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CHAPTER 1

Bay of Gebbin, Lynda. Far Eastern Continent

Present...

Gin disembarked *The Argyn Ot*, his mind set on his destination, ignoring the guilt still plaguing him at having kept Rum out of his plans. This was *his* fight, the ryn Ferths were his clan; Rum should understand. Besides, he was the older brother, it was his duty to keep Rum safe—his mother had said so—and he would not allow the ryn Ferths to torment his twin another day, he would stop the attempts on both of their lives. If he succeeded, and he was determined to do so—this would end or the ryn Ferths would perish—he might finally be able to live his own life without Rum hanging upon him.

Stupid Ellis. It was a dark whisper in his mind, one still lingering from his childhood, and he shoved it away. He loved his twin; he did this for his twin. *Stupid Ellis.*

Gin pressed a wide brimmed hat down upon his blond head, the long, black feather dancing in the breeze. He wanted to blend in with the crowd and Lyndian men never went about in public without a hat upon their head—at least ‘twas so when last he stepped foot upon Lyndian soil and a quick glance around confirmed the continued trend.

“Where do you go, Master Py?” Golden Boots crossed his arms over his chest as he stood

at the bottom of the gangplank. He knew his first mate was up to something, had known since they set sail towards the other man's home port, but of just what Gin was planning, he held no notion.

Gin offered a trouble-making grin. "Family reunion, Capt'n."

"I see." Boots shook his head, thinking he should have seen, should have known. "Make certain to return in two days, 'tis when we depart. Leave ye I will with little guilt if ye think I mean not to stick to the schedule. Expected we are in Elaquin next and I will not be late."

"Aye, Capt'n." With a nod to Boots, Gin continued on his journey, making his way through the crowded dock, the way to the vile ryn Ferth manor still burned within his memory—not even seventeen years of another life could erase it.

"Do ye have me follow the lad?" Rune Stone stood next to Boots, watching where Gin was heading. He shoved his hands in the pockets of his seacoat after pulling a ratty hat over his dark hair. He was uncertain how he felt about standing once more upon Lyndian soil, for the last time had held an explosive argument with his father. If he could avoid his father though, 'twould be a fine thing. Though he wondered if there was time to visit with his mother.

Boots nodded and waved the man off before returning to supervising the unloading of the wool and other goods he brought to trade. He felt better knowing Rune would be keeping watch over the wayward first mate. Rune would keep Gin out of trouble; as his uncle, he had a vested interest in the matter.

* * *

Gin waited just on the edge of town, his back against the wall of the last building, staring at the single lane road, the one that would take him slightly inland and south to the ryn Ferth estate, and grabbed the man following him. Spinning him around, he shoved him against the building and...

He swore seeing that it was Rune who followed him. "Why do ye follow me?"

"'Tis a foolish quest yer on, lad. Would it not be best to have one along to watch yer back?"

"I need not an old man to watch my back."

"Old! Lad, only am I eight years yer senior and two score is not old. Now that Rum is not

here to aid ye...”

“Rum would be useless for what I desire to do.”

Sadness filled the older pirate’s grey-blue eyes. “Ye think so little of him and ‘tis a shame. As his twin, ye should know he is not so fragile.”

“As my twin, I know just how fragile he is. Now, return to the boat and tell the Capt’n I need not his protection.”

“I volunteered my protection for I know what sort of trouble ye are about.”

“Fuck! Why do ye care?”

“Because, ye fool, yer uncle I am and ‘tis my concern to keep ye safe. Now, let us move along. This part of town,” he looked about, disgust upon his face, “is falling into disrepair with bandits and thieves lurking about.” It seemed a lot had happened in the twenty years he had been gone, and not all good.

“Uncle!” Gin tightened his hold on Rune’s jerkin. “What mean ye uncle? Well aware am I that...”

“Upon yer father’s side. Eltin was my older brother. Still clinging I was to my mother’s skirts when he married yer mother.”

“I need naught, desire naught, from the tyr Venses, so report back to the old man...” Gin wasn’t certain what happened, but somehow Rune had switched positions with him and now it was he who was being held against the building.

“Think what ye wish, lad, but in need ye are of my aid in this venture and there is naught ye can do to change my mind or chase me away. Now let us be off before the day wanes further or I will drag ye back to the boat and throw ye in the hold for yer own safety.”

* * *

Torin eth Welex sneezed just as he walked through the large front gates guarding the ryn Ferth manor and dropped his case, which had the good grace of falling open and spilling all the papers inside. He hated his job, his life. He consoled himself with knowing that he would not be working for Doshan ryn Ferth in a few days.

No! He would quit at the end of the day. Why push his luck, his vengeance was complete, the ryn Ferth fortune no longer within the ryn Ferth coffers.

Besides, *The Argyn Ot* was in port; he had seen her dock that morn. It had taken all of his control not to run up and search out her captain, Ellis's letter in hand. Yes, he would quit and be on the boat by the morrow's sunrise; he was already packed, nothing holding him to Lynda's shores any longer.

With a sigh, he knelt down and he started gathering the contents of his case, grabbing the gold cuff that had spilled with the papers first, shoving it into his pocket until he was inside. He was happy that there wasn't much of a breeze that day—were he to arrive with a page or two missing, everything could be ruined.

“Do allow me to aid you,” he spoke in the High Commons parlance of Lynda, allowing his U's to dip and when he came to an R, it would roll. He hated to take on the ruse of being Kynon, he did not wish to be Kynon, but he was willing to do what needed doing for the situation. He knelt down and started gathering papers, keeping his brows from shooting upwards seeing the various numbers upon them.

“No need, I have it.” Torin looked up and froze seeing the ghost from his past. He knew he shouldn't be shocked, knew he would be seeing him when he begged for passage on *The Argyn Ot*, but he never expected him to appear at the ryn Ferth manor.

“Well now, I know not about that, since all you do is sit and stare.” He offered a cheeky grin to the portly man. “Zasara's blessings.”

Torin wished to know why Kynon would offer blessings when suddenly he sneezed again and again. “Thank you. How did you know...?” Another sneeze.

“That you would sneeze?” He touched the side of Torin's nose, finally seeing the chubby boy with the untidy sun bleached hair in the grown man with his tidy wheaten hair before him; the slight downturn of his yiska eyes giving him away. “It twitched right there. 'Tis what happened in our youth when you were struck with a round of sneezing.”

“Kynon...” Torin sucked in a breath, hating the way his voice shook. This man... “What do you do here?”

“Am I disallowed to return? A ryn Ferth I am and 'twould seem that I would be welcome.”

“You know 'tis not so. Doshan...”

Kynon's smile turned troublemaker and he had to keep from slipping into the guttural tones of his pirate self. “Now I must profess hurt. There would be no welcome for the long lost

scion?”

“’Tis why you would have no welcome, and methinks you are well aware of this fact. Intent you are upon mischief.”

He touched Torin’s cheek, doing his best to keep from cupping the fullness and kissing him proper. He had always enjoyed those of a more portly build, that Torin had been his first crush, only made the desire more so; he wanted to suck on those cheeks. No... what he truly wanted was to pull Torin against him and feel himself press into the other man’s flesh. He nearly shuddered with lust at the thought, but he couldn’t control the beginnings of an erection—he was glad for his coat.

Dropping his hand, he returned to aiding the one he planned to make his lover, picking up the papers, straightening them. “You look well. Prosperous even. Though I must wonder what you do working for such foul beings as the ryn Ferths.”

“Always have those of my House worked for them. How else would the ryn Ferths have kept their pockets filled with coin? Their marriages are never as advantageous as those of the tyr Vens.” Placing the last sheet back in his case, Torin once more looked at Kynon...Gin. Ellis had said that his brother went by the name Gin. He thought he preferred Kynon, especially when he was acting like Kynon. “Truly you should not have come. Doshan...”

“Needs know that his days of attempted murder are over. No longer will I allow him to harm my brother.”

Torin studied him a moment longer, uncertain what his Reading abilities were telling him. There were so many conflicting emotions crammed within the other man, much of them in regards to Ellis, some good, but mostly... “Have you heard from Ellis?”

“Not for the last ten days. I left him in Ganos with his new husband.” Straightening, he held out his hand to Torin, posture and tone indicating he wished not to speak of his twin.

Taking the hand, Torin allowed himself to be helped to his feet, the handle of his case tightly clenched in his fist, knowing everything was now in peril. He pulled his hand away, turned and started the long trek to the back entrance of the manor, already winded—he needed to drop a few pounds.

“Where do you go? Is not the front door this way?” Kynon placed a hand on Torin’s shoulder, motioned to the door with the other.

“Think you that Doshan would consider me more than a servant? I care for his finances

and ‘tis not an occupation, let alone an individual, he deems worthy of such significance as entering the front door and being received.”

“Then a fool he is. Methinks ‘twould be most prudent to treat such an individual with the respect they are due. Are you skilled at your job?”

“I would like to think so, yes. The ryn Ferths capital has increased each quarter since I have been in charge, as it did with my mother.”

“And she is well?” Seeing the flash of pain in the other man’s eyes, Kynon knew he stepped wrong. “My apologies. When did she cross?”

“Ten years past.” Torin turned away. “If you are determined to confront Doshan, I wish you luck. Do please excuse me, already am I late.”

Kynon followed, not ready to cease speaking with his treasure. “Does he then yell when you are late?”

“He docks my day’s wage by half.”

“If he does so this day, then gladly will I make amends and give you the other half.”

“Why would I desire your ill-gotten gains?” Though the money he pilfered from the ryn Ferths could only hold the same title, but at least it was by his own hand.

“Not all my funds are ill-gotten. And I see that you are informed of my life since leaving the manor.”

“I am, as is Doshan—‘tis why I offered warning. Now please, I must go about my day; ‘tis my last.” Torin hurried on away from the other man, uncertain he cared for the information he was receiving about him. He cared very little that Kynon preferred men, long had he known, it was that it was affecting *him*, causing his own prick to tingle with interest and *he* liked women...

Though Torin had to admit that since his wife’s death he had not preferred anyone, man or woman.

He watched his treasure escape thinking that he would have time enough to take him later and so kept himself from giving chase right then. Besides, there was too much to do before indulging in his heart’s desire.

“Never have I seen ye act in such a way, lad.” Rune stood leaning against one of the stone pillars of the entry gate. “Is he treasure?”

“I see not why it matters.”

“Treasure always matters to a pirate.”

“Go away. I need ye not with me to offer threats.”

“If ye think that threats will stop Doshan, then a fool ye are. ‘Tis a blade in the heart that will cease his activities.”