It had been so relaxing he'd almost decided against continuing. Lying there, resting. Enjoying the calm.

But he remembered himself enough through that to continue with the experiment. He'd channeled Fire, which was about letting loose, feeling beyond all measure. Doing, not resting. Unleashing, not soothing.

He'd felt the pull then, but it hadn't been the ignition of Water, Fire making him feel more of what Water was until he lost control. He'd felt pulled away from Water and toward Fire. But that led to him feeling less of either because of their differences. It made it easier to remain himself.

He'd tested it with Fire and Earth, and something similar happened. Earth made him slow down. Made him feel like there was no point in ever hurrying, while Fire wanted to act now. Fire had no patience. Tibs felt, and needed to act. Both together and Tibs felt more like himself than either apart.

Confident he'd understood what was happening, Tibs had channeled Fire and Fever.

He looked at the result. Didn't think about the other things he'd done.

Knowing what happened hadn't let him keep control.

Training would do that.

And he'd have to test each combination of elements.

But for now, this was the one he needed to master.

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He wanted, needed, so much.

He needed to run, to eat, to mate, to defecate, to everything. Standing still was so painful, he didn't understand why he did it.

Other than he'd made the decision to torture himself like this.

He hated himself.

He screamed.

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Tibs cursed, but he didn't throw up this time.

How many failed attempts now? How many days, weeks, had he been trying this? He didn't know. He had no sense of how much time passed once he lost control.

If he trusted himself not to experiment with both elements in the middle of a fight, he'd swear the combination off. Stick with Water and Fire, Fire and Earth, but not Fire and Air. Both elements were about giving into part of himself, and had fed on each other. He'd laughed, and run, set fires and only the pain of the fire had brought him back before the fire spread.

He gathered the bear's body and returned to his camp.

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NO!

He shoved himself off the animal, and it ran off.

He nearly chased it. He needed to continue. The need was so strong it hurt.

No.

He didn't want this.

Need.

He *didn't* want this.

Need!

He didn't want this.

He wasn't Fever.

He wasn't Fire.

He was Tibs.

And he didn't want to do that with the animal. To himself.

Need!

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Tibs sighed.

He'd remembered himself at least. He hadn't been able to maintain control, but he'd remembered who he was. So that was a success.

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Stop!

Nee—

I said, *stop*.

The animal ran off and, this time, he didn't even entertain the idea of chasing it. He was Tibs Light-Fingers. He was a person. He had limits. He had to deal with the consequences of what he did.

And he didn't want to do this. None of it.

Nee—

Tibs let the elements go.

No dead animals, so he'd returned to himself sooner. He'd also been himself enough to remember he didn't have to channel the elements.

Definite improvement.

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I need. I want.

I don't have to give into what I need or want.

He trembled from those needs. But he didn't move.

Thinking was difficult, but acknowledging what made the elements seemed to soothe them. Helped him remember he was Tibs, while they were Fire and Fever. They were part of himself and the world, but there needed to be an equilibrium. Everything alive had wants and needs.

They were a part of how the elements that made up everything manifested in them. But they, like him, weren't the elements.

He was Tibs Light-Fingers, and he was the one in charge in.

He opened his eyes.

He was in his camp.

He wanted to run, to chase, to eat, and do other things, but with some exceptions,

those were things he wanted at one time or another. He hadn't had to give into those desired then; he didn't have to now.

He dressed in one of the set of clothing he'd made from the pelts he'd collected, and set about gathering wood, remaining aware of who he was the entire time. Fever and Fire pulled at him, but he was used to it. He needed to eat. His temper exploded at times. They intensified them, because it was what they were, but he didn't have to give into them. He'd satisfy those urges that were his when it was appropriate.

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Tibs moved the raw essence around him, fire through fever, over and under. He felt their pull, but remembering who he was was easier with each time he did this. They were part of him, but not him.

He sensed the animal trotting through the trees, and as it stopped, he formed the fire blast etching with that essence, then fed it fever essence.

The heat of the blast was...moist was the closest word he could think of. The trees barely had marks of the blast. And when it hit the animal, it consumed it entirely. Its life essence hadn't leaked out until it was dead. It had been burned away along with its body.

What was left, when he reached it, wasn't quite ashes. It was pale and soggy. If he hadn't sensed it before, he wouldn't have known what this had been.

He stepped away and, without letting go of Fever, he formed the fire blast etching, then fed it fire essence, unleashing it at the remains.

There was no change in how he felt. No shift in the essences within his reserve. Channeling both elements didn't require him to always use both, it simply increased the range of what he could do.

He smiled.

So long as he remained himself for a few more days, he'd be good to return to his journey.