

## Twenty Paranoia, Eighty Plotted Against

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## Twenty Paranoia, Eighty Plotted Against

by [trafficpose](#)

### Summary

“You should have told me you were coming,” Clown says, then, “Jeez, you’re messed up.”

Branzy leans against the wall. He glares for a few ticks, then his face screws up in pain again.

### Notes

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Title from Holy Waterfall by Aesop Rock. This fic contains descriptions of serious but not life-threatening injuries. Stay safe reading!

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

“You should have told me you were coming,” Clown says, then, “Jeez, you’re messed up.”

Branzy leans against the wall. He glares for a few ticks, then his face screws up in pain again. There’s a cut under his cheek crusted over with blood, but Clown’s far more concerned about the way he’s favoring his right leg over his left. One of his gloves is in shreds.

“Branzy?” Clown says.

Half a smile. His breathing is shallow. “I’m used to it. Had a couple potions, but I don’t think they

fixed everything. It was a pretty bad fall I took to escape.”

“I’ll kill them.” Clown crosses the space between them. His hands don’t seem to want to cross the final gap between them.

“Don’t bother. You probably already have.” Branzy laughs, a shuddering thing, but he’s already starting to stand straighter. “It’s just nice having somewhere safe to come back to.”

“Can I —“ Clown swallows, mouth dry. “Let me... help.”

Branzy’s eyes flick up, too fast to be feigned. There’s a streak of ash across his brow like he fled through the Nether. “Yes. Please?”

“I’m not gonna be good at this,” Clown warns him. He shoves a stool behind Branzy so he can sit, listen to Branzy’s sigh of relief as he takes the weight off his leg. From there, it’s just armor, same process he’s done a million times just in reverse. He sets Branzy’s helmet on the floor before his hands search for the buckles and ties on Branzy’s chestplate. “I mostly just use regen pots.”

“Yeah, not gonna cut it.” Branzy hisses as Clown’s fingers brush just under his armpit. Bad sign. “I don’t know whether one of ‘em got me with weakness, but something’s wrong, and it’s gonna take a, a minute to fix it.”

At least the clothes Branzy’s wearing under his chestplate seem undamaged. The leggings are so dented Clown’s surprised they made it through, at least four arrows, maybe more. Hard to salvage. It’s odd, being this close to Branzy for so long. They don’t share a bed, mostly keep displays of affection to a minimum. There’s no such thing as a safe place — even this is a risk, just a necessary one.

Clown kneels to tug the boots off with the leggings. At least Branzy can lift his left leg, although he has to do it with his hands. It’s odd, looking up at Branzy while kneeling. Normally, Clown would at least have his eyes closed.

“Okay,” Clown says. It’s hard coming up with a strategy when he’s stressed and uncertain but however bad he’s feeling, Branzy’s worse. “Okay. Shirt off.”

“At least buy me dinner first!” Branzy says. Clown’s thrown more stacks of golden carrots his way than he can count.

“Oh, we’re dealing with the pants next, I assure you,” Clown says. He undoes the buttons on Branzy’s waistcoat, shoves it off. When he hooks his fingers under Branzy’s shirt, though, he pauses. “Yeah?”

“Just not looking forward to what it’ll look like.” Branzy sighs. “Go ahead. I trust you.”

Clown inhales. He knows Branzy trusts him, he does, but it drives home the intimacy of the situation. It’d be hard for Clown to let someone do this to him — for him. Maybe impossible. But taking liberties with Branzy is so easy. A chance to let himself be terrifying, and careful too, and Branzy trusts him to do it. Branzy’s shirt slips over his head, down his arms.

“Yeah.” Clown stands for a closer look. “That’s bad.”

“Just tell me.” Branzy’s voice is tight. The pain has to be getting to him, adrenalin wearing off.

Branzy’s ribs are a canvas of deep purple splotches and light red rash. Clown doesn’t dare touch. “Bruised rib, I’d say. Maybe cracked. You can breathe okay?”

“Well enough,” Branzy says. “Sort of.”

“I can wrap it for you, but it’ll make it hard for you to run.” Without thinking, Clown touches the pale flesh to the side of the worst bruising. It’s fever-warm. “Otherwise, it’s just a couple weeks of rest. Maybe more.”

“Not like I’m good at running anyway,” Branzy says. “Just do it.”

“I want to see your leg first,” Clown says. He kneels back down. “Should I just cut your pants off?”

“I got it,” Branzy says. His face crumples in on itself as he levers himself up by his elbows to detach his pants from his underwear. “Y’know, I’m starting to feel like this situation is a little unequal.”

“Feel free to take my shirt off the moment I get destroyed this badly,” Clown says. “But when people try to kill me, they come prepared.”

“Hey!” Branzy says. He’s shrinking in on himself, sitting in only his underwear, or maybe he’s just trying to protect his ribs. “So. How bad is it.”

The skin’s pink and new all over, like his pants started rubbing his leg hair off while he was running. Four distinct deep bruises where arrows must have hit him, but no signs of embedded tips or lingering effects. Ankles looking okay, and Branzy hasn’t said anything about his hips.

“Your knee’s like a blowfish,” Clown says. He makes a fist. Blows it up. “Sprain if you’re lucky, tear if not. I don’t know how you made it here.”

Branzy giggles. “Y’know, neither am I. I just kept thinking ‘*Clown, Clown, he’s safe.*’ and, well, here I am.”

“Here you are.” Clown rests his hand on Branzy’s shin, half to ground Branzy, half to remind himself why he’s here. Branzy trusts him. No sense letting him down now. “We’ll deal with it.”

“It hurts,” Branzy says. The whole picture of him would be unpleasant if Clown weren’t so inured to blood and injuries. “What kind of meat shield am I?”

“I’ll kill them,” Clown says. He’s still kneeling, looking up at Branzy, and it feels like he’s doing something right even as Branzy’s breathing gets shallower. “Let me get a washcloth. You’ve got blood on you.”

Branzy’s quiet as Clown pours the water, pats at his face with hands he’s trained for gripping and slicing. The ash wipes off his face and arms. It’s meditative, almost, the same way training is. Branzy flinches, sometimes, makes an unhappy sound, but he always pulls Clown back when Clown stops working. He looks almost normal, after a while, except for the pained creases at the downturn of his mouth and the exhaustion in his eyes.

“All done,” Clown says. “Bandages next.”

“Thanks.” Branzy’s gripping the edge of the stool, the remnants of the back of his left glove flapping. “Clown, I don’t —“

“Hey,” Clown says. “Let me fix this. You trust me. You do.”

Branzy smiles. “What else is there to do?”

## End Notes

I hope you enjoyed, and I hope you consider leaving a kudos or a comment! These two are so fun to write for.

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