

## Chapter 21



It takes a while before Mira looks like herself again. The whole time, you sit beside her not saying anything, but just silently letting her know you're there. When she's finally ready, you both stand up and walk out of the tunnel.

Levanter is surrounded by mountains, with surprisingly many buildings and houses for the small space. As you exit the tunnel, Mira pulls up her hood. "Are you okay?" you ask, and Mira only nods in response. Walking around, you look for a building that might look like a tavern. There's a rather large looking house with a cylindrical entrance and a cone-shaped roof on the entrance. Various people are entering and exiting, and you think that might be the tavern. You start to head towards it, but Mira stops you.

"The tavern is over there," she says and points to a more cosy looking building almost right by the cave entrance.

"Well, well, well," you hear a female voice behind you. "Look who's decided to grace us with her presence once again."

Mira mutters a "shit" under her breath, and turns around, taking her hood off. "Nixy, always a pleasure," she says, her voice dripping with false politeness. You feel that ripple effect coming off her again, but you don't need that ability to know she's lying.

“Did you get homesick?” Nixy asks her hands on her hips. She has her blonde hair in a thick braid resting over her shoulder. She’s looking at Mira with gorgeous green eyes and an amused smile. Wait, homesick?

“Something like that.” Mira responds.

Nixy lets out an amused ‘hm’ and regards her. “Still you, I see.”

“Still me,” Mira says, and you once again feel that ripple. You look at her, feeling slightly sad on Mira’s behalf.

“After so long too. And here I thought you’d have given in long ago.”

“Well, we can’t all be right every time.” Mira and Nixy stare at each other, one annoyed, the other quite the opposite. Then, Nixy notices you. “Who’s your friend?” she nods towards you.

“Hi, I’m Pernille,” you say and extend your hand in greeting. Nixy takes it and says, “pleasure,” then releases your hand again.

“If you’ll excuse us, we have matters to attend to,” Mira says, desperate to get away from this interaction.

“Does your friend know about you?” Nixy asks, ignoring Mira’s attempt to get away.

“Yes,” Mira responds curtly.

“I see,” Nixy looks you up and down. “And yet, you’re still sticking around.”

Nixy sizing you up makes you feel very uncomfortable. “I’m sorry, who are you?”

“Oh, my apologies. Let me introduce myself.” She grabs the skirt of her dark purple dress, and courtesy. “I am Nixy, the lovely, and generous witch who gave Mira her...gift.”

“You cursed her?” You ask, looking at Nixy in a new light. “Why?”

“Because she tried to steal from me.” Her eyes bore into yours and suddenly your mind is transported elsewhere.

You’re in a cosy room, with magical artifacts and trinkets everywhere. Thick tomes line the shelves along the walls, and you immediately want to go look at them. But you can’t move, you’re just a spectator, watching from the corner. You see two figures by one of the shelves with artifacts on them. You recognise them immediately as Mira and Nixy. Mira is struggling, held down by some magical force. Nixy is standing over her, looking down at a golden artifact shaped like a beetle in her hand.

“I don’t appreciate thieves trying to take what’s mine,” Nixy says, her voice low and menacing. She looks down at Mira kneeling in front of her with a strained face, as if in pain or struggling against what’s holding her down.

“I’ve heard of you. The phantom thief, striking from the shadows.” She crouches down in front of Mira, putting a finger under her chin, forcing her to look up at Nixy. “Well, since you love the shadows so much, why don’t I give you exactly what you want?” Nixy’s eyes shine a deep purple as the shadows you’ve now gotten so used to seeing, surround Mira in a whirlwind before plunging into her. Mira’s back arches and she screams out in pain as the shadows relentlessly seeps into her every pore. She hunches over as the last of the shadows disappear, the only evidence left of their presence are in her eyes before they too disappear. Mira pants, clearly exhausted and in pain. Nixy’s eyes return to their green shade as she regards Mira’s hunched form.

“There you go. I’ve generously given you the ability to control the very thing you hide in. Be careful though. Rely on them too much, give in to their every whisper, and they will slowly change you into a creature befitting them.” Nixy smiles at her. “I can’t wait to see what you become.” She gives Mira a condescending pat on the cheek and stands up. “Oh, and if you ever try to steal from me again, you’ll wish I had killed you instead.” And she walks out of the room.

You are standing back in Levanter, Nixy looking straight at you. “See? I don’t just give out curses willy nilly. I’d say she deserved it. Tell me, princess,” you startle, you haven’t told her you’re the princess. “Has she learned? Has she changed her ways? Or does she still deserve it?”

You look at Mira, unsure what to respond. She is still stealing, and you don’t want to lie. Nixy chuckles. “So that’s a no then. She’s still the lying thief she was back then.” She sighs in mock disappointment. Mira is taking deep breaths, but her fists are clenched. Nixy notices and turns her attention towards her. “Everything alright, dear?”

“Pernille, we have work to do. Let’s go.” Mira says, ignoring Nixy, but you’re not done.

“Can you reverse it?” you look at Nixy, and she smirks at you.

“I can. But why would I? I cursed her because she stole, and she still hasn’t learned. So tell me, princess, why should I remove the curse?”

“Don’t you think the curse is a bit harsh?”

Nixy laughs. “Harsh? No, I think this is the perfect punishment. Besides, I gave her power, didn’t I? I’d say that’s more than she deserves.” She steps back, providing some more space between you. “So no, I will not be removing the curse.” She turns her attention towards Mira. “I still can’t wait to see what you become.” And with that, she disappears in a swirl of purple smoke. You’re both silent for a moment, you’re looking at Mira and Mira’s looking at the empty space Nixy left behind. Her face is expressionless, and you wish she knew what she’s thinking. Eventually, she turns to you. “Come on, let’s find Broadin.”

Inside the tavern is busy, with lots of patrons drinking and enjoying some beer. You both head to the barkeep and ask for Broadin. The barkeep tells you he’s not working today, but he has the morning shift tomorrow. You decide to book one of the rooms in the floor above the bar and stay there for the night.

The room is bare, with little furniture. Two single-sized beds take up most of the space, and you crawl into one of the beds. Mira sits down on the edge of the other.

“So this is where you’re from then?” You ask, staring up at the ceiling as you lay in the surprisingly comfy bed. Mira nods. “I see now why you originally refused to come here.”

“I’m losing control,” Mira says, which is not what you expected her to say. You sit up and look at her.

“I mean, I know you’ve noticed, you’d be blind not to, but I just... I don’t know, I guess I didn’t wanna admit it.” She looks at you, searching for a reaction. But you don’t know how to react, so she goes on. “The whispers, they’re just... they’re getting so damn loud. And I know I’m more short-tempered than usual, and it’s so easy and convenient to just tap into their powers. I know I shouldn’t, believe me. But I just... Maybe you should try to find someone else to go the rest of the way with you.”

“Who would I choose? Everyone I know is back in the capital, and I’m not about to trust some strangers with this. No, you’re coming with me the whole way, and I will do my best to help you stay in control.”

“I’m not sure you can.” She pulls down her shirt, revealing dark veins creeping up her chest, all coming from a single point still covered by her shirt. Your eyes widen, and you look up at her. “I noticed them at the camp, the morning after you discovered your fire powers. The other visual signs all go away after a while, right? Like my eyes and stuff? But these refuse to go away, they’ve actually gotten longer since camp,” she says as she releases her shirt.

“Shit, Mira,” you don’t swear often, and it surprises her. You take a moment to think. “Okay, here’s what we’re going to do. We’re going to save Christmas, and we’re going to do it together, but mostly me of course.” Mira snorts, and you smile, happy you got a snort out of her. “Then, we’re going to figure out a way to remove your curse. And until then, I will shoot a fireball at your ass every time you try to use your powers. Okay?”

Mira studies you, then chuckles. “Okay.”

“Great!” You lay back down. “Why’d you steal from her anyway?”

“Some guys hired me to. Offered a pretty hefty sum too,” she says, laying down too. “Had I known who they wanted me to steal from, I never would’ve done it.”

“Right,” you say, thinking it over. “Well, tomorrow we will find this Broadin, get the bracelet, return it to its owner, sail out and finish this stupid journey. Sound good?”

Mira smiles. “Yeah, sound good.”

“Good,” you say and close your eyes, surrendering to the pleasant land of sleep.