Sticks And Stones

by Lothiriel84

Summary

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me. That's how the saying goes, at least.

The master, that was how Douglas referred to him – meaning he was excellent at being teased, and his co-pilot surely didn't waste any chance to make the most of it. As a rule Martin could live with that, but in the end he was only human, and Douglas had been pushing things one time too many of late.

“I thought we were friends,” he snapped after a particularly stressful trip. “Clearly I was wrong.”

No reply came from the First Officer, so he simply collected his hat and strode out of the flight deck. People had been making fun of him for the better part of his life, and some days he felt like he'd had enough – no matter how hard he tried to convince himself it wasn't such a big deal.

When he came in to work the following day Douglas barely acknowledged his presence, didn't utter a word except when strictly necessary for operational matters. This show of professionalism only sought to irritate Martin even further, though he had to admit he might have overreacted in the first place; by the time they landed he was utterly bored, and if he had to be completely honest also a little bit sad.

Douglas, however, seemed all set not to talk to him, so there was nothing much he could do about it. How typical of him, Martin mused – placing the blame on other people even when he'd been the one to start it; on the other hand, that spoke volumes about how little their supposed friendship mattered to his co-worker, and his heart sank even further.

It took three more trips worth of silent treatment for Arthur to take charge of things. The steward
cornered him in the Portakabin after everybody else had left, practically begged Martin to listen to what he had to say; so listen he did, his fingers clasped around the mug of coffee his friend had all but shoved in his hand.

“You have to talk to Douglas, Skip. I'm not sure you've noticed, but he – he looks sad when he thinks you can't see him.”

“What do you mean, 'sad'?” Martin furrowed his brow in confusion. All along he'd simply assumed that the older man was either angry or annoyed at him; it hadn't occurred to him that his words might have hurt Douglas' feelings rather than his pride, and he felt something akin to guilt coiling in the pit of his stomach.

“Well, you're his best friend,” Arthur explained, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. “And I don't think he has that many.”

“Who, Douglas?” he scoffed, only to trail off as the reality of those words started to sink in. For all his smooth talking and his sky god reputation, the man had revealed an incredibly thin skin on several occasions – each and every one of them involving someone second-guessing their admiration for him. Taking his three divorces and his history of alcohol abuse into account, one could seriously wonder whether his high opinion of himself was nothing but an act – a way to convince his subconscious that he wasn't such a failure after all.

“He likes you, you know,” Arthur added helpfully. “He would made your life a misery if he didn't – that's exactly why our previous captain left.”

Martin chuckled, couldn't help it. “Of course he did,” he murmured wryly, but he was already thinking of a way to make it up with his ridiculously stubborn friend.

And apparently he got it right, if the smirk that lit up Douglas' face upon discovering a lemon tucked inside his flight bag on their next layover was anything to go by.

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