

# Chapter 11

Brena

Brena wakes with her left arm gently wrapped around Aleiri's waist. She snakes her arm out, then sits up. She looks down at her hands, there is still a faint red stain, that when she blinks disappears. Brena slips back under the sheets and closes her eyes. She can still see Frodgar's face, the scene plays itself over and over again. She scoots closer to Aleiri and lets her warmth envelop her. She buries her face in Aleiri's hair, and suddenly the scene stops playing itself. Frodgar's body is whisked away like the tide taking a shell into the surf, and is replaced with Aleiri's face.

She did not wake after the incident. A dark thought passes her mind when she thinks of Alyks. There is no scenario where he does not hate her for this. For either endangering herself or embarrassing him. She even killed one of his own men. The sun starts to leak into the tent in thin slivers from the slits in the canvas. Brena refuses to let go of Aleiri, but then a shaft of light crawls its way across the floor onto Aleiri's face, and she starts stirring.

I can't let her stay. There is no reality where this ends well, but I can't resist the draw. I can smell her on the wind. I have to be strong. I was not able to talk to her. I need to send her away. I need to, but I can't. What if this is a sign. What if Broun sent her to test my resolve. Sending her away would be the right choice right? But what if Broun sent her to me because he wants to reward me for my constant vigilance. Maybe she is an angel sent from him to finally reward me for keeping it at bay. For keeping myself in tact for my vigilance.

Outside the tent Alyks clears his throat. Aleiri shoots awake, then scrambles out of bed. Aleiri does not have enough time to hide, so she leaps behind the bed and covers herself in the covers. Brena sidles over to her.

“What are you doing?” Brena whispers.

“I can’t let him see me here.” Aleiri whispers back.

“Why?” Brena whispers back.

“He just can’t know I’m here, I’ll explain later, just don’t let him know I’m here.”

“Fine.” Brena whispers.

Alyks steps one foot in.

“I’m not dressed.” Brena says with as much seduction as she can muster.

*‘Maybe he will just walk in anyway.’* Brena thinks. The thought enters her mind, and she flushes, but something nags at the back of her mind. The thought hides in the shadows of her thoughts, she can’t seem to find it, but she brushes it off as something errant. Brena waits for a spell, and Alyks does not walk in. Brena sighs, then walks over to her clothes chest. She tosses on a black frock with a white apron.

“I’m decent, you may enter.” Brena says.

Alyks walks in. He pans his gaze about the tent lazily.

What’s that common girl doing there? She’s in Brena’s bed. Did they do something? Did Brena betray me? Did that vile wench steal Brena from me. I can’t let such vile cast a dark fog on my mind. I know Brena, I know her love, I know her devotion. If only I could respond in kind. If only I could let myself.

“Do you mind the accommodations?” Alyks asks.

“Everything is perfect, thank you my prince.” Brena says.

Thank Broun for you. But I can't let you stay. This must be a test of the highest order. Broun has sent you to tempt me. Broun has sent you to try to test my resolve. I can't let it win. I will not let it win.

“Good, good.” Alyks pauses.

“About last night.” Alyks says.

The image of the dead man's body leaking onto the dirt floor flashes before Brena's eyes, causing her facade to slip for an instant.

She's pretending to be fine, but the first is always the worst. Already she has been tainted by death. Already it tries to corrupt her, to try to take her away from me. I need to keep her safe, I need to keep her pure.

Alyks notices the slip and his face softens.

“You need not worry about any repercussions. Consider it handled.” Alyks says.

It's an awful shame that I can't parade what I made of that man's body around. I could show all these fools what true horror looks like. The consequences of touching something that is mine.

“Thank you.” Brena says

Brena avoids Alyks eyes, afraid that if he looks into them he can see that she is not the same. If he looks in her eyes they won't be as bright as they once were. Although

maybe he would like it. Maybe she wouldn't just seem like a love sick little girl. Maybe she could seem more like her sister. The thought immediately sours her expression.

She is not looking at me. Something is seriously wrong, I can't let her go on like this. Although seeing her that night with the bloody sword in her hand, standing over that body. I don't think I have ever had that much trouble holding myself back. I remember her heat as I carried her. I was so close, all I had to do was put her down, and devour her. Ravish her until she could not imagine anyone else but me. But I resisted, I kept myself intact. She doesn't know and she will never know. I just need her to go, I can't let her see that part of me. Its disgusting.

"Although." Alyks pauses.

Brena looks up and stars at him in the eyes. She knows that she is going to hate the next words that he is going to say. She knows that she is going to hate herself. She knows exactly what he is going to say. *'He thinks i'm disgusting now. He never saw Ealyn covered in blood, and guts. Ealyn's always perfect. Now all he will see is a beast when he looks at me.'* Alyks winces.

This is it.

"When we make it to split river I will organize a contingent of Whitefall soldiers to escort you back to castle Lightfeather." Alyks blurts out.

Brena starts to tear up.

I need to leave, I can't be here. I can't see her face like that.

Alyks turns around and leaves the tent as fast as he can. Tears start to stream from Brena's eyes, then a scowl starts to form on her brow. She slowly turns to face where Aleiri is hiding. She tries to muster all the hate and anger in her heart, but as soon as Aleiri pops out from behind the bed it all melts away. Aleiri faces her, then she runs to embrace her. Aleiri grabs on tight.

"I'm so sorry. It's all my fault." Aleiri says.

Everything she has worked for has collapsed around her. This entire adventure has been a waste. Alyks hates her, there is no point being her. Then she breathes in Aleiri scent, and her emotions smooth. Aleiri leads her back to the bed, and slowly her cries turn into a whimper. Aleiri strokes her hair, and hums. The melody is calming, and she likes the way Aleiri's hand feels in her hair. Slowly the tumult of emotions is turned from an ocean storm into a still river. And she looks up at Aleiri with clear eyes. She is haloed by the light passing through the top of the tent. It is said that Broun was the only would who met angels, but a likeness has never been closer replicated than in this moment. Alyks' shadow finally moves from out of the tent.