

Chapter 16

You wake the next morning to chatter, and the sound of tents being put down. You're not ready to open your eyes yet, so you stay still, pretending to be asleep. Memories of last night flood your mind: the chatting with Jush and Thyler, the fight with Mira, her eyes going black, and the flames flaring up. After that happened, you and Mira had looked at each other, eyes wide. Her eyes had gone back to their normal blue selves, apparently snapped out of whatever was happening to her. She eyed you and the flame curiously, then a little smirk formed on her lips.

"Don't look at me like that, I'm sure someone else did it and is messing with us." You said, feeling freaked out.

"Yeah sure, they just timed it really well," she said, and you could hear a hint of amusement in her voice. "Try it," she nodded to the bonfire. You shook your head, you don't know why this was freaking you out so much.

"Oh come on, please! Humour me," she placed a hand on her hip, and you had a feeling she would not let this go until you had tried. Half her features were lit up by the warm glow of the fire as she faced you. You guess you were a bit curious yourself, but it also scared you. You took a deep breath and extended your arms towards the fire, palms up. You both watched intently, but nothing happened.

"See? Someone's just messing with us," you said, letting your arms fall.

"You didn't even try. Anyone can do this," she said as she mimicked you, extending her arms, then let them fall again. "Focus your energy, like you do when you're healing people."

You gave her a sceptical look, then did as she said. You extended your arms again and focused your energy on the flame. Again, nothing happened.

"What are you trying to do?" Mira asked.

"I don't know, I'm focusing my energy like you said."

"Yeah, but it won't work unless you have a clear intention. Like, I can't just control the shadows without giving them something to do. If I want them to surround and hide me, that's what I tell them. If I want my own shadow to move somewhere, I tell it to move. But I can't just focus my energy and expect them to know what I want if I don't even know that myself."

You looked at her. "You can move your own shadow? Isn't that attached to you?"

She shook her head. "No, it isn't, it can roam freely. It can have a life of its own too if I'm not careful. But that's not the point. The point is, what are you trying to do? Make them bigger? Smaller? Something else?"

You thought about it. You wanted to do something to be absolutely certain it was your doing and not just the wind or something else. So, you closed your eyes, and imagined the flames taking shapes, dancing as you focused your energy. You thought back to the puppet show Mira put on when you

first met her and thought of similar shapes. When you opened your eyes, that's exactly what you saw. They were not as detailed, but they were very clearly human shaped. You gasped as your heart skipped a beat and you stepped back, the flames returning to their regular shape.

"Ha-ha!!! You did it!!" Mira exclaimed excitedly, clapping once.

You turn onto your back, your eyes still closed. You still can't quite believe you did that, still thinking someone else was just hiding somewhere and messing with you. But they couldn't have seen what you were imagining in your mind. Slowly, you open your eyes, and you have to squint as you do so. You move your hands to shield them from what's blinding you. Carefully, you open your eyes wider and look up. You quickly sit up, excited as you realise what's blinding you is the sun.

"Mornin'," Mira's voice says next to you and your head snaps towards her. She's eating some bread and jam, leaning her back against the log you sat on last night.

"Are you seeing this?" you ask, pointing to the sky. "I'm not hallucinating, right?"

Mira chuckles. "Am I seeing the almost clear sky? Yes, I am."

You can't help the grin forming on your face as you realise you must be closer to your destination. Around you, people are busying themselves with taking down their tents or eating or otherwise preparing for travel. Jush and Thyler approach you, large backpacks resting on their backs, and they greet you both with a good morning.

"Where are you headed next then?" you ask, taking out a piece of bread and some jam.

"Don't know," Jush responds, looking at Thyler. "We go wherever we feel like and stop when we feel like stopping."

"Oooh, please do make your way towards the capital!" You explain the party to them.

"Do you want us to perform?" Thyler asks.

"Only if you want to. Otherwise, you're free to come and just hang out and celebrate." You want that day to be about having a good time, you don't want them to feel like they have to work.

"We'll be there," Thyler smiles. That's the first time someone has said for sure they will show up. Everyone else has just said they will see, and that makes you excited.

"If you go by Riptide, you should invite our friend as well, J. Oftenbridge." Jush says.

"J. Oftenbridge?" you ask as you eat your bread.

"Yes, he's an actor friend of ours. He stayed behind in Riptide."

"Does he always just go by a letter and his last name?" Mira asks.

"He never actually told us his full first name, so we just call him Oftenbridge."

"We'll see if we find him," you smile. You chat a bit more while you and Mira eat your breakfast before you tell them you have to move on.

You both agree to stop by Riptide, since you'll pretty much be going by there anyway. You're both in a better mood this morning, chatting about random things that have nothing to do with your journey. Then, Mira goes quiet before she says softly, "I'm sorry about last night. I think..." she pauses. "I don't know..."

"I'm used to your testy attitude, but I'm not sure if I will ever get used to seeing those black eyes. Especially if they're directed at me like last night." Mira remains quiet. "Do you notice your eyes doing that? Do you feel it when it happens?" She shakes her head, but she doesn't say anything. "The way you spoke was kind of creepy too. It was your voice, but at the same time it wasn't." She still isn't responding. It's clear she's taking in your words, but you wish you knew what she was thinking.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know," she says, and you can sense a hint of uneasiness in her tone. It's clear she's holding something back, but you don't press the issue.

"I'm sorry too. I don't know why I was getting riled up. It felt like it came out of nowhere," you say calmly, sincerely.

"At least it led to the discovery of your hidden powers," she says, her excitement picking up. "You should practice. Do you think you'll need already existing fire for your power to work? Oooh do you think you can produce fire?"

"I don't know, I'd probably need fire to already exist, right?"

"Try it! No, wait! Does your fire power come with fire immunity? What if you produce fire in your hands and then your hands just blister and burn?"

You punch her arm. "Don't say that, you're freaking me out!"

"Can you heal yourself? If you can heal yourself, I'm sure you'll be fine, right?"

You haven't really thought about it. If you're hurt, your wounds tend to heal quickly. Maybe that's your powers at work.

"I say go for it. We have lots of time to explore before we reach Riptide." Mira looks super excited about your new fire powers.

"What do you want me to do then?"

"Try summoning flame in your hand. It doesn't have to be big, just a small one."

You sigh, and open your palms, imagining a tiny flame flickering in the palm of your hand as you focus your energy on it. It doesn't take long, before you actually see that small flame in your palm.

"Ha! Amazing!" Mira says. Your palm doesn't hurt at all. It's just a warm, pleasant feeling in your palm.

The rest of the way to riptide is spent practicing your new powers as Mira shares some tips and tricks about accessing your magical energy. You're actually having fun with it, and you're learning to use them quickly. Unnaturally quickly according to Mira. Most people take years to master their powers. Though you still have lots to worry about, in this very moment you're feeling good.