

The Cup of life

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Kapitel 3: Rain day

Some more days had passed now and after more than a week of cloudless sky and hot weather it had started raining again. Not the drizzle they had on their arrival day in Altador – now it was a real cloudburst. The temperatures didn't drop very much though and it was still pretty warm outside.

A few teams still had been able to play in the early morning the other matches had been delayed until the late afternoon or evening – which also included Darigan and their opponent Haunted Woods. Tandrak didn't bother about them too much. Although the Zombies had improved over the last years they still were known to draw or lose against old and ongoing powerhouses. They wouldn't be too much of a problem.

Right now he used his uncommon spare time to wander through the streets of Altador a bit. His fur was soaking wet after just a few seconds but he didn't care about it. This was one of the rare chances to see a bit more of the city without being chased over the hills by a hoard of raging fangirls. No one else was outside. Or at least he believed so at first.

"The ballstar doesn't even have enough money for an umbrella?"

The Gelert stopped so sudden as if he had run against an invisible wall. Not again... This cold voice was giving him the creeps. The only thing he wanted to do was just turn tail and run. But then again it might have been pretty impolite... Maybe Terr really was just seeking for a friend and didn't mean any harm. He was a creep anyways...

"Care for another visit at the Darigan Island or whatever it was called?" the Lupe asked and came closer. Too close.

"Krawk Citadel", Tandrak said and instinctively backed away a bit, "No, thanks, I was just on my way back."

"Oh, then ... wait a sec, I'll get us a coffee-to-go from that Krawk Citadel and then I'll accompany you for a while, what about that?"

The Gelert sighed resigned and just nodded as there was no way he could get rid of the other too soon.

Just a few minutes later Terr returned and handed him his cup. At least it had a lid – watered coffee wouldn't have tasted too great. For a second their eyes met and Tandrak felt a shiver running down his spine. His cold gaze and the grin that now set his features – this mix made him look as if he had laid an eye on some kind of prey. And still the Gelert didn't just leave and walked beside him through the empty streets instead. They talked a bit about the games although it seemed as if Terr was just

asking questions about them to have something to talk about, not because he was really interested. He also asked him if he still felt happy with his pirate guy and repeatedly mentioned that there were a lot of Darigans around he could take instead. "Listen", Tandrak said and took another sip from his coffee, "I neither want you nor any other. I'm happy with my pirate since the second Cup and it also will stay like that for a long time."

"We'll see", the Lupe just stated, "Opinions can change quite fast you know."

Suddenly Tandrak felt a slow growing sickness – but not because of Terr. Maybe the stress of the past few days, heat, humidity, a heavy fur coat and coffee was too much for him at the moment. He had to lean against a wall.

"T-Terr ... I ..." The last thing he brought out before a dark cloud filled his head.

His mind was slowly returning. He was lying in a bed, staring at the wall. His bed, he was back in his room. He never had been completely passed out and the memories that were now flooding through his brain made him want to throw up. He still had been able to feel, hear, see, move around but it was like he was walking through thick fog with earmuffs on his head and a strange feeling of callousness. They had been walking into the building and up to his room. No strangers were allowed in there but after Terr had been with a player who didn't seem to bother about him too much the security had let him pass. They had walked into his room and then... He was shivering when he realized that he still was naked and that someone now was crawling over him, back into the bed.

Terr roughly hugged him from behind – at least he now was wearing some clothes again – placed a kiss at his neck and whispered into his ears, "See, I told ya. I knew we'll belong together one day."

Tandrak would have really vomited but he didn't even have the strength to turn his head, not even to open his eyes more than just half. His whole body was hurting and he still felt so weak, so tired ... and so grossed out...

"I know it still will be hard to keep you, but it was a first step after all. Next would be to make that pesky pirate leave."

There was a knock at the door. "Shaye? Are ye back again?"

"Heck, not that early", he pushed Tandrak in the back, "Tell him, he should piss off."

The Gelert opened his mouth, not that he wanted to really do what Terr said but he at least wanted Hale to know he was there, to know what was going on. But it was just a mere whisper that was coming from his lips, drowned by a door pushed open – Terr didn't even take his time to lock it – and a pirate Bori coming in. He stopped and stared at them, bewilderment in his gaze. "Shaye? What the fuck...?"

Terr sighed and climbed out of bed another time. "So you were the one, weren't you? Well yes, it is exactly what it looks like. I think he even was happy to cheat on you with me."

Hale turned his head to look at Tandrak. There might have been a little glint of anger in his eyes, but they mostly were filled with pain.

The Draconian now was at least able to lift his head a bit. "Hale... please..."

And the pirate's eyes widened in realisation. He had perceived despair, pain and fear in those two nearly whispered words, seen it in the other's eyes. Something was completely wrong here. His eyes narrowed when he looked back at Terr. Suddenly he rushed over to the Lupe, grabbed the collar of his shirt lifted him up a bit and slammed him against the wall. "Little bastard. What the fuck have ye done to him?"

Terr tried another smirk but it more looked like a grimace. "Just tried to show him

some real fun and pleasure. You pirates may be rough but not enough for us Draconians. He just still stayed with you because he had a lack of comparison and after he was unwilling at first I had to drug him. The effect will subside soon but believe me, now that he has tasted blood he wouldn't want to have you back. And now let me go. You can't do anything against me. Wouldn't be too good for any image if a ballstar beat up an innocent fan."

"Innocent?" Hale scoffed, "I bet they would forgive me beatin' ye up after Shaye..."

Terr's real smirk returned. "Forget it. Our sexy one wouldn't say anything for a certain reason."

Hale snarled and let go of him but just to push the alarm all of the players had in their rooms. "Then let's just let the security take care of ye, scumbag."

Just a few seconds later two security members approached.

"We have an intruder here", Hale exclaimed, still having a hard time to repress his rage, "He... might have attacked Shaye but don't worry he's alright. Would be enough if I stay here with him for a while. Just take care of that creep."

After Terr had been dragged out and they were all alone again, Hale sank down to his knees beside the bed, carefully took Tandrak in his arms. The tiredness was still there but at least the Gelert's strength was slowly returning. He wrapped his arms around the other, buried his face the Bori's shoulder. At first he had been shivering but now he felt Hale's soothing warmth around him again. He didn't say a word, just was there letting his hands gently run through the fur on Tandrak's back giving him as much comfort as possible. He held him tight until the Gelert finally gave in to his exhaustion and slowly drifted into sleep.

When Tandrak opened his eyes again the room was bathed in the light of dusk. The rain was now completely gone. Hale still was sitting beside his bed and let his fingers run over the other's cheek. Tandrak set up slightly. His strength had fully returned his body was hurting just a bit anymore.

The pirate looked at him. "So ... ye're feeling better?"

"Yeah ... a bit I guess ..."

"Ye knew this guy? At least he seemed to do so quite well."

"He was ... I made acquaintance with him years ago on the Citadel", Tandrak said, staring down at the blanket. Seeing a former friend in him made the pain inside stronger again. "He once was a street kid like me." It came out before he could hold it back but then again why should he still keep silent about it. Hale was his love after all and furthermore the pirate in him would make him understand better than anyone else. "But this isn't the only secret he knows about me. I once was a thief, a criminal, a hunted one on the Citadel. Let's just say I faked my death to escape and start a new life. When I returned as a grown up no one recognised me anymore, except for him. I haven't told anyone about my past before and I'm afraid of what could be if he came out with everything."

Hale carefully took his hand. "Hey, look at me. I'm a goddamn pirate and I'm sure ye know what we mostly do. But do people hate the Krawk Island team because of that? No. Besides this was yer past life. It's long time behind ye. I would also feel sure enough to say that most of yer fans would be like 'Aw, poor Tandrak, what a rough childhood he had' than be mad 'bout ye."

Tandrak weakly smiled. Yeah, the fans wouldn't ditch him that fast but what about his own teammates? Before he could think any further it was knocking on the door again. "Tandrak? After the rain is gone now they decided to set our match in half an hour",

they heard Layton's voice.

"Okay, I'll be there soon", Tandrak answered.

"Ye sure?" Hale asked after Layton was gone again.

"Yes, this is business and has nothing to do with my private problems. Besides this is just Haunted Woods. I could need an easy game now."

There were still puddles on the streets but they already started to dry. The sun was half gone when Tandrak came to the coliseum. Nights in Altador weren't that much cooler than days but at least there was no sun burning down.

When he was changing clothes in the dresser room he repeatedly could feel Layton's gaze on him. Finally their team captain came over to him. "Are you sure, you can play today? You don't look as if you're feeling too well."

"It's nothing. Just usual nervousness." This was more than ordinary stage fright. He felt sick and weak again but he tried to repress it. There was no time for unwanted feelings and memories during a game. Layton didn't look too concert but at least he didn't want to go any deeper. Besides it was already time to leave. The game was about to begin.

"The game is half over and Darigan is still in lead with a good 3-1. The Zombies would need some good shots or a miracle to catch up", the commentator's voice echoed over the field again. "Vitor on the ball, Shaye behind him but he seems to have problems catching up."

It was true. The longer this game was lasting the harder it got to run. Not just the muscles in his legs were feeling numb he also ran out of air faster than usual and he had to stop and stand around just panting heavily more often. It was a very hot night but he alternated in sweating and freezing badly.

"Vitor shoots and ... wait, what's that? Do we have our first breakdown this Cup?"

The Yooyu went straight into the net but Reshar didn't even seem to notice it. Not even Vitor payed attention anymore if he had scored or not. The centre of attention now rather was the Darigan right forward who had broken down to his knees. For a second he tried to get up again then his arms gave in and he remained lying on his stomach.

When Tandrak's eyes snapped open again he saw a white ceiling over him. He quickly tried to set up.

"Hey, not so fast, pal. It's not good for you."

Layton gently pushed him back into the bed.

"What has happened? What about the match?"

"Is that the only thing you are worried about? Well, you have passed out and we had one player less. Even the Zombies wanted to cancel the game and repeat it on the next day but the committee decided to go on with it. With one forward less we were going down. As long as you still aren't feeling too good I wouldn't suggest you to take a look at our standings now."

Tandrak closed his eyes and groaned.

"I couldn't care less about it because I was worried about you and still I am. The paramedics thought it was because of the heat and the stress but still suggested we should let a doctor examine you. Right now I'm just glad that we didn't let an official Cup doctor close to you because you would be in a lot of trouble now. One of Tormo's old friends who's a doctor has his practice in this town. When he analysed your blood

sample he found a mix of the speedo power-up, date rape drug and Rapture, a common party drug. He said it must have been mixed by a pro because one microgram more or less of one of the ingredients would have been a deadly cocktail. I know you had never done drugs and I don't think you ever would but the committee would have thought else. So what on Neopia has happened?"

"Yeah, he really is an expert", Tandrak slowly said staring at the ceiling, "Date rape to make me compliant, Rapture to keep me from passing out and to give me enough energy to move on my own and the speedo maybe for camouflage so that he could carry it around before he gave it to me. Maybe also to give me some kick so that I wouldn't just lie around later on."

He noticed Layton's confused and now even more worried gaze and shut his eyes. Slowly, haltingly he uncovered memories he wished he could just forget a second time that day.

After he had ended Layton looked at him silently for a little while then he said, "I'll stand by you, no matter what and I think I can speak for the rest of the team as well. Past is past and I think we all are no angels after we all had been through a few rough years including a war. Don't believe we would ditch you just because some idiot reveals never told information about you. We might not be able to take memories away from you but we can bring that bastard into even more trouble than he is now. But it's all your decision because it's highly possible that every detail will go public. Think about it."

Tandrak just silently nodded. Layton gave him a warm smile and said, "Now rest, we want to have you back. I think I can now finally tell Hale you're alright."

The Gelert's heart made a little jump. Why just Hale? Could it be possible that Layton knew something? Hadn't he already revealed enough of his private life on one day?

"Hale?" he asked as innocent as possible.

"Yeah, a lot of people came to me that night to ask about your well being but Hale definitely took the cake. No, wait, he rather took the whole bakery because he was literally storming me every five minutes. I wonder what got into that guy. Well, I think he will be happy to hear that you feel okay again."

After Layton was gone Tandrak let out a sigh of relief.

For one day it remained pretty calm. The news mentioned his breakdown but after he was alright and able to play again it wasn't a too big deal. And then on day two the headlines exploded. Seemed like Terr didn't want to wait much longer to slip a few humiliating details about Tandrak's past life and how he raped him. Strangely there was nothing to read about a relationship with a certain pirate. Only one of the papers mentioned that the Lupe seemingly wanted to humiliate Tandrak even more by framing him for having a relationship with another male player – complete nonsense of course. In their opinion the Darigan player still was the womanizer all people saw in him and his only sexual interaction with another male was during the rape and the other papers obviously silently agreed to that.

On one single morning the Gelert got more attention than ever before. It wasn't easy being reminded of what had happened two days ago with every step he took but he had the support of his friends and Hale. And it also was better that everything was out, much better than choking on it forever.

"The desert mummies might be out of shape a bit lately but that's no reason to take them lightly. They were our hardest opponents last year and still can take us as

stepping stone up to the top again if we let our guard down. But if we do our best just like we always do we can win. I believe in you. So let's fight for our DC pride."

Tandrak listened to Layton's motivation speech while still getting dressed and couldn't help but smile. Even if their opponent was called Moltara he held speeches as if they had to face Kreludor. Sometimes Tandrak wished he also had such an undying optimism.

Before they all went out Layton held him back to ask, "You're feeling fit enough even with all this ... hullabaloo now going on? I know we can't cancel the match now nor do we have any substitutes. Just wanted to know if I should take the main part today or if we can rely on two forwards like usual."

"Yeah, I'm sure I can do it. This Cup is my life. It might not always be too good but I will go through no matter what."

The Hissi patted his shoulder. "Alright, then let's go out there and sweep them."

The crowd went wild when they entered the game field and took their positions. Win or loss – somehow that didn't matter at the moment. The most important thing was that he felt alive again. Another game, another chance – and Tandrak Shaye was alive.