

Friendship

Von Tikaya

The uproar of battle filled her ears with a cacophony of sounds. She heard the harsh shrieks of Vampis over her own blood running loudly through her veins, the menacing footsteps of a dozen evil creatures, the dull thunk of bodies, falling dead into the red dust.

The green haired archer girl held her bow in a desperate grip while ducking under a dash attack of some quick, four-legged monster. Instead it hit the sword girl running beside her, bringing the strong woman down. Immediately a horde of misshaped animals were above her and Tikaya resisted the urge to cover her ears as she kept on running, desperately trying to ignore the screams rising behind her.

She skidded behind a huge rock, pressing her back against the jagged stone, only the thin layer of her green leather clothing separating her shacking form from the cold surface.

She pulled her booted feet close to her body, leaning her head against the stone and closed her eyes for a moment.

But even now she could hear small animals coming closer and poisonous spikes hit the rock, melting it like butter in a summer heat. Rays of darkness stroke the stone, marking the approach of Vampis.

Tikaya released the death grip on her bow, only now noticing that she had hold it so tight that her fingers were still stiff. She carefully secured her main weapon behind her back, before she took a deep, shaky breath trying to calm herself.

Then she fingered a dirk out of her pocket and listened how close the enemy had come to her position.

In the next moment she jumped out of her cover, driving the dagger through the skull of a steel hamster. She ignored the light going out in those red eyes as she pulled the small weapon out to throw it at the next monster, only cringing slightly at the amount of dark blood forming around her feet.

She took a step back, taking her bow again and aimed at the only thing still coming after her: a pinkish round ball with narrow eyes and a transparent body. A Jelly.

Tikaya send out a series of arrows, all stuck through the flappy skin of her enemy until it looked like a twisted version of a hedgehog. The archer began to step back, still shooting at it until her back hit the next rock and she couldn't move further. And the jelly completely ignored the life treating arrows in its body, as it jumped closer and closer.

The green haired girl shifted through her quiver, frantically looking for something to hold the danger of. And then she found something. She almost dropped the heavy arrow, after she pulled it out, not expecting such a weight and her constant shacking

didn't help the situation either.

The jelly was close now, almost close enough to use a dagger instead, but this arrow was specifically made for a case like this.

And when she set the arrow free, watching it travel the short distance between her and the pink enemy, she knew it was over for the monster.

The wooden doom hit the wobbly surface of the enemy's body and literally tore it apart, splashing the water inside it in a wide circle around it.

Tikaya lowered her bow, blinking. It was over. She was enemy-free. No one was after her anymore.

And for a moment, all she wanted was to lean back and never stand up again. She could have fallen asleep right here and now, between the red dust, the sharp rocks and the uneven ground.

But that moment passed and a shriek brought her back to painful reality.

There were still monsters out there... on the battlefield.

The rock, moments before a hindrance in her escape, became her biggest ally. It was almost two times her size and successfully prevented herself from being seen by the rest of the monsters.

She pressed herself against it and carefully peeked around it and saw... the end.

The dog-like, two-legged Kovolt patrolled in two-man rows over the field, a red cloud of dust trailing behind them. Occasionally they shoot one of the few human fighters with their sling-shots or threw a pick axe after them. It didn't matter if they actually hit someone, since soon their much stronger Koaren-allies arrived and killed whoever was left with their spears and broadswords.

And between the front of the organized Kovolt-Koaren-alliance... was utter chaos.

Winged, black balls with sharp teeth and the power of darkness, vampis, rushed over the battlefield, spitting black smog onto whoever wasn't fast enough. Poison hamsters crept slowly after their targets, no haste in their movement as they already brought their toxic into their victims blood system and only waited for them to fall from the contamination.

And among them were the fast and sly foxes of all elements, successfully chasing their prey in packs.

And Tikaya had to watch as more and more of the few humans died.

She couldn't help them, she told herself, there were far too many enemies and a lone archer like her had no chance to save anyone. Behind her was nothing. No enemy, no monster. Just an empty red plain which led to a stripe of blue so far in the distance, she wasn't sure if she imagined it. But this stripe of blue was her hope in the darkness. It meant there was a way out of the insanity. She just... had to turn around and run...

In that moment she heard a horde of monsters coming closer and immediately ducked behind her rock. Seconds later a fragile and exhausted mage girl passed her position. Her long brown hair was clamped by sweat and in her blue eyes sat a haunted, hollow look that made shivers run over Tikayas skin. Around the magicians body was a faint blue hue that slowly healed all damage she took in her escape. But her short, hitched breath and the swollen, puffy face told the hidden archer, that the other girl wouldn't be able to run for much longer.

But she wasn't alone. Behind her a grey-haired archer boy came up, occasionally stopping to shot at the massive amount of monsters chasing him.

None of them noticed Tikaya behind her cover.

Suddenly the mage girl turned around and pointed her golden staff at three foxes with light brown fur and three tails. The red orb on top of the wand began to glow

short before a series of fireballs burst towards the three animals. One of them immediately caught fire, howling in pain and broke into a mad dash, running over the fox to his left, signing both of their doom. The last one ignored his burning fur and continued after its prey unfazed.

In the meantime the grey haired archer raised his bow and shot a single arrow towards the dark sky. But Tikaya knew this skill as well and waited for more to come. Upon his hand sign and the following release of simple magic a cascade of arrows rained down onto the horde of monsters, exploding into water the moment they hit something solid.

He didn't wait to see the outcome of his attack and quickly turned around to stumble on.

Tikaya leant back again, raising a hand to her forehead to whip the sweat away. Her bow felt wet and heavy in her hands and she just couldn't find a way to control her panicked breathing. She knew she should run. This situation was lost. But she wouldn't die. No. She would escape. She always found a way to survive.

She stood up, carefully avoiding to be seen and eyed the distance to the next monster that might spot her. Too far away. She was safe to run.

And then... she made the mistake of looking back.

Another crowd of monsters came up from a different direction, rushing towards the two remaining fighters on the battlefield. Those two were as good as dead.

And then the blue shine of recovery aura collapsed. Immediately the boy stopped to protect the magician, so she could renew the healing buff. But as she raised her hands towards the sky, summoning visible blue magic around her, a Kovolt took aim and hit her unprotected temple. And the life faded from her blue eyes, as her magic flickered out of existence. The archer boy took a shocked step back as her body fell to the ground lifelessly. Grieve crossed his face, but soon his expression turned dark and furious.

With burning eyes he raised his bow and killed the Kovolt just as easily as the mage had died.

And a low growl, like a distant thunderstorm, rolled over the battle field.

Even Tikaya looked up in alarm, trying to find the source of the fearsome sound. And a moment later she wished she didn't.

In the distance, a dark creature rose and leaped over the moving frontline, crushing his allies under his weight. But one look in those soulless eyes and she knew this monster couldn't care less. It had set out with only one purpose: to tear the archer boy apart.

This was a Kenko, a four-legged, dog-creature with a solid armor covered in spikes. An aura of darkness emitted in waves around its muscular body and its evil red eyes never left its prey. It opened its mouth to let out another dreadful howl and razor sharp teeth blinked in the gloomy red light.

Terrified, Tikaya had to watch how its wicked claws drove into the meager body of a Kovolt that wasn't fast enough to move out of the way. And she realized that this beast might really be in league with demons.

The boy had raised his bow once more and half-heartily shot some arrows towards the approaching danger. But the fire in his eyes had vanished and left only dull desperation and a small part of determination. He knew it was over, but was too proud to simply give up.

None of the arrows that actually hit the monster showed any significant reaction, as the Kenko continued unfazed and slowly, a blinding fear crept into the archers blue

eyes.

With sheer willpower he tore his attention away from the beast and watched the rest of the battlefield. And he saw every remaining monster follow the Kenko towards him.

But he also saw something else.

For a moment, he looked Tikaya directly into the eyes.

She immediately turned away, ducking deeper behind her cover of rock, unable to bear the sudden hope in those eyes. *I can't help him.*

She touched the stone besides her for support, suddenly shacking violently again. *I will die, too.*

She covered her ears, slowly sliding down the rock. *No reason to sacrifice myself.*

And with that she made a decision.

In one movement she climbed on top of the rock and raised her bow, summoning the light energy inside her body for her next shot. She took careful aim, waiting for her breath to slow down and for the shacking to stop. A strange calmness began to rise inside her, growing stronger the more the arrow in her hands began to glow. When she finally was sure, that nothing would distract her anymore, not the Kovolts that noticed her, not the archer boy in his desperate situation, not the Kenko closing in more and more with each passing second, the arrow emitted light in waves. And when she released it from the bowstring a blinding light illuminated the battlefield, even startling the Kenko.

And then it made the mistake to turn its head. And the arrow drove right through its right eye, knocking it backwards. In its fall its massive body took several of his allies down and tore the ground apart.

Tikaa allowed herself a smirk. This was definitely a critical hit! In the same moment the shacking was back, and brought his friend "exhaustion" along. Ohoh, she shouldn't have used that much energy for only one hit...

But the Kenko remained unmoving, so she turned her attention to more pressing matters.

For example the other archer, who had sensed his opportunity and ran towards her rock.

She stretched out her hand to pull him up, but almost toppled over him, as her strengths seemed to leave her, but he used his momentum to make it on top anyways. For a moment both of them couldn't do anything but gasp for breath. And then... the enormous Kenko slowly stood up again.

"Scheiße." Tikaya slipped to her native tongue, just as the archer next to her said something equally sharp but in a language she didn't recognize.

Nonetheless she said urgently: "We need to go!"

The boy watched the monsters again and she couldn't quite read his expression. Maybe he didn't understand her?

Nonetheless she pressed on: "We can't do anything! We will die! We need to go now!" And then... he nodded shortly and relief flooded her.

Without any further unnecessary talking both of them activated *Haste* and the air around them began to blur.

The speed skill was the reason why both of them manage to dash away from the rock without being slowed down by the rain of bullets that the Kovolt send after them. Tikaya grunted as she got hit, but fear and adrenaline kept her going. Towards the blue stripe in the distance, away from the blood and darkness behind them.

She barely noticed, when she tripped and the speed of her movement almost made

her crash, but a steady hand grabbed her arm, pulling her along not letting her fall. And then all she felt was the rush of wind in her face. The sounds of battle behind her faded to a dull background noise, her breathing was carried away in the rush of moving and she only came back to reality as her lungs protested with every breath. Suddenly she was aware of herself again and the pain hit her full force. Everything hurt... The world around her began to spin and she couldn't remember how long they already ran. But the other archer was still beside her and that made her keep on going.

And then... the sun broke through the dark and heavy clouds, her golden rays brought finally light into their dark escape and made the sky turn blue...

Blue...

They reached safety...

Unable to bear her exhaustion anymore, Tikaya came to a sudden stop, letting the sun relax her still shaking form. And her surroundings began to shift into focus.

There were trees. There was the sound of a river nearby. It was warm.

It took Tikaya several moments to notice the absents of certain sounds. Weapons, footsteps, shrieks... It was all gone. Their followers were gone. And she still lived!

Adrenalin left her body and made room for pain and exhaustion. Tikaya almost fainted as she made the last, heavy steps to the next tree. But instead she slid down and rested her head against it.

For a while no one said a word and Tikaya almost forgot, she was not alone. Her eyes fell shut as the sound of a nearby river and the song of birds lulled her to sleep, but way to soon a different sound made her wake up again. The sound of light footsteps on the grass.

The sun light danced across the other archer features as he walked the short distance towards her and so she stood up herself to face her fellow survivor.

Survivor...

And for maybe the first time they really looked at each other and suddenly she had the good feeling that it was over, that they survived.

"Im Tikaya." She finally said, her gaze fixed on his blue eyes.

"Its Chiro." He replied immediately, happy to finally introduce himself.

Chiro... What a nice name, Tikaya thought. Something warm settled inside her.

They smiled at each other and she knew, she finally found a friend in this strange place.