

eine kleine (is it alright if i keep calling out your name?)

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by [cheyritORIZAWA](#)

Summary

Etho never expected this. He thought he would come to Zera with Iskall and Cleo, and the three of them would stick together and they would learn alongside each other. He never expected that he would be away from the two friends he has known all his life, instead spending time with the prince of a neighbouring kingdom that he grew up disliking. He never predicted that he would be having fun with Bdubs of all people.

Notes

hullo~ this is the first part of my (planned) hermitcraft/3rd life/last life medieval royalty au!! starting off with ethubs because of the latest last life session and "he loves me" yknow
enjoy!!

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

Etho first met Bdubs when they were 2. He knows this not because of his "intelligence" or "princely memory", as the tutors appraise him for, but rather, the painting hanging in the main dining hall.

The painting depicts the royal families of the three kingdoms together, in celebration of their century of shared harmony and alliance. On the far right is Bdubs' Kingdom of Vryo, with the 2 year old Bdubs cradled in his mothers' arm, and the 4 year old Keralis holding his fathers' hand next to his mother. In the middle is the host kingdom of the celebration, the Zera Kingdom, with its crown prince Grian, then aged 2 years old, next to his 1 year old brother, Zedaph, standing with their parents. Last, but definitely not least, is Etho's Kingdom of Pellur, where the young child stood tall next to his parents. That's the extent of Etho's knowledge of his and Bdubs first meeting.

Etho's first memory of Bdubs is when they're 4, at the triannual interkingdom meeting. He remembers this because he was dragged away from the toy catapult his best friend Iskall gave him, when his mother instructed him to start making friends with the other boys his age. He vaguely remembers being pulled out to the fields, expected to chase the other boys around the field, but Etho, being Etho, found a pile of pebbles and started throwing them around, wanting nothing but to go back inside where his toy catapult was.

What he didn't expect was for the other young prince in the mix, Bdubs, to come up to him and ask to join him in throwing pebbles. Etho remembers giving him a vague shrug, and Bdubs proceeds to sit next to him and starts talking non-stop. He doesn't remember what Bdubs talked about, but he does remember relishing in the quiet he got when Bdubs finally realised Etho wasn't going to respond, and left to join Grian and Impulse and Tango to actually play.

The next time Etho vividly recalls Bdubs is when they're 6. It isn't much different from their past encounters, but this time, it's at Etho's kingdom, so he sneaks away to the archery range he has been spending much of his time at after Xisuma started to teach him. He is so focused on the tips Xisuma has been teaching him (do not drop your elbows, remember to breathe), that he doesn't hear the footsteps of another child creeping up behind him.

Just as he is about to release the arrow, he is startled by the sudden "Ooh!" from his right. He jumps a little, releasing the arrow very off his target.

He spins to look at the source of his distraction, and is met with Bdubs sitting on the fence next to his archery lane.

"What are you doing here? You're not supposed to be here," Etho scowls, clearly irritated that he missed his shot. That was supposed to be a good shot. He could have shown it to Xisuma.

Bdubs clearly does not pick up on Etho's evident frustration at Bdubs, grinning widely at him. "I saw you sneak out from the field! Keralis says that losing my tooth means I am growing big. I thought I should show my friends!"

Etho glances at Bdubs' toothy grin, which is, in fact, losing one front tooth.

"Well, congrats," Etho tells Bdubs. He turns back to his target and picks up another arrow. "You really shouldn't be here."

A humph sounds from his right. "I haven't spoken to you today though! I've spoken to Grian and Zedaph and Impulse and even Cleo, but I haven't spoken to you. That's not fair. Everyone should have an equal share of my time."

Etho dusts his hands on his shorts. "I don't need your time."

"But-" Bdubs starts, clearly not used to this rejection. Before he can continue yapping Etho's ear off, Bdubs' helper frantically hurries into the archery range, relief washing over her face as she picks Bdubs off the fence and mumbles a string of words to him, amidst his evident protests. Etho draws his bow and shoots. He misses.

It is a tradition for the sons and daughters of the three kingdoms to participate in the yearly olympiad once they turn 14.

It is a chance for all the kingdoms to weed out the best of the children. Promising ones will be invited to train in royal training grounds, where children of the kingdoms can share their knowledge, and eventually, expertise, while also giving them the opportunity to socialise.

Etho, being the son of a king, knows that he will be training on royal grounds nonetheless, but desperate to prove that he is more than just a prince, he trains his archery skills relentlessly before the event, excited to showcase his abilities at the olympiad.

He sits in the stands, waiting for his turn as he fiddles with his favourite set of marbles. He is disinterested in the games, afterall, he would get to know the winners of the events in the training camps in a few months.

His mother begins to shake his shoulder. “Look there! It’s Bdubs from The Vryo Kingdom. Etho, darling, you should really start to make acquaintances with him, he is your age, afterall.”

Etho, in an attempt to satisfy his beloved mother, glances up to the field for a moment, where the runners are about to race. From what he can tell, most of the runners in this starting heat are aged 15 to 17, and Bdubs definitely seems the youngest.

Etho scoffs internally. A fresh faced 14 year old racing against older kids? They couldn’t even spare a prince like Bdubs some face?

The trumpet signalling the beginning of the race sounds, and the runners are off. To Etho’s surprise, the young prince is surprisingly fast, his quick pacing making up for his unusually short legs. From where he is seated, Etho can only catch glimpses of Bdubs’s face, but he can vaguely make out a smile on his face and he dashes ahead of all the other children.

The race is a short one, but Bdubs wins with ease, undoubtedly advancing to the next competition.

At first, Etho thinks it may be a fluke, and that Bdubs was just lucky his first time, but as the event progresses, Bdubs wins his second, his third, his fourth running event.

Etho is slightly taken aback. He vaguely remembers Bdubs running around the fields at most interkingdom meetings, but he never expected him to be this quick. He was, and he would never admit it, quite in awe of Bdubs. He never expected the boy who did nothing but annoy him when they met to actually be quite that talented.

Before Bdubs’s final race though, an escort came to prepare him for his own event, and Etho was left wondering whether Bdubs would win his running event, his interest in the other young prince piqued.

Etho never liked parties, and the after party of the olympiad was no different. It’s not as if he had much to celebrate, sure he had gotten far in his archery event, but was beaten by older kids in the semi-final. He ends up taking a handful of bacon from the dining hall, and sneaks away to a balcony he remembers seeing on the way. He gets a little lost, this being in The Vryo Kingdom, but he finds a decent spot nonetheless. He leans against the balcony, finishing the last bits of his bacon and fishing out his marbles from the seams of his clothing.

Looking out into the scenery in front of him, he decides that Vryo is actually quite pretty. Crowds of thousands gather in the common areas, and he can pick up indistinct ceremonial noises from the square. The trees sway with the wind, and from where Etho is standing, he spots a few plants that he rarely sees back at home.

Caught up in his appreciation for nature, he is oblivious to the clacking of boots from behind him.

A sudden “Hello.” shocks him, and he spins around, his hands clenching into fists, ready to fight whoever is behind him.

“Woah, woah. No need to get all defensive, it’s just me,” Bdubs laughs. Etho frowns, a wave of déjà vu washing over him. He still doesn’t relax his fists. Bdubs pointedly looks at his hands, and continues, “Are you that unhappy to see me? I thought we were friends.”

Friends? That wouldn’t be a word Etho used to describe the little, forced acquaintance that he and Bdubs share, but he’ll allow it.

“Why are you here?” Etho questions, finally choosing to relax his fists.

“Hey, these are my grounds, I am free to roam free wherever,” Bdubs replies, walking over to the ledge of the balcony, and leaning on it.

Etho stands there awkwardly, not knowing what to say. Was Bdubs hinting to him that he wasn’t supposed to be there?

Bdubs picks up on Etho’s apprehensiveness, and laughs again. “No need to be so stiff. I just saw you leave the party barely a couple of minutes in, and got curious. Then, Keralis got so swept up in the celebrations of his first win, and I got lonely, so I decided to look for you.”

Etho remains silent, unsure what he should say.

Again, Bdubs laughs. “Well, I saw you shoot in the archery events earlier. You made it surprisingly far for a 14 year old. You’re quite noticeable with your white hair and that black mask you always wear.”

Etho decides he should probably say something. “You too.”

“I don’t have white hair.”

“No, I saw you made it quite far in your events too. Running. You were really quick.” Etho clarifies.

“Oh, I’m surprised you saw. It’s nothing much, really. I just like running.” Bdubs looks down on the balcony ledge, and traces it with his finger. “Makes me feel free.”

A silence falls over the pair. Etho doesn’t know whether he should ask something.

“So…” Bdubs starts, obviously not enjoying the sudden awkward silence. “Why do you always wear that mask? I remember you never used to wear it when we were younger.”

This time, Etho deliberately stays silent.

“Private topic, huh?” Bdubs chuckles. “It’s alright. We all have our secrets.”

A third silence falls over them, but this time, it is of mutual understanding. Etho doesn’t mind it, frankly quite surprised that Bdubs isn’t talking, and they stay that way until Bdubs decides that it is high time for him to be heading back.

“You should be heading back too,” he says, to which Etho merely nods. “I’ll see you in a few weeks for training then.”

It is only when the sky is morphing into a mix of orange and pink that Etho notices that it is the first time he never really got irritated at Bdubs while they interacted. Perhaps he isn’t that bad afterall.

The weeks fly by, and Etho finds himself in Zera for the training camp. He has seen the kingdom countless times, and been through the royal gates many times, but this time, with nothing but a large pouch of clothes, his horse, Iskall and Cleo by his side, and the sword his father gave him for turning 14, riding through the front gates feels different.

Sure, he was celebrated for turning 14, but there was something affirming about knowing he was truly about to do his kingdom proud by training with the best. It was as though something was about to change.

Unfortunately, it isn't long before Etho is separated from both Iskall and Cleo, with the trainers splitting the children in smaller groups for "fairness and socialising".

As Etho finds his way to his group, he scans the faces for familiar faces. He spots a familiar tuft of brown hair, and as he makes his way closer, he hears the distinct laughter of Bdubs. Laughing with him is Wels, the son of an esteemed warrior in Vryo.

Etho thinks back to the ideals of "fairness and socialising" and scoffs. This was obviously to separate royalty from commoners, nothing fair about that.

Lost in his thoughts, Etho barely notices Bdubs frantically waving to him, and he nods back, to which Bdubs gives him a smile. Etho is quite glad he has a familiar face in his group.

Etho is not glad he has Bdubs in his group. That may not be entirely true, but as it turns out, Bdubs is really only talented at running. Looking at him, Etho is quite sure it is from years of training from running from his problems.

For a prince expected to have gone through years of training prior, Bdubs wields a sword weirdly. He somewhat makes it work, sure, he is able to cut through the targets of hay, but he doesn't fight with much poise or gracefulness.

In stark comparison, Etho, who spent his years training instead of chasing his friends in fields, is constantly praised by their trainer. It's doing wonders for his ego, really.

This confidence boost is amplified with Bdubs constantly fawning over him with "Wow, Etho!" this, and "Woah, Etho!" that. If Bdubs keeps praising him like this, Etho may need to change his

name from Etho to Ego.

Bdubs also seems to not be able to keep quiet for more than a minute, but Etho really can't find it in himself to mind. The questions Bdubs asks are surprisingly insightful, and he seems so eager, and Etho finds himself picking up a few tips here and there from Bdubs's questions in just a short time.

By the first time Bdubs draws his bow and releases, and misses the bullseye completely, Etho is comfortable enough around Bdubs to release a chuckle.

Bdubs halts, turns to Etho, and jokes, "What are you laughing at? You think you can do much better?"

Etho blinks at Bdubs, then draws his own bow. Xisuma's voice rings in his head, telling him to relax, to aim a little higher, to follow through, and Etho releases his arrow, letting it fly to the bullseye.

He turns to Bdubs and looks at him pointedly. He seems both appalled and enthralled by Etho.

"How did you do that?" He cries. Etho merely shrugs, a teasing smile playing on his lips.

The two boys continue on with friendly banter throughout the training camp, with Bdubs throwing food into Etho's bowl, and Etho kicking Bdubs's leg from under the table as retaliation. Water is splashed at each other in the lake, and teases are exchanged under the bright summer sun.

Etho never expected this. He thought he would come to Zera with Iskall and Cleo, and the three of them would stick together and they would learn alongside each other. He never expected that he would be away from the two friends he has known all his life, instead spending time with the prince of a neighbouring kingdom that he grew up disliking. He never predicted that he would be having fun with Bdubs of all people.

Yet, Etho thinks that this is freedom. Without the expectations of his father, the King, weighing heavily on his shoulders, in a place where he can do nothing but learn his favourite things, where he has his first true friend outside of Pellur, Etho feels truly free for the first time.

By the time the training camp at Zera ends, Etho already feels himself missing Bdubs. But Bdubs, ever the proactive extrovert, flashes Etho a toothy grin (he has all his teeth now, Etho finds himself thinking), and tells him, "I'll write to you! I won't be able to stand not seeing my best friend for the next 3 months."

Something in Etho's heart thumps wildly. He nods, easily agreeing to the arrangement. He doesn't know how he would be able to train without Bdubs after 2 weeks of having him by his side constantly, but letters would suffice.

Bdubs writes to Etho about everything and anything.

'Etho!!' The letter reads. Etho may have been overly excited after hearing from a servant that there was a letter for him, but that's for him to know.

'Keralis just got sorted into the highest ranks for his age!! That's so cool! I think you will too, in a few years. You're really talented at fighting and you're obviously a natural. There's no way you wouldn't.' Etho smiles to himself, reading the letter to himself on his balcony.

'Anyway, I recently got a bunch of new marbles. Doc gave them to me! Have I told you about Doc? He's this really scary friend of Keralis, but he's really smart, and inside, he's very nice. I think you'd like him. You're scary, Etho. Not to me, I mean. But you're so good at everything.' Bdubs would ramble on for pages and pages, and Etho has never gotten tired of reading them.

In return, Etho would write back stories of his own life too.

'Hey, Bdubs,' Etho would write. 'Doc sounds really cool. I'd like to meet him one day, when I go over to Vryo again. I think you'd like Iskall alot. He's a close friend of mine, and we grew up together, and he makes a lot of jokes like you. His jokes are lame though. But you're quite cool too, Bdubs. You run really quickly. For someone that short I mean.'

Etho thinks he has never felt such exhilaration, sealing up his letters and waiting for a letter to come in return. Still, it is nothing in comparison to meeting Bdubs in person, but this would suffice.

Etho's mother finds him in the archery range, a month and a half after the end of the training camp. She tells him that he should come with him, and in his desire to continue shooting, Etho follows her a little reluctantly.

All traces of reluctance are erased when he sees Bdubs standing in the Pellur royal family dining hall next to his father, eyes lighting up when he sees Etho, giving him a wide smile and waves at him.

"Bdubs?" Etho questions, heading towards Bdubs. "You didn't tell me you were coming!"

Bdubs laughs sheepishly. "I wanted it to be a surprise!"

"Oh, I sure am surprised," Etho replies.

Bdubs looks at his father, and signals that he would be taking his leave with Etho, and the two boys leave the dining hall together.

"You don't mind, do you?" Bdubs asks.

"Of course I don't!" Etho says, barely able to contain his excitement in his voice. "I'm going to show you all around Pellur."

"Wow, a tour by the crown prince?" Bdubs teases. "What an honour."

Etho lightly shoves him, and starts to bring Bdubs all around the castle grounds. He shows Bdubs the places where he, Iskall and Cleo used to hide from the servants, his favourite hide and seek spots, the place where he fell when he was 4, and ended up losing his front tooth. He pulls Bdubs to the archery range (there is something familiar about this, Etho thinks), which he introduces to Bdubs as his favourite place.

When they exhaust the best places of the castle grounds, Etho brings Bdubs to the city surrounding the castle. He shows Bdubs his favourite childhood food, he tells stories of him getting lost in the city for the first time, and the best spots to oversee the city. Throughout the tour, Bdubs has

nothing but his full attention on Etho, hanging onto his every word, sometimes asking questions, or adding in his own stories in his hometown.

By the end of the day, both children are exhausted, but adrenaline rushes through both their veins. Bdubs couldn't see it under Etho's mask, but Etho was smiling the widest he ever remembers in his 14 years of life.

Bdubs leaves after a few days, once his father is done with whatever business he had to settle with Etho's father. The two boys part, with high hopes that they'll see each other again.

They do.

The moment Etho's father mentions over the dinner table that he would be heading to Vryo for business, Etho asks if he could follow.

Both his parents are surprised at this sudden request, but his mother's expression turns into one of understanding.

"I'm glad you're making friends with Bdubs of Vryo, Etho. It seems good for you. You seem much more open now," she comments. Etho looks down onto his food, hiding his face.

When Etho reaches Vryo, it is Bdubs's turn to be exceptionally surprised with the sudden visit. Without much delay, Bdubs pulls Etho away, and starts giving Etho his own tour of Vryo.

As Bdubs drags Etho along the halls of the Vryo royal family castle, Etho spots a certain familiar balcony. It's funny, he thinks, that just a few months prior, he was so cold to Bdubs at that exact balcony, but now, there is no one else he would rather be with.

Etho is particularly enthralled by the nature found in Vryo. "It's much more diverse," he tells Bdubs, pointing out the plants that he rarely sees in Pellur, to which Bdubs expresses his astonishment and surprise.

Similar to when Bdubs visited Etho, they reach the castle with light hearts and spirits. Etho's legs

ache, and he's exhausted, but just one look at Bdubs's laughing face makes Etho smile once more.

It becomes a regular thing between the two of them. They write when they are unable to see each other in person, and visit each other whenever they can. Every four months, they meet at the interkingdom meeting.

The second olympiad that they attend, they spend the entire day together.

"That's Grian," Bdubs tells Etho. "He's the crown prince of Zera." Etho nods.

"He's quite skilled in the ways of the sword," he comments.

"Pales in comparison to you, though," Bdubs adds, turning to Etho. "Say, why don't you participate in the sword-fighting events? You're really good at them."

Etho shrugs. "I like fighting, but I'd like to be known for archery, if anything."

Bdubs tilts his head, perhaps considering what Etho's words, then turns to back to see Grian annihilate his opponent, a boy a year older than him.

Etho doesn't think he has cheered louder than during Bdubs's events, and just before he releases his arrows, he thinks he can hear a voice that sounds suspiciously like Bdubs's shouting his name louder than any other.

Neither of them win any events that day, but to Etho, the full day of fun with Bdubs seems like a good enough win for him.

Iskall points it out one day, a few weeks after their second training camp together.

"You've been spending a lot of time with Bdubs," he notes. "Not that I mind or anything, I have my own friends. I was just curious, is there... Anything between the two of you?"

Etho feels his ears turn a pinkish shade, but he shakes his head with little hesitation.

When he goes to sleep that night, however, he contemplates Iskall's words, and something flutters in his heart.

By the time they are 16, the children of the kingdom frequently compete in sparring matches with one another, in preparation for the series of tests to sort them into various ranks.

Naturally, Bdubs and Etho gravitate to each other to spar, despite the obvious difference in skill. Both parties don't mind though — Etho has known Bdubs's fighting style for long enough that he knows how to nudge him into gaining his own proper fighting instinct, and Bdubs knows that he benefits much from sparring with Etho.

There is one particular sparring match that Etho will never forget, forever imprinted in his mind.

The two boys spar in an empty arena in Pellur, Etho instructing Bdubs with tips and tricks as their swords clash.

Etho's movements are methodological and calculated, and he knows exactly where to place his sword, his foot, his body.

Bdubs, on the other hand, while nothing like the clumsy boy from 2 years prior, still leaves his movements unintentional, and dare Etho say, sloppy.

“Stop getting distracted, Bdubs, you know you can do this,” Etho reminds Bdubs. “Make your arm movements more deliberate. Slash your sword at an angle more suited to your target.”

Etho notices Bdubs's tongue sticking out slightly at the corner of his mouth, a sign he has learnt that Bdubs is exceptionally concentrated. He is quite proud of Bdubs, he decides, for improving by leaps and bounds since he first got to properly know him. He thinks of the first day of training camp, where Bdubs couldn't even properly wield a sword.

With Etho clearly distracted, and Bdubs highly concentrated on his arm movements, Bdubs accidentally steps on Etho's foot.

Normally, Etho would shake it off with a quick sound of pain, and Bdubs would immediately realise and raise his foot, and they would continue on with their sparring session.

This time, however, with the momentum of his forward arm movement, Etho knocks into Bdubs, and subsequently falls forward. With his foot still trapped under Bdubs's, Etho is unable to react fast enough to do anything other than cushion his fall with his arms in front of him. Bdubs's quick instincts ensure he doesn't have a harsh landing, but even he does not have enough time to roll away.

With Bdubs fallen backwards and Etho cushioning his fall with his arms, Etho accidentally pins Bdubs to the floor, with Bdubs under him.

On the hard dirt, Bdubs stares up at Etho, and Etho, back at him.

At that moment, Etho felt as though there was nothing in the world other than him and Bdubs.

All he could see were Bdubs's brown orbs staring back at him. Were they always this pretty? Did they always look this chocolatey? His cheeks were flushed from sparring, and sweat glistened on his face. Under him, he could sense Bdubs inhale and exhale a couple of times, and Etho could feel Bdubs's breath on his lips.

And at that moment, Etho wanted nothing more than to kiss Bdubs.

What? Kiss Bdubs? What was he thinking?

Etho looks away and coughs awkwardly, blood rushing to his ears. He pushes himself up, and extends an arm to Bdubs, which was probably not the best idea Etho has had in his life.

Feeling Bdubs's calloused hand holding his, Etho's cheeks flushed, but was luckily covered by his mask.

With what little strength Etho has left, he pulls Bdubs up, and coughs, "Let's take a break."

Bdubs laughs. "Sure, I really need that water," he says, walking away to get a drink.

As Bdubs walks away, Etho contemplates the emotions he felt in those few seconds.

He wanted to *kiss Bdubs! Kiss Bdubs* , could you imagine? His best friend, his sparring partner, his... favourite person.

That sparks something in Etho. He thinks of their past two years of interactions, of the explicit joy he feels around Bdubs, of all the time he wishes he was spending with Bdubs, and all the times he was grateful he could hang out with Bdubs.

He thinks of the times when he gets filled with pure exhilaration when a letter from Bdubs arrives, the freedom he feels when he is with Bdubs.

He thinks of Bdubs under him moments before, and how he really wanted to... Kiss... Him...

Etho slumps into a ball in the middle of the arena, his hands covering his face.

He's in love with his best friend.

He has been in love with his best friend for ages, and now, he doesn't know what to do.

Etho takes the most logical route, which is, obviously, to ignore his feelings.

Thinking about it seriously, Etho thinks he has liked Bdubs for so long that it has become second nature to him, and that this crush, or whatever he'd like to call it, wouldn't subside anytime soon.

But feelings aside, Etho would really like to get sorted into the highest rank. For Etho, the natural

talent at sword-fighting and archery and the like, has little worries about it, but it has obviously been taking a toll on Bdubs, who is expected to live up to his older brother's standard. It's tough, but Etho believes that Bdubs could make it if they make full use of the remaining 2 months they have.

A few days after *The Incident*, as Etho would like to call in his head, Bdubs is slumped on Etho's bed, playing with Etho's favourite marbles while Etho sharpens his sword in the corner of the room.

"I'm never gonna be like Keralis," Bdubs whines. "I think my sparring is adequate as of now," Etho hums in agreement, "but the same can't be said for my archery."

Etho thinks about it. Bdubs's archery is actually decent, but could stand to be polished further.

"My shots are always so inconsistent," he continues. "You saw that day! I was hitting the bullseye the whole day! Then we went for a lunch break and I couldn't even hit a single bullseye."

That was quite sad, Etho thinks, *but just a stroke of bad luck*.

"I don't want to go to Keralis for help though, he's all busy with his adult stuff now." Bdubs complains.

Ah, that's what he's doing.

"I'll teach you," Etho says decisively, setting down his sword.

Bdubs instantly perks up from Etho's bed, catching all the marbles in one clean swoop. Etho swears his eyes sparkle as he asks, "Really?"

"Just to get you to stop whining," Etho states. Bdubs giggles. Etho likes that sound.

"Wow, I get the archery master to teach me?" Bdubs teases. "Honestly, why haven't you done so before? Bad friend. Terrible friend."

Etho shrugs. “Didn’t seem like you needed help.” It’s the truth. But who is Etho to pass up more time with Bdubs?

Etho brings Bdubs to the Pellur archery range, which he thinks is quite sentimental. He’s deliberately bringing his crush to his favourite place, that’s got to account for something, right? It’s not like the other hundreds of times Etho and Bdubs have come to this exact archery range to shoot... Right?

Bdubs definitely seems to think so, naturally going to his usual lane. He slings the quiver over his shoulder with practised ease, and Etho follows suit.

Picking up his bow, Bdubs asks, “So, where do we start?”

“Shoot a couple of arrows for me. Let me see you shoot,” Etho instructs. He honestly doesn’t need it. He realises that he’s seen Bdubs shoot so many times, he essentially has his posture and style engraved in his mind. It’s such a Bdubs way of shooting that when he examines it, he barely sees anything wrong with it.

Bdubs shoots three arrows, and they land all over the target, none hitting the bullseye.

“Ah,” Etho notes. “Try relaxing first.” Bdubs relaxes.

“Good, now try not to drop your elbows.” Bdubs raises the elbow of the arm that is pulling the string, but he then returns to his original stiffness.

Etho huffs out a laugh. “You’re back to before.”

“This is hard,” Bdubs whines. “How do you do it?” Etho, as usual shrugs.

“Hey, you should just come here and adjust my arms for me.” Etho thinks about the close contact he’d have with Bdubs. It’ll be like hugging him from behind, and Etho definitely does not think he

can handle it.

“It’s alright, you got this,” Etho says, ignoring his burning desire to accept Bdubs’s offer.

“Wow, some teacher you are. I’m going to ask Wels instead.”

“No, no, I’ll help you,” Etho finds himself saying, but maybe it was worth it for the instant smile that Bdubs gave him.

Etho stands behind Bdubs, his left hand holding Bdubs’s left forearm, and his right hand holding Bdubs’s right elbow, as if Bdubs’s arms were his bow instead. With how close he is standing to Bdubs, his chest is nearly touching Bdubs’s back, and his chin barely hovers over Bdubs’s shoulder.

He was right. He cannot handle this.

It doesn’t matter, Bdubs asked for it.

He adjusts Bdubs’s arms until it feels right to him, then takes a step back.

“Remember this position,” he instructs. “When you release, make sure you follow through with your fingers.”

He sees Bdubs take a moment for himself, and then he releases the arrow. It cuts through the air, and just as Etho expected, hits the bullseye.

Bdubs immediately turns to Etho, a wide smile plastered on his face. “It worked! Etho, you truly are an archery master. I bow down to you.”

Etho chuckles. “Don’t be silly. Try it again, without my help this time.”

Bdubs nods, and takes his stance again. Etho can almost see the gears turning in his head as he methodologically follows Etho’s instructions.

This time, however, when he releases the arrow, it misses the bullseye.

“It didn’t work,” Bdubs states, obviously dejected.

“It’s alright, you were almost there. Xisuma always told me to try and aim a little higher. It helped me a lot.”

“Aim higher? That sounds counter-productive. You should come and show me how.”

Etho sighs. Why is Bdubs suddenly so... touchy? He’s not complaining, but his heart may explode if he keeps this up.

Similarly to before, Etho takes his place behind Bdubs, but this time, he explicitly shows Bdubs how to angle his arms. It takes much longer, and his skin starts to flush. He starts to feel very grateful he is behind Bdubs, so that he can’t see his red ears.

However, as always, it is worth it when he sees Bdubs’s smile directed at him.

Etho ends up teaching Bdubs how to shoot for a good majority of the next month or so. When they’re not sparring, they’re shooting, when they’re not shooting, they’re running, and when they’re not running, they’re sparring.

Etho still spends as much time as he did with Bdubs before *The Incident*, and really, nothing much has changed. One thing has changed, though, and it’s Etho’s awareness of every single action Bdubs does.

He notices the little nuances in Bdubs’s actions, like his tendency to scratch his arm when he’s nervous, or how he fiddles with his (very fluffy) hair when he’s embarrassed.

Most detrimental to Etho, however, was his sudden hyper-awareness of anytime Bdubs touched him. A simple shoulder nudge would be enough to send Etho’s heart rate spiking, and he is certain

it is not good for his health.

A few weeks into this routine, as they are walking back to their rooms, Bdubs jokingly questions Etho, “You’re so good at all these fighting things, are you even interested in any non-violent things?”

An immediate answer pops up in Etho’s brain. He hasn’t done it much since his life became so packed with Bdubs, Bdubs and more Bdubs, but it is still something he greatly enjoys.

“Yeah,” Etho answers. Bdubs startles, obviously not expecting an actual answer. “I’ll bring you there tomorrow.”

“Fishing. You like to fish?” Bdubs deadpans.

Etho shrugs, two fishing rods slung over his shoulder.

Bdubs bursts out laughing. “Etho, the great archery master, likes to fish? What a surprise! How have you never told me this before?”

Etho starts to feel a slow heat creeping up his neck. “I didn’t think you would want to know?”

“Oh, I do,” Bdubs manages out in between laughs. “Now, where are we going to fish?”

Etho ultimately brings Bdubs to one of his favourite places to fish when he was younger. As he had hoped, the lake barely has anyone visiting. They move to an area with shade, and Etho starts to set up all the fishing materials.

Bdubs, as it turns out, used to fish with Keralis and their father when they were much younger, but when Keralis grew out of it, he didn’t want to go fishing alone, and stopped fishing as a result.

Listening to Bdubs's story, Etho casts his line and settles down on a patch of grass. Bdubs follows suit, and sits next to Etho.

"When I was younger, I never really had much to do," Etho says in return. "I'm not sure if you recall, but I didn't talk to many of the other kids back then."

"You still don't," Bdubs interjects, to which Etho responds with a humph.

"Before really getting to know Iskall and Cleo, I had nothing much to do with my life, and thus I decided to go fishing with my mother."

Bdubs nods. A comfortable blanket of silence falls over them. Etho doesn't mind. All he needs is for Bdubs to be beside him, and he would be perfectly content. He enjoys this.

He thinks Bdubs may not, though. From the years of knowing Bdubs, he has learnt that silences aren't really his thing. In an attempt to break the silence on behalf of Bdubs, Etho wracks his brain for things to talk about.

"You once asked me why I always wore my mask," Etho starts. Bdubs startles, clearly not expecting this topic of conversation, or perhaps not even expecting Etho to speak at all. He nods.

"It's nothing ground shattering, really," he admits. "I grew up a really shy kid, as you know. The mask helps to cover my smile. Gives me some confidence."

Bdubs tilts his head, clearly wanting to know more, but afraid to ask.

"I think I smile weird," Etho elaborates. "I don't know where it came from. But I do know the mask helps."

"That's good," Bdubs finally says. "I'm glad you found something comfortable for you."

Etho smiles to himself and nods. "I've honestly never told anyone other than Iskall and Cleo the truth."

Bdubs stays silent for a while, his rod sinking into the lake. He tugs on it and pulls it in, and after some struggle (and some help from Etho), Bdubs catches the fish.

“Well, I’m glad you told me,” he confesses.

Etho turns back to the lake and says, “Seems right.”

A month later, they both get into the highest rank, and the adrenaline Etho was riding on then seemed nearly enough to push him to confess to Bdubs.

He didn’t.

As expected of a prince of one of the three kingdoms, Bdubs’s coming of age party was an extravagant splendour. Alliances of the Vryo Kingdom were invited from all over, to celebrate the second prince’s 18th birthday. Etho remembers a similar experience for his coming of age celebration just months prior.

Etho, as usual, was not particularly fond of this party, just like how he barely enjoyed his own coming of age celebration. Bdubs, however, was not enjoying his own coming of age celebration either.

Bdubs, the heart of a party, not enjoying a celebration, much less one in his honour? That’s a rare sight to behold. Although, Etho supposes, Bdubs would much rather celebrate his birthday with his close friends and family, not mindlessly sitting there, accepting gifts from strangers he barely knows. But still, a rare sight nonetheless.

An urge to leave the celebration creeps into Etho’s system, but he pushes it away. He isn’t going to leave Bdubs’s coming of age celebration. His own, perhaps. (He did. He sneaked away when “looking for food”, and returned long after. He was watching the clouds with Bdubs. It caused quite a ruckus in the castle. Not his problem.) But Bdubs’s? Etho would not allow it.

He stands in a corner for most of the celebration, wishing that he could capture Bdubs's attention more.

It isn't until Tango approaches him, that he even interacts with someone.

In all honesty, Etho isn't quite sure what Tango was talking about for the most part. It isn't until an abrupt silence falls between the two of them that Etho returns back to the conversation, wondering whether he was supposed to have responded to something Tango said. Judging from Tango's expression, he doubts it.

"I've seen the way you look at him," Tango says. Etho's cheeks blush a little — Is he that obvious? It's been two years, how has he not realised? — but his mask covers it.

He plays the oblivious card. "What do you mean?"

Tango laughs and shakes his head, obviously seeing through Etho's charade. "You'll be good for each other," he states, before seeing someone, probably either Impulse or Zedaph, and heads off.

Etho runs Tango's words through his head. He sure hopes so.

As the hype of the celebration dwindles, so do the number of guests. As the esteemed guests start to leave, Bdubs's tense shoulders start to relax, and he begins to seem more at home, more free.

Etho, by some miracle, catches Bdubs's eye, and signals for them to head out. He sees Bdubs tell a servant something, and then he stands up and exits the dining hall.

It isn't hard to find Bdubs. He's been around the Vryo castle enough times to know Bdubs's favourite spots, and that one of them is the garden.

He walks through the perfectly trimmed leaf arch, dried dirt crunching under his boots. Hearing Etho's approach, Bdubs steps out from behind a particularly tall bush.

He is adorned in a suit, with his signature mossy green and hints of red. His face glows under the soft moonlight. Etho would like to tell him he is very handsome.

“Quite a party back there, is it not?” Etho says instead.

Bdubs laughs, tilting his head towards the inside of the garden, signalling for Etho to follow him. “It sure is. I don’t know how you handled yours.”

“I didn’t. I spent most of it out of the dining hall with you, do you not recall?” A smile tugs on Etho’s lips, reminiscing the fond memory in the midst of the chaotic celebration. Etho had a good time then. Bdubs looked really content watching clouds.

“I do,” Bdubs chuckles. “It feels a little surreal, knowing that I have officially come of age.”

“It’s terrible. You’d better get used to it,” Etho jokes. “Soon, you’ll be clamoured with proposals from men and women from all over, asking for your hand in marriage. Not something to revel in, speaking from experience.”

“Why not? I thought the great Etho of Pellur would have many distinguished, fine suitors. Or, do you not want to marry?”

Etho realises Bdubs have never spoken of marriage and suitors and partners. He’s quite glad for it, for now that Bdubs has brought it up, his heart palpitates as he thinks of courting Bdubs, of having him as his partner, and seeing Bdubs every day in Pellur after they wed.

He realises that Bdubs is waiting for an answer, and in a hurry, he rushes out, “I do. I just have my eyes on a special someone already.”

Bdubs blinks at him, clearly unsure whether this was a joke. “A *special* someone? What’s so special about them? You’ve never spoken of anyone catching your eye.”

That’s because it’s you, Etho thinks. He considers leaving Bdubs hanging and changing the question, but knowing Bdubs, he would likely pester Etho until he gets an answer, especially for gossip such as this. This would also be a good chance to tell Bdubs how much he admires and adores him, albeit in a slightly warped way.

“They’re... Important in my life. They’re also really eager to learn, and so resilient after failure. I admire them so much.” Etho finds himself saying. He looks down at Bdubs, and the dam holding back all he wants to say to Bdubs cracks. He finds himself rambling on, “Not to mention, they’re really good looking. And funny, and so sweet to me.”

Lost in his ramble, Etho fails to notice Bdubs’s change in demeanor.

“That’s great, Etho,” Bdubs forces out, his voice uncharacteristically soft. Etho thinks he sounds a little sad. “Look, I should be heading back to the celebration. They’ll be wondering where I am.”

When Etho returns his focus to Bdubs, he has his back to Etho, his shoulders slightly slumped, and looks ready to leave.

A thought pierces through Etho’s brain. Did Bdubs connect the dots? Did he figure out that the person Etho was raving about was Bdubs? Did he feel uncomfortable with the new information? Did he want to leave Etho?

Etho’s heart throbs painfully at the thought, but he instinctively reaches out a hand to hold Bdubs’s wrist, effectively stopping him from leaving. “Bdubs? Is everything alright?”

Bdubs halts in his tracks. “Yeah. It’s alright. I’m glad you found your person. You should tell them.”

Without Bdubs facing him, Bdubs’s words seemed to be picked up by the wind, but Etho makes them out anyway.

Tell them? That’s weird.

With his other hand, Etho spins Bdubs around to face him, and is met with his teary eyes. His big eyes well up with tears about to fall, and Bdubs seems somewhat disheartened... No, rejected.

Rejected?

Gears spin in Etho's head, and the pieces of a puzzle that Etho wasn't even aware existed fall into place.

Bdubs was dejected after hearing about Etho's crush, yet told Etho to confess.

Etho hopes it isn't wishful thinking, but there seems to only be one answer to this.

Bdubs's eyes are downcast, and Etho raises a hand to caress Bdubs's face, tilting it up to face Etho. His thumb moves to wipe away the tears under Bdubs's eyes. Bdubs seems to lean into Etho's touch, and that tiny movement alone is enough to give Etho the final burst of confidence.

"Please don't hate me if I got this wrong," Etho whispers to the distance between them.

He removes his mask, eliciting a tiny gasp from Bdubs, then tilts his head down to Bdubs's level. He sees Bdubs's brown pupils dilate and shake a little, glimmering in their own unique way under the moonlight. Etho closes his own eyes. Angling his head slightly, he pushes closer to Bdubs, until their lips meet.

Despite all his years of daydreaming of this very moment, Etho would have never imagined how amazing kissing Bdubs feels. Bdubs's soft lips press onto his, and he can feel Bdubs raising an arm, which Etho hopes and prays it isn't to push him away.

Bdubs buries his fingers in Etho's white hair, pulling his face closer. He angles his own face, then pushes his lips harder onto Etho's, as if this was all he has wanted all his life, melding their lips together in a closed mouth kiss.

Etho's heart flutters.

As they pull away from each other, Bdubs smiles, a pure, genuine smile, not the wide toothed grin he usually gives, and Etho finds himself smiling back. He presses his forehead against Bdubs's.

"It has always been you."

Bdubs giggles in response. "I always thought you were really cool. I never stopped to think about it

until much later, but deep down, I think I always knew you were the one for me.”

Etho drops a hand, finding Bdubs’s own open palm, intertwining their fingers. “I’ve liked you for years now. You have been my favourite person, my best friend, the person I couldn’t live without, for so long. Would you allow me the honour to be your partner?”

Bdubs’s lips crash onto his, and Etho smiles into the kiss.

That is answer enough.

Etho is lying on a hill in Vryo with Bdubs, his mask off, when Bdubs says, “You have a really nice smile. I like it when you smile. It makes me happy knowing you're happy.”

Etho halts his counting of the stars, and turns to Bdubs. He'll lose his progress from counting, but when he looks into Bdubs’s eyes that always seems to glimmer, he thinks he can see a whole new sky full of stars in them.

He smiles at Bdubs, who gives him a smile in return.

“You make me happy,” Etho confesses. “I love you.”

Bdubs says it back, and Etho knows that this is true love.

End Notes

kingdom names:

Grian/Zedaph's kingdom: Zera, Hebrew for 'seed', which came from 'grain', as in Grian's name misspelt

Bdubs/Keralis: Vryo, Greek for 'moss', stemming from Bdubs's recent skin

Etho: Pellur, coming from the three rhetorical appeals: Pathos, Ethos, and Logos, making PEL and with the suffix -lur

title is from kenshin yonezu's *eine kleine*, and the last line of the english translation!

if you enjoyed this, do head over to my [tumblr](#), or my [medieval royalty au tumblr hashtag](#), where i'm discussing headcanons for my AU!! a lot more is in store :]

constructive criticism is accepted, and kudos and comments will be greatly appreciated!
thank you! :D

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