WILL WIGHT

NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

KICKSTARTER BONUS SCENE!

WINTERSTEEL

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Wintersteel

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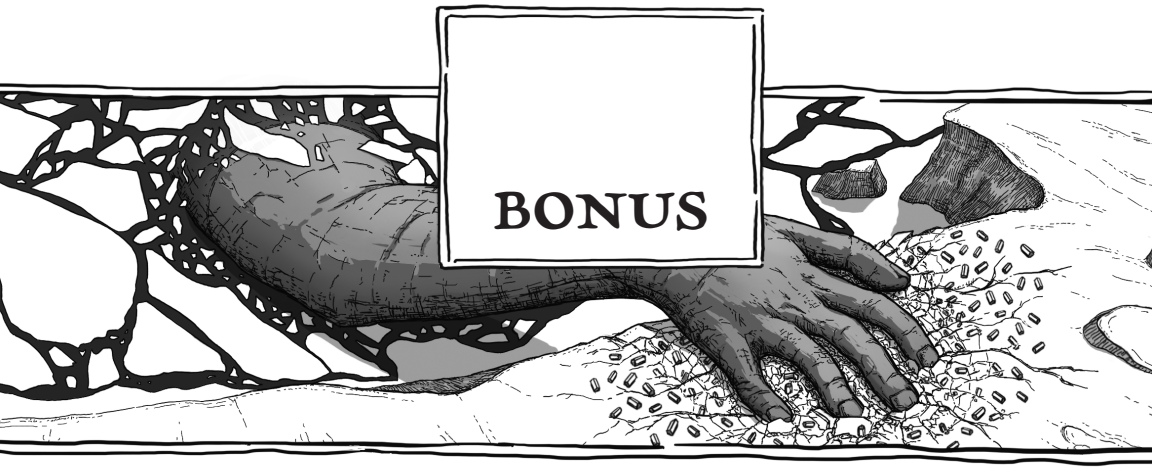

***Wintersteel* Kickstarter Bonus Scene: Spoiler-free!**

Location: Just before Chapter 24 of *Wintersteel*

Mercy stood inside a medical tent her people had erected in Sky's Edge. It had one purpose: to take care of Lindon.

At the moment, he was lying face-up on a cot, sweating and muttering to himself. Akura healers had started to check him over, but Eithan shooed them away.

He sat in a chair at Lindon's side, contentedly reading a book. The moment Mercy took a worried glance at Lindon, Eithan spoke.

"He's still the same. It's a test of his willpower, which I have every reason to believe he will endure. Physically, he's only at risk of a crushed hand."

Ruby knelt at Lindon's side, gripping his larger hand tightly in both of hers. Her knuckles were white, and she shook.

It was a sweet gesture, and Mercy understood. She also worried for Lindon, and she wished there was something she could do.

But in the meantime, Ruby might really break Lindon's bone by accident.

"Ruby, why don't you ease up a little?" Mercy suggested gently.

"He held my hand before," Ruby whispered. "And I could still feel it, even when I was asleep. You want me to let go, you can cut through my arm."

She did relax her grip, though. Just a little.

Little Blue whistled angrily and kicked Ruby's finger. Ruby growled back, her eyes flashing red.

[Spirit fight!] Dross cried. He floated over to the two of them. [I'll be on Blue's team, so it's fair.]

Mercy patted Little Blue on the head, which felt like patting a cold wave. "It's okay. We're all worried about him."

[I said *spirit* fight. Back off, fleshy.]

Little Blue looked up at Mercy with an expression of indignation and began a clamor of whistles and tumbling bells. Mercy couldn't understand her as well as Lindon could, but the gist was easy enough to grasp; she was warning them about Ruby.

Eithan flipped a page. "That's not fair, Blue. Aspects of madra don't determine everything about a spirit's intentions."

"Is that really what she said?" Mercy asked. She'd only gotten a general sense of Little Blue's feelings, not a specific sentence.

"Oh, have I never told you?" Eithan responded. "I speak fluent Bell."

"That's about the first thing you've told us," Ruby muttered.

Eithan seemed to stagger, though he was still in his chair. He looked up. "I can't help but notice a tone of resentment there, Ruby."

"Don't know you, do I?"

"As I understand it, I've been around the entirety of your consciousness. Almost as long as Lindon has."

Ruby leaned closer to Lindon. "Don't *know* you. Lindon I know. I could feel him, I could see him. Might be you see everything, but I can barely

feel you at all, even now. Gives me shivers."

Eithan cleared his throat, flipped a page, flipped it back, and then cleared his throat again. "Ah. Yes. I suppose I shall return to my book, then."

Mercy had scarcely imagined it possible, but she thought Eithan might actually be hurt. She left Little Blue to pat him on the shoulder.

He gave her a faint, grateful smile.

[Ruby, you *are* short on time,] Dross pointed out. [Lindon's no closer to waking up than he was an hour ago, so why don't we go over your next match, hm? Wouldn't you like to relax with a little training?]

"Later," Ruby said.

[We don't have too much 'later' left to work with.]

"Later."

Mercy's heart ached. It was painful to see how much Ruby cared for Lindon. Especially when Lindon could never return her feelings; despite their resemblance, she wasn't Yerin.

Mercy knelt down at Ruby's side and put an arm around her. "I'm so sorry, Ruby. You only had a few days on your own, and I know this isn't how you wanted to spend it."

To Mercy's faint surprise, she wasn't stabbed.

"I wanted to help," Ruby said. "This is me helping. I wanted him to know me, not just Yerin. Well, I was here to hold his hand. Not Yerin."

Little Blue looked Mercy in the eyes and pointed straight to Ruby. She didn't make a sound, but Mercy could interpret that gesture.

"See? This is what I was talking about!"

The Blood Shadow getting closer to Lindon, separating herself from Yerin...there was danger in that.

But Mercy found it impossible not to sympathize.

She squeezed Ruby tighter. "You *are* helping. Lindon will know that when he wakes up."

"Not just Lindon I wanted to help." To Mercy's shock, Ruby leaned into the hug, resting her head on Mercy's shoulder. Just for a moment.

Tears welled up in Mercy's eyes. "Awww, Ruby! I'm so glad you didn't stab me!"

"Don't love stabbing so much that I'd stab a friend. *You* I know." Ruby tossed a glare to the side of the room where Eithan sat.

Eithan pretended not to hear.

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