

Jyk burst into loud, rolling belly laughter, cutting it off quickly as Tylik strode forward again. Jyk swatted aside a few slightly harder swings before reaching across his body to snatch Tylik's wrist again, stepping into him – looping his front foot behind one of Tylik's – and ramming his shoulder into the larger man's chest, knocking him firmly to his backside.

“Tylik, listen to me,” he said, backing away yet again, “just stop. I would really rather not hurt you, but if you persist for long enough I'm gonna lose my patience and do something we'll both regret.”

“Servant- prick,” Tylik growled, scrambling to his feet. Without another word he charged in for another round, this time adding knees and elbows into his easily blocked attacks. As he mustered a fairly impressive combination ending with a hard knee aimed for the stomach, Jyk changed tactics and used his fist to block it. Knuckles drove painfully into Tylik's lower thigh, even as Jyk hit him squarely in the chest with a hard palm strike, knocking the young man assward once again.

Jyk looked over at Tylik's cousin, who was still watching calmly, a bemused look on his face. “Is he always like this?,” Jyk asked. “Because he could get himself killed picking fights of this sort.”

The cousin shrugged. “He's stubborn and aggressive, but I'd say this has a lot to do with his brother's broken jaw. That, and where I say things to servants and the like, he *means* them.”

Jyk turned back to the again- rising Tylik with a bemused look on his face. “If this is about your brother's jaw, then it's time to bloody well forget about it. That was three cycles ago.”

Tylik shook himself off and settled into his stance. “Bylik handles his own problems, just like I do, and I won't have some bastard servant talking to me like that.”

Jyk raised a finger. “I am not a bastard, I'm an orphan. My parents were married when I was conceived, but both dead by the time I was a day old. Big difference.”

Tylik snarled and waded in again, no less ineffectually. Jyk even stopped his token retreat and simply held off Tylik's attack while standing in place. After several irritating combinations Jyk growled with aggravation and slammed his boot into Tylik's stomach with a front kick hard enough to send the larger man rolling over backwards a full rotation before flopping onto his back. Tylik quickly regained his feet, though he struggled with regaining his breath.

Jyk threw his arms up in vexation, grunting a sigh. “Tylik, open your bloody ears: you are not going to beat me. Not now, not ever. If you don't quit this shit I'm gonna show you just what that kind of attitude will get you in the real world.”

Tylik coughed loudly as he regained the ability to breathe. “You act like you've been able to hurt me. All you can do is push me over and sneak out a kick like a little bitch.”

Jyk shook his head slowly before settling into a defensive stance, a stony expression taking hold of his face. “Fine,” he said flatly, “if you won't listen to reason then I'll just have give you a demonstration. Give me your best stuff this time because you will *not* be getting another pass.”

When Tylik advanced, Jyk strode forward to meet him and easily blocked a few quick jabs followed by ducking a slow hook. As Jyk ducked, Tylik brought a knee up and almost into his face, before a fist blocked it in a manner very similar to the last time. As Jyk stood straight, Tylik was loosing an overhand right that he had wound up before throwing the knee. Jyk brought his left forearm up across his body and swiped the punch outward, almost simultaneously driving his right palm into the punching arm's shoulder.

Thus on the offensive, Jyk pressed his advantage while attempting to stay at half- strength in order to avoid doing his opponent serious injury. Before Tylik had finished reeling from the palm strike, Jyk took a small shuffle step forward and jabbed him stiffly in the solar plexus, laid opposing fists to each side of the jaw, then threw a hard kick to the lower legs, sweeping Tylik from his feet. The moment he hit the ground, Tylik began rolling from side to side on his back, grasping at his chest in a strangled attempt to catch his breath.

“You'll be able to breathe shortly. Stop struggling and it'll be easier,” Jyk said sternly.

After Tylik caught his breath this time, he made no move to spring back to his feet, instead by turns coughing and gasping in gulps of air – although a couple of the gasps did sound suspiciously like “crazy bastard,” and “coulda killed me.”

Jyk fixed Tylik with a deep frown. “Do I finally have your attention?”

Tylik, bug- eyed, looked up from the ground and nodded fervently in response.

“Whereas I am actually turning out to be a fairly nice guy, as it seems,” said Jyk, “most people you're going to run into will not act as I just did. If you pull some shit like that in the wrong pub you're likely to get knifed to death before you know you're outclassed.”

Tylik laid on the grass and fixed Jyk with a baleful look.

Jyk rolled up the sleeve of his left arm and showed a nasty knife scar on either side of it. "You mounted five separate attacks on me and didn't get so much as a fingertip past my guard. I rendered you completely helpless in five *moves*. I haven't even broken a sweat."

Tylik's face went slack as he opened his mind, just a little.

Jyk rolled his eyes at the prone man. "I'm not even sure why I'm bothering to tell you all of this. Normally I would just knock you out and hope I don't get flogged for it, but for some reason I feel myself compelled to impart a little hard-earned knowledge. You pull this with the wrong person and they'll just kill you. They also look just like everyone else, so think about that before you start talking shit. Ask yourself two questions: 'could this person be crazy enough to kill me?' And 'is what I'm about to say or do worth risking my life?'"

When Tylik actually nodded before making an effort to stand, Jyk turned to leave and noticed the master-at-arms standing several paces on the other side of the wall, staring directly at him. *Bugger*. Varlin raised a hand and motioned for Jyk to come to him. *I don't know a curse expressive enough for that...* He hopped the wall and tried to keep a calm pace as he walked up to the master-at-arms.

"Yes, master-at-arms?," asked Jyk, sketching a bow.

Varlin's eyebrows rose, but not angrily. "No lengthy excuse?"

Jyk shrugged slightly. "In my experience, people very rarely listen to anything beyond what they themselves saw. Until I know what you saw I have no way of knowing what is in need of explanation."

Varlin fought off a chuckle. "I take it you've made trouble a habit, then?"

Jyk fought the urge to look at his feet and maintained eye contact with the master-at-arms. "I prefer to think that I made standing up for myself and those around me a habit, but I must admit I never shied from trouble. Until recently, at least."

Varlin narrowed his eyes in what could be concentration or irritation. "And you would call that avoiding trouble?"

"I did everything but run away, sir, and that would have only changed the location of the fight. He was very adamant."

"Adamant and not just easily provoked?"

"I watched a little of your training session. I was roundly insulted by the pair of them and I told him that he should be sure of who the servant is before he starts attacking them verbally."

"And just who are you that he should be wary of attacking?"

"Jyk Pevnal, sir, born, orphaned, and raised in the servants' wing; current title holder for Tarranton Arena's third division." He managed not to smirk as he said the last bit.

Master-at-arms Varlin's mouth pulled into a small smile. "I thought as much. I did not catch the whole exchange, but I saw you defend and toss him to the ground two or three times, attempting to get him to stop before you fought back."

"I hesitate to call what I did fighting," Jyk said with only a hint of arrogance.

Varlin chuckled lightly. "What would you call it then?"

"It was more like thumping a hyperactive dog on the snout, hoping it learns the lesson."

Varlin raised an eyebrow. "What you mean is that it took you no more effort than disciplining a badly behaved mutt, yes?"

Jyk nodded. "I tried to tell him not to do it until I ran out of patience and just thumped him in the solar plexus to keep him immobilized and knocked him onto his ass again." He gave a tiny shrug. "Just enough to show him what I *could* do."

Varlin nodded again. "You said that you hadn't shied away from trouble except for recently. Why recently?"

Jyk took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. *He seems to like me well enough...and maybe he still tells me to come see him next cycle. I'll find out just how interested he is before putting my dream on the line.* "I found a real, concrete goal for the first time in my life," he replied.

Varlin quirked an eyebrow. "That's a bit vague, don't you think? Try again."

"The long or the short of it?"

Varlin shrugged. "How about we aim somewhere for the middle."

Jyk smiled as he gave a short nod. "Yessir," he said, and inhaled deeply. "At first it was simply because it's hard to fight when your back is all stitched up from being lashed." His back muscles flexed with the uncomfortable memory. "When I realized how attainable the Ducal Guard could be...my focus hasn't wavered since."

Varlin pursed his lips and nodded, somewhat impressed. “That’s a pretty good goal. Still pretty vague, a lot of young troublemakers go on to be Guards.”

Jyk took a deep breath. *Here we go.* “Troublemakers don’t get trained in the sword by Master- at- arms Varlin. Especially not before their sixteenth cycle.”

Varlin’s eyebrows arched high. “Now, that is a lofty goal indeed,” he said. “So you figured you’d clean up your act to learn what you need to become a Guard, eh?”