

Hot Tea

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Hot Tea

by [tunastime](#)

Summary

“Let me over the fence,” Bdubs says, all at once. He turns his head, but not his body, to Etho. Etho looks away, shaking his head.

“I can’t do that.”

“Let me over,” Bdubs says again, and as he sees Etho open his mouth in protest yet again, he lurches forward, stuttering out his words. He nearly knocks the tea out of his own hands.

“Just—just for tonight. Just tonight.”

Etho knows he has to divide the base between them. It's the only way to settle, now, knowing everything between them. How Bdubs shouldn't be there. Etho builds the fence. Etho divides them. And Etho divides himself in the process.

Notes

hi everyone getting into double life. that was a fun season <3 y'all remember married couple etho and bdubs from last season? yeah? me too. i wrote this six months ago. i miss ethdubs married couple but at least bdubs has someone who'll keep him alive now and etho has joel, who will kill him unprovoked.

for Laurie. I'm glad we had the 1/200 chance.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

The worst part about the whole situation was that Etho did not want Bdubs to leave. The fence was his idea, just high enough to where if either of them tried anything, it wouldn't be profitable, and just low enough to still meet halfway.

The loneliness set in approximately three days after Etho set the last fence post.

It wasn't even like Bdubs and him were physically apart—aside from a wood railing between them. But Etho felt the emptiness in the space next to him, when he checked the farm, when he sharpened his axe, when he hung the kettle over the stove and willed it to boil, when he looked up, seeing the stars in the sky.

He never knew it would be so hard to look up into his husband's face and expect there to be something else behind red, hungry eyes. It was like Bdubs was possessed by a creature that could never be sated by the bloodshed of one.

Striking flint against steel, Etho lights a fire. It was a dangerous torch in the night, but for this moment of respite he does not care. He lays meat in the red hot coals and hooks the kettle to the rig balanced precariously above the smooth yellow flame.

Bdubs is at the fence in an instant, the flames reflecting in his eyes, casting gaunt shadows on his bruised and healing face.

"Nice of you to keep the fire close to the fence," he chirps, shooting Etho a toothy grin. Etho looks over for only a moment to study the fire in his eyes before he turns away, face morphing into a grimace first then back to neutral in quick succession. He shrugs.

"Figured I could do something for you," he says coolly. He can't help but smile just a little, though. "It'll be a cold night without it."

"You don't have to pity me," Bdubs says. "Better off without your help."

Etho's eyebrows raise. "I can snuff it out if you prefer—"

"No! No," Bdubs lunges forward, holding to the fence post he had been leaning on. "Don't do that. Don't be like that,"

Etho laughs to himself, casting another throw away glance in Bdubs' direction.

A solemn silence falls over the two of them as Etho works, busying himself. He stokes the fire to keep the coals alive, and Bdubs keeps his back to the fence, soaking in the heat. They partake in an equivalent exchange so often a part of their intertwined lives, whether or not Etho or Bdubs really noticed.

Every so often, Bdubs turns, looking up into the clear sky, tipping himself to lean against the fence posts. He finally stills, eyes turned to the sky, as Etho lifts the pot of water and dried leaves from the flame and settles, precariously, with his cup of tea. The wooden cup is warm in his hands, steam rising from the lip. When he takes the first sip, it's scorching and bitter, and he swallows with difficulty.

Etho, too, finally looks up, kettle cooling on the coals, still steaming. He speaks softly, as to not startle Bdubs if he were sleeping, but finds that he barely meets a whisper.

"It's clear tonight," he says. He hears Bdubs hum to himself. "I hope it stays that way."

"I don't think it's rained once since we got here," Bdubs says, sitting up. He turns to face Etho, who shifts back on instinct. He nearly kicks himself for it, since Bdubs made no further movement toward him. For a split second, a fracture opens in Bdubs' scowling facade, and the bone deep hurt shows instead. Etho's face morphs into concern, and he shifts back.

"Yeah," he says, looking away. "You're right."

Bdubs sighs. The fence creaks as he leans against it.

"So you're still doing our ritual, huh?" He asks, his voice flat. When Etho looks at him, he can't see his face, but Etho doesn't speak for fear of the confusion being too evident in his voice. He can't tell if Bdubs reads it in his body language or his face but Bdubs shakes his head, settling back against the fence.

"The tea, Etho. You used to make tea for us at night. Especially if you weren't feeling well."

Etho blinks. His stomach is in thick knots, twisted in on itself—sick, as Bdubs had assumed. He holds the cup loose in his hand, bringing it up to drink, the motion deliberant.

"I did?" he asks, voice somewhat lost. He sets the cup in the soft sand beside him. "Oh. Hm. I guess I'd forgotten that."

"I'm sure you did," Bdubs says, and then in one motion, he rises to his feet. Etho can hear the sand crunch as he walks away and for a moment lets out the breath in his chest.

Etho listens as Bdubs leaves, and only then does he eat. It's not a satisfying meal in its own right. It's plain and lukewarm and hard to swallow, and would be even without the lump in his throat. He sits on Bdubs' words as he eats, turning them over to inspect the sentences. He never thought twice about how the little habits might change each meeting but clearly the two had gone from meeting like a semicolon to meeting like a period. There was a sense of finality in every word Bdubs spoke to him. Like he expected it to all come down around him.

The ache was back in Etho's chest, a solemn silence that replaced hunger and hurt a little less. It wasn't welcome, but it was bearable.

Etho tracked the sounds of Bdubs' footsteps across the sand. He must have gotten something to eat because he hadn't said anything in between the moment he left and the moment Etho was within his sight. Everything was within earshot, silence was only a formality.

Etho hears Bdubs sigh as he sits, then hears him clear his throat.

"You know, Etho, it doesn't have to be like this," Bdubs says, almost nonchalant. "I can help you. We can help each other, even, it's not that hard—"

"C'mon, now," Etho cuts him off, raising his hand. "You can't possibly mean that."

Bdubs sighs, and it has a certain quake to it that does very little to settle Etho's nerves.

"I don't," he says after a beat, but immediately inhales as if to note that he's speaking again. "But Etho—"

"Bdubs, please—"

"No, Etho listen—"

"No, *you* listen—"

"I miss you, okay?" Bdubs says, turning fully around to face Etho. "I miss you so, so much, you have no *idea* ..."

And then Bdubs falls silent. His chest rises and falls haphazardly like he can't get a breath in otherwise and his face has fully morphed into something very painful for Etho to look at. Even in half darkness he doesn't want to see the ache in his eye that may surely manifest in his chest if he does. He does not want there to be a hand shaped hole in his heart where it may be held and willed to beat. He does not want anything. If simply wasting away in this space would be enough to sate Bdubs he would do it. But he finds that that is not the case.

"I know," Etho says, voice bowing. It barely scrapes by a whisper, so he clears his throat. His words stick together. "I *know* ."

The quiet, though unbearable, envelopes them again. Etho takes the time to look up to where Bdubs' head is tilted, shoulders knocking back against the fence posts. He watches the sky, hoping to find any sort of solace he can, and finding only the cool black, and the stars that wink back at him. He opens his mouth for a moment, almost pointing out a series of stars that form one of the many constellations he'd gotten good at recognizing, but then shuts it. He stays quiet for a minute even though it weighs like a heavy coat on his shoulders. He holds his cup in one hand, letting the warmth seep into his fingers until he reaches over to his bag, and sets the cup in the sand. There, he takes another small wooden cup from the satchel and turns back to the pot. The metal tin is lukewarm at best, and only a few long wisps of steam rise from the cup's surface, but Etho cradles it in both hands. With a deliberate slowness, he turns to Bdubs, and extends his hands.

Bdubs sees him out of the corner of his eye and when his gaze fixates on the cup outstretched to him silently, Etho's gaze elsewhere, his eyes snap to the cup and his hands and not Etho's face. He doesn't dare look, likely for the same reason. He takes the cup and only then does Etho sigh in relief. Bdubs takes a long sip of bitter tea (Etho can tell its bitter, Bdubs' pulls a face so scrunched it takes everything in him not to laugh) and then moves to speak. His eyes fixate on the stars above him.

"Etho..." Bdubs says, still looking up into the sky. Etho turns his head to him, and in the light of the fire, he can just see the profile of his face, tipped back. Etho's eyebrows raise questioningly.

"Yes?"

"I want to offer you a proposition."

Etho's voice bubbles with amusement.

"Shoot," he says, as if he doesn't already know where Bdubs is going. In all honesty, he's thrown away the notion all together until the words slip from Bdubs' mouth.

"Let me over the fence," Bdubs says, all at once. He turns his head, but not his body, to Etho. Etho looks away, shaking his head.

"I can't do that."

"Let me over," Bdubs says again, and as he sees Etho open his mouth in protest yet again, he

lurches forward, stuttering out his words. He nearly knocks the tea out of his own hands. “Just— just for tonight. Just tonight.”

His voice mellows out as he sits on the words, the last of them spoken low and without fervor.

Etho sighs, his brow furrowing.

“Why, B?”

Bdubs shrugs, a motion that’s almost lost to the dark.

“We both said that we miss each other,” he reasons. “What’s one day? One night?”

“I...” Etho *tsks*, sighing through his nose. The words he wants to say are hard to find, and he folds and unfolds his hands, as if the words might be written somewhere on the backs of them, or in the sand around him. He finds nothing but the grey-brown swirls in the soul sand.

“Bdubs...” he tries. “I don’t think it would be just one night if I let you do that.”

Bdubs is silent. He deflates, body moving as he twists around, leaning sideways against the fence. He folds one arm over himself, letting the other rest on the sand.

“Then...then...” Bdubs fights, looking anywhere but Etho’s eye. “At least let me hold your hand.”

He finally manages to get the words out with what seems like a frustrated sigh. Etho almost laughs. He almost can’t help himself. The notion that Bdubs would be asking to hold his hand when they were married not long before, and for all accounts and purposes, still. But the notion remains terrifyingly the same. He requests Etho’s vulnerability, face up. Palm up. Much like how his hand rests under the last rung of the fence, palm up, fingers outstretched.

And Etho gives it to him. He sets his hand, palm down, into Bdubs’, and nearly instantly does he find that Bdubs locks his fingers around his own and the side of his hand, slotting in the funny way he always held his hand at this angle. Bdubs gives Etho’s hand a hesitant squeeze.

It’s as if all the confidence Bdubs had at the beginning of their meeting tonight has seeped out from his body. He holds onto Etho’s hand with careful pressure, thumb skimming the side of his fingers and over the top of his hand. He stops for just a moment to trace a thin, fine scar at the base of Etho’s thumb. Etho makes a noise in the back of his throat, a huff out of his nose, as the motion settles.

With his free hand, Etho finishes the last of his luke-warm, bitter tea, and realizes that the flavor isn’t so bad anymore. It settles in his stomach, no longer knotted, and as he presses back against the fence he can actually feel the dark, heavy sky around him again. There’s still a shred of empty air that claws at the corner of his heart, but, all at once, Etho decides that there’s no reason it should fester.

He detangles his fingers from Bdubs’ hand. In doing so, a short, painful *oh* catches in Bdubs’ throat, but it’s very nearly replaced with the sound of Etho pulling himself to his feet. He looks down at Bdubs, and Bdubs’ eyes are wide and Bdubs blinks hard as he looks away, and a second later Etho isn’t looking at him. He’s moving, pulling himself over. He doesn’t even need to hop the fence. He lifts one leg, then the other, and he’s over it. And he’s there. He falls to his knees and Bdubs is in front of him, eyes still wide and mouth slack jawed. There’s nothing behind the red in his eyes, at least, to Etho, the hunger is gone. There’s nothing. But they are round, and wide, and glossy, and Bdubs is halfway to reaching out to him before he even thinks about pulling away and Etho can’t help but meet him anyway. He pulls himself into Bdubs’ outstretched arms, lurching

forward into him. His head falls into the dip of his neck, hands cradling his shoulder blades. His knees sink into the sand and his body forms a convex at which Bdubs is the apex. He lets himself be held in Bdubs' hands like everything else has suddenly stopped mattering. And to Etho, it has.

Bdubs holds the back of his neck in the palm of his hand and the other rests at the top of his spine before he curls his fingers into Etho's jacket and holds him fully.

“Etho you said—” he tries, the nervousness bubbling up into his voice. Maybe he, too, fears the inevitable that Etho is promptly ignoring.

“I don't care what I said, I missed you,” Etho says against his shoulder. “I miss you, Bdubs.”

“I know, Etho,” Bdubs says. His forehead falls to Etho's shoulder, his body sagging as he sighs. “I know.”

End Notes

hey besties <3

follow me on [twitter](#), [tumblr](#), or just enjoy the content while i churn it out like a madman also, [shepscapades](#) on tumblr drew [this iconic scene](#) from this fic and it had me in tears fr

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