

Chapter 13



“Come out you asshole! We need to talk!!” The kid shouts. He’s got a fierce stance, but as you near him you can see on his face that he’s scared.

“Kid, what are you doing?!” Mira asks, and she looks almost uneasy. The kid startles at her voice. He looks between the two of you.

“I’m confronting the guardian. She’s the reason everything is dying.” He looks around him and shouts, “Come on, you coward!”

“You’re Jason, right?” you ask, forcing your voice to sound calm and soothing, though you feel the opposite. “Your mom is worried sick about you.”

“I kept telling them. No one would listen. No one would even try doing anything about it! So it’s up to me.”

“Look, kid, you’re brave. We get it,” Mira says. “But what’s your plan here? Yell at it ‘till it shows up, then what?”

Jason seems uncertain, but he doesn’t back down. He yells for the guardian again. Next to you, Mira shifts, uneasy. “Are you okay?” you ask her.

She ignores your question, only focusing on Jason. “Do you have any idea what you’re dealing with here? Are you sure it’s a guardian?”

You don’t know much about guardians, but you know they are sacred beings meant to protect and preserve their area. Jason nods. “I’m certain of it. We must have done something to make her angry

and she's punishing us by letting our land die." He looks around in the air and shouts "AND IF YOU DON'T SHOW YOURSELF, I WILL SMASH EVERYTHING I SEE!!"

Mira pats you on the arm. "We need to get him out of here right now." You have never seen Mira like this before. She's restless and jumpy, looking around as if something's going to pop out any second.

"What's going on?" you ask, feeling uneasy yourself. The kid shouts again, and you feel a gush of wind behind you as if something just flew by you. Turning around, you see something black and flowy fly around all of you before coming to a stop in front of the statue. The figure floating in front of you is stunning. She's got long, black hair, a gorgeous, long and flowy black dress. Her eyes are completely black, and surrounding them are dark veins crawling outwards in every direction. Her skin, in contrast, is ghostly pale. A dark energy surrounds her. "Who are you to disturb me?" she asks, her reverberating voice making you shudder. Mira's hand shoots out and grabs Jason, pulling him behind you both.

Jason tries to face the guardian, but Mira holds him steady behind you. "You ruined our town!" He shouts. The guardian laughs; a cold, menacing sound. "I ruined it? Oh no, you've brought this onto yourselves, with your greed and carelessness."

"We really need to get out of here," Mira says to you.

"Just tell me what's happening, please," you respond. You had always imagined guardians to be nice and pure, not this.

"She's corrupted. I could feel her energy from far away. It's the same as mine," her head turns towards you. "But she's way too far gone."

"Is there anything we can do?" you ask.

"You dare speak about me as if I'm not here?!" the guardian's voice startles you both. The area around you gets darker, shadows gathering around her. You've seen this before with Mira. She's preparing for something.

"There might be something we can do, but it's going to require a lot from both of us. And we need some sort of container we can seal shut."

You hastily take off your bag and rummage through it. There are several bags of food, some clothes, a water flask, and the bottles of ale. "I don't suppose any of this will work?" Mira shakes her head. Suddenly, Jason screams. But the sound isn't coming from where you last saw him. You look in the direction of the scream, and see him hovering in the air, held up by shadowy tendrils. You can see the air being squeezed out of him, the guardian wearing an almost manic expression.

"Shit!" Mira says, her hand going up to her forehead, rubbing her temples. "You stupid kid."

You're about to lunge for Jason and try to drag him out of the guardian's grip, but Mira stops you.

"We need to do something!" You protest.

Mira is getting visibly frustrated. "Shit. Okay, we can still do this without the container, we just..." she looks towards the guardian, then back at you. "You're going to have to focus all your energy, okay? More than you ever have before. Even if it feels like you have no more left to give, you keep going. But

not yet, wait until I say so.” You nod, your whole body shaking. This was suddenly a whole lot of responsibility, and you are certain your heart is going to burst out of your chest.

Mira gives you a nod, and she disappears into the shadows that for once, were not of her making. But you can’t just do nothing until she says go. You should’ve asked what her plan is, you hate not knowing what’s about to happen. You try to think of something, anything, your mind swimming.

“Let the kid go!” you shout, trying to distract the guardian. You need to keep her attention away from squeezing the life out of the poor kid. But all it does is make her squeeze harder and she’s now looking at you with a furious gaze. Behind her, Mira is climbing up the statue, nearly reaching the top. More tendrils shoot out of the guardian, only this time they’re coming for you. With a racing heart, you back away from them. Just as they’re about to wrap around you, Mira jumps onto the guardian’s back, her legs and arms wrapping around her to hold steady. She places her hands on the guardian’s head, fingers splayed, and you swear you see the veins on her hands turning black. “NOW!” she shouts.

You don’t hesitate for a second. Gathering all your energy, you shoot your hands out towards the guardian. A blinding white light floods out of you and hits her in a steady stream. The guardian writhes and shakes, trying to shove Mira off her, but she holds fast. You keep pouring all your energy into your healing magic towards the guardian. The dark veins are now creeping up Mira’s neck, slowly reaching up her face and to her eyes. You don’t stop using your magic, but you do hesitate, and she can feel it. “Don’t you dare stop!” she yells, but it’s strained. Her eyes have turned black, and the veins are surrounding them from all directions, just like the guardian. Except, the guardian doesn’t have those dark veins anymore, and her skin has regained some colour. You keep going, pouring everything you have and then some. The dark energy surrounding the guardian has almost completely vanished. In a final explosion of bright light Mira is thrown off the guardian, hitting the statue behind them and crash to the ground. Your legs give in beneath you, all breath knocked out of you. As the bright light slowly disappears, you look up at the guardian, panting. What you see almost takes your breath away all over again. She’s still got her long black hair and her flowy black dress, but her skin is more colourful, more alive. There’s a glow about her, nice and pure, a stark contrast to the dark energy surrounding her before.

“You have done well. Thank you,” the guardian says, her voice no longer cold and menacing. Now, her voice is warm and calm and ethereal. She approaches you and places a hand on your head. A warmth spreads through you, and you feel your energy returning. You look up at her in awe, speechless. Behind her, Mira is crouched over, probably trying to regain her energy as well. What concerns you is that her eyes are still black, the veins still very much visible. But your attention snaps back to the guardian as she speaks.

“I was lost, with no hope of returning. You brought me back, and for that, I have bestowed upon you the sense of truth. From now on, whenever someone tells you an outright lie, you will be able to sense it.”

Your eyes widen at this very generous gift. “I... thank you!” you want to say more to show how grateful you are, but you can’t find the words. The guardian smiles, sensing your genuine gratitude, no more words needed.

She crouches down next to a wide-eyed Jason and touches his cheek. “You can tell your mom that you have been a very brave boy. And that I will do my best to restore your land to its former beauty. But it will take time.” The boy nods. He too seems speechless. The guardian then turns to you. “Now get this boy back to his mother.” She does a little wave with her hand, and the world around you blur and fades. There’s a strange sensation within you and you feel like puking. Before you know it, you are standing in the middle of Vignette. Elisa screams as she sees you and runs towards her boy, hugging him tightly. You smile and feel a pleasant warmth in your chest at their reunion. You turn to say something to Mira, but she’s not there. You frantically look around, looking for any sign of her. Dread settles over you as you realise that Mira did not return with you.