

Chapter 22

The next morning, you head down to the tavern to check if Broadin has arrived yet. Mira is still asleep, so you head down alone. The tavern isn't as busy this morning as it was last night, with just a few patrons eating some breakfast. Behind the bar stands a lanky guy drying some glasses. You approach him and say, "Hi, sorry, we were told Broadin would be working today?"

He looks up at you and brushes some of his black curls away from his eyes. "I'm Broadin. What can I do for you?"

"Oh," you say, then feel silly. Broadin is the exact opposite of his brother Brakin. He smiles, recognising that look.

"You met my brother first, didn't you?"

You smile back, letting out a little chuckle. "Yeah, sorry."

"No need to be sorry," he says, waving a hand to dismiss your apology. His smile makes your heart melt. It's cute, and charming, and inviting. "What can I do for you?" he asks again.

"Oh, right. Brakin mentioned he gave you a bracelet," he nods, recognising immediately what you're talking about. "The thing is, that bracelet wasn't really his to give away."

"Ah, I see." He reaches into a pocket and takes out a small box, setting it on the bar. "I assume you're here to ask for it back, then?"

"Yes, please, if you don't mind."

He opens the box and looks at the bracelet inside. It's a pretty, silver bracelet with a few charms attached to it. "I was planning on gifting this to my girlfriend, but..." He sighs and closes the box, sliding it over to you. "I'll find her something else."

"I'm sorry I ruined your gift," you say genuinely as you pick up the box.

He waves off your apology again. "Don't worry about it. I can't give her something that was never mine to give away, can I? It wouldn't sit right with me."

"I can help you find another gift for her if you'd like?" You pocket the box, and it fits perfectly inside one of your cloak pockets.

"Don't worry about it. It's fine, really," he reassures you. "They have a jeweller in Phoenix who makes jewellery out of the gems they mine there. I'll ask Brakin for something that didn't originally belong to someone else," he laughs.

"Okay, if you're sure?"

He nods. "Absolutely."

"Well thank you for giving it back."

"Don't mention it," he says, and his attention changes to the person now standing next to you. "Mira?"

“Hey, Broadin,” she says, sitting down on a stool at the bar.

“I haven’t seen you in so long! You just up and left,” he studies her, taking her in. “Where have you been?”

“You know him?” you ask, sitting down as well. “And you didn’t think to mention that last night when we were looking for him?”

She shrugs. “You didn’t ask.”

“You can be so frustrating sometimes, you know that?” you say.

“So we eat before we leave, yeah?”

“You’re leaving already? You just came back,” Broadin says, and there’s a hint of disappointment in his look.

“Yeah, we’ve got some matters to attend to,” Mira responds apologetically.

“Okay, I’ll get you some food, on the house,” he disappears through the door behind the counter and into the kitchen. You turn to Mira, and her eyes are lingering on where Broadin disappeared to.

“How do you know each other?” you ask.

“It’s a small town. I used to hang out here a lot. It’s where I usually got my... jobs.”

“So, people used to hire you to steal for them?” you say, looking around to make sure no one heard.

“Yup,” she says, her fingers playing with some split wood on the bar.

After a few minutes, Broadin returns with two plates of pancakes and two mugs of coffee. He sets them down in front of you, along with some milk and sugar and some choices of syrup if you want any.

“You serve pancakes in a tavern?” you ask, taking a bite of the delicious pancakes.

“Technically, it’s an inn since we do lodgings as well. And yes, after I started working here, we started serving pancakes.”

“When did you start working here?”

“Right after I moved here, which was what... five years ago?” he says, looking up in the air as he thinks.

“And before that, you lived in Phoenix?”

Broadin nods. “Yeah. Me, my brother and my mom.”

You turn to Mira. “Brakin didn’t recognise you. If he did, he didn’t react.”

“That’s because they never met. He didn’t come over here a lot when she lived here,” Broadin responds to your comment.

Mira snorts and says, “You make it sound like it was because of me.” Broadin laughs.

“Why didn’t he? Because of the dangerous way to get here? You know, with the trolls and all,” you ask, sad that you’re almost done with your pancakes and coffee.

“Nah, the trolls aren’t a problem to us anymore,” he says, and you think back to the confrontation you just had with three trolls.

“Oh, actually I’m curious. Mira mentioned that Bird’s Tail put up defences due to a troll attack. How do you deal with that here?”

“Our tunnels are usually too small for them, but should they break through we have specially trained people to deal with them. Troll attacks are very rare though. They usually stick to their territory, and we stick to ours.” Broadin explains.

“But the people in Phoenix mine in those caves, don’t they? Isn’t that imposing on their territory? And what do you do if you want to visit your brother. You’d have to cross their space.” You have so many questions about how this works.

“We have our ways,” he says simply, and it’s definitely not because the voice in your head has not thought of a good solution to this.

“We should head back,” Mira says, and stands up. “Thanks for the food.”

You are not exactly thrilled at the idea of having to navigate away from the trolls, but you do have to go through there eventually. Alternatively, you could try going over the mountains, but that would take way longer.

Broadin clears your plates and mugs away, then puts two pellets on the bar. “Here, take these. Crush them in your hands and it will teleport you where you want. Just make sure you have a clear picture in your mind of where you want to go.” His gaze lingers on Mira, and she smiles. “Thanks, Broadin.”

“Anytime,” he says, sounding a little sad.

Mira looks at you. “Should we just head straight for Fomo then? We have no more business in Phoenix.”

“Yeah, sounds good.” You would have liked to invite him to the Christmas party as thanks, but since this is Mira’s town you don’t want to do anything that might make her uncomfortable. Not if you can avoid it at least. So, you close your eyes and picture the docks of Fomo, the new-looking buildings, narrowing in on the bar where you met June.

“I’ve missed having you around, Mira.” You open your eyes to see Mira standing like you did, about to crush the pellet when she was halted by Broadin. She opens her eyes and looks at him, her face masking her emotions. She looks down at the pellet in her hand, contemplating something.

“Pernille’s hosting a Christmas party in the capital in a few days’ time,” she says softly and looks up at him. “I hope to see you there.” Then she crushes the pellet in her fist and she disappears.

You smile at Broadin one last time before you too crush the pellet and are transported back to the bar, at the exact spot you had pictured in your mind. Mira stands next to you, lost in thought.

“You okay?” you ask.

Mira nods and looks at you. “Come on, let’s go talk to June.”

June is standing behind the bar, and her face lights up as she spots you. Then she realises her face lit up, and she puts on a mask of indifference. “Did you get it?”

You take out the box Broadin gave you from your pocket and hand it to her. She accepts in and opens the lid to look at it. Smiling, she takes it out and puts it on, its silver chain glinting in the light above the bar. “Thanks.”

“Now you’ll let us see Ronn,” you say, and it’s not a question.

June heads over to the door with the ‘Ronn Duckson’ sign and knocks on it. “There are two girls here who want to see you.”

“Send them in,” he says and you swear you’ve heard his voice before.

June frowns and looks at you. “He’s usually not this accepting of visitors, but you heard him.”

You and Mira enter the room. It’s a small space with cabinets and fishing equipment, some hunting equipment and a liquor cabinet. In the middle of the room is a large, wooden desk. Behind it sits the very same man you met back in the hut. The one who told you to go get the beer for Ronn.

“I’m sorry, you’re Ronn?” you ask incredulously. He sits with his hands folded in front of him, his expression firm as he nods. “So you made us go out of our way to get you the ale under the pretence of it being for someone else?”

Ronn giggles, the sound still infectious. “I never said it wasn’t for me. Do you have it?”

You take out the bottles from your bag and place them on his desk. He looks lovingly at the ale you’ve brought.

“You could’ve easily gotten those yourself,” Mira says, unamused.

“I had already been social with two strangers that day. Didn’t want to be any more social than I had to.”

You can feel Mira’s temper rising, but at the same time she respects his desire to avoid social interactions.

“So we could’ve given you the ale back at the hut and not have to travel all the way here to give it to you?” you ask.

“But you wanted my boat. My boat is here. That wouldn’t have been helpful to anyone.” Right, you had forgotten he didn’t have his boat with him back at the hut.

“So,” Ronn says, standing up. “Are you ladies ready to sail?”