

Chapter 19



You and Mira keep the chatter light on the way to Phoenix, keeping it clear of any of the stuff you really should talk about but neither of you want to. Phoenix sits on the other side of the mountain range, but where Death Valley is only a mining structure, Phoenix is an actual settlement. The buildings are all sturdy, stone or brick buildings, and like in Death Valley there's a carved-out entrance into the mountains. Except this one has not collapsed, and there's no chaos here. A few people are working by the entrance, and without wasting any time you head towards them.

"Hello," you say to the very first person you see; a relatively tall man who looks like he's got better things to do than to talk to you. "I'm sorry, I'm looking for a Brakin?" He nods towards a very big, bald man loading some heavy rocks onto a mining cart. "Thank you," you say and walk away from him.

"Nice guy. Real chatty," Mira murmurs to you and you chuckle. When you reach Brakin, you realise just how big and muscular this guy is. He sees you coming and he studies you with an expression that makes you want to crawl in on yourself. You must look like an obnoxious insect in his eyes.

"Can I help you?" His voice is deep and gruff. He brushes off some dirt on his shoulder, but it only serves to add more soot.

"Umh... we uh..." you stutter, then you shake your head. Get it together. "June Ludport asked us to see if you still had her bracelet," you manage to say, but your voice is weak.

"June. She couldn't even come to pick it up herself, huh?" he crosses his arms, his large black beard almost reaching them.

"I'm sorry, all I know is she asked us to come get it for her."

He hmphs and continues loading rocks onto the cart. “Don’t have it. Gave it to my brother,” he says curtly.

“Okay, is he around here?” you look around, trying to spot someone who could look like Brakin’s brother.

“Nope, he’s in Levanter.”

Mira lets out a loud, frustrated “Hah!” and throws her arms out. “Of course he is.”

Brakin pays her no mind. “If you want the bracelet, you’ll have to go meet him. You can go through the tunnels, but I’m not escorting you.”

“Okay, thank you for your help,” you say and turn around, facing Mira.

She’s just standing there, shaking her head. “Nope. Let’s head back, you know you can convince her if you use the right tools.” She places a hand on her hip. “I told you, didn’t I? Things will just keep piling up, we’ll never actually get to the Warlock.”

You let her finish her little rant before you speak. “It’s okay. We’ll head quickly to Levanter, we’ll get the bracelet, head back and finally be able to sail out.”

“Nono, you see, his brother has some long-lost cousin he needs to get a message to in a kingdom in the clouds, and you need to deliver that before getting the bracelet. And then his cousin wants a rock from space, so you need to get that as well.”

You chuckle, amused by how fed up she is. “Then we’ll deal with it when we get there. Come on.”

“No, I’m not going to Levanter.”

“We’ve come so far, we’re literally only one town away from having visited every single town in this Kingdom, and you’re going to back out now?”

“I don’t care. You can head to Levanter if you want. I’ll wait for you here.” As you study her, you see there’s a determination in her eyes, and you wonder if it’s just based on her being done with these fetch quests or if there’s something more to it.

“I don’t want to go through those mountain caves alone.”

“You’ll be fine, you’ve got your fire power and everything. That’s plenty to defend yourself against the trolls. I’ll be right here rooting for you!”

“Trolls?” you ask, suddenly scared.

Mira nods. “Trolls. They live deep in these mountains. That’s why Brid’s Tail is fortified, you know. Trolls had come out from Death Valley and attacked their town.” She pats her hand on your shoulder and smiles. “But I’m sure you’ll be fine.” She notices your hesitation. “Or, we could go back and deal with this another way.”

You’ve never met trolls before, you don’t know what they’re like, or if they’re immediately hostile. But you’ve faced a bird-human hybrid and a corrupted guardian. You can face some trolls too. So,

you shake your head and grab her arm and starts pulling her towards the cave entrance. “No, come on. One more town, we can do this.”

But she halts you. “Pernille, I’m serious. I am not going to Levanter, and if you try to drag me again, I swear I will use my power to make you back off,” and she pulls her arm out of your grip.

“Why? Are you really that opposed to doing just one more favour for someone?” you ask, but you know by her look that’s not the only issue. “Or is it Levanter? It can’t be worse than Vignette or Smithereens, can it?”

“Levanter is fine. But I’m not going.”

You let out a frustrated sigh. “Fine,” you say and walk towards the cave entrance.

“You’d seriously rather walk around through a cave where I just told you there are trolls, just to get a stupid bracelet, instead of going back and doing this the easier way?”

“Yeah. I said I would try, and I will.”

She doesn’t respond, and you keep walking. You’re almost by the entrance when she catches up with you. “If you die, I lose my protection if I’m caught stealing,” she says, walking past you.

“You will mourn me if I die. Admit it,” you tease.

You’re almost by the entrance when you hear Brakin’s voice. “What’s your plan here? Just walk around and ask everyone until you find my brother?”

You feel a flush reach your cheeks as you realise that’s basically what you’ve been doing. No one has told you where to find the people they talk about, and you’ve never asked. Asking would have made the search way easier.

“He works in the tavern. Ask for Broadin.”

Mira’s head whips around. She looks him up and down, then lets out a “huh”.

“Thank you,” you say and brace yourself before you both head into the mountain cave.