

## Chapter 5

Aleiri

Brena dips the mop into a ducket then presses down. From the corner of Brena's room Aleiri watches like a hawk waiting for its prey to step into the open. Brena lifts the mop out of the bucket and starts clawing the floor. Aleiri continues watching intently as Brena pushes the mop around the floor, she gets every square inch of the floor with perfect percision. On the last sector of the floor Brena hearse footsteps.

"Hide." Brena whispers.

Brena quickly stashes her mop in the closet along with Aleiri, then slams the door shut. She turns around and spots her mop bucket, she runs for it. She grabs it and pushes it under her bed. Missy walks through the door holding her breakfast. Brena gives her a beaming smile as Missy looks down at the spotless floor brow furrowed. She lays the tray on her bedside table. Missy looks back up then looks down at Brena's dress. The sapphire silk is spotted with discolorations at the knees and forearms. Then Missy looks down at her shoes. They at one point must have been silver, but now they were totally brown.

"Did Tabatha help you today?" Missy asks.

"No, why?" Brena asks.

"You are dressed and the floor is spotless." Missy says.

Brena blanches.

“Oh, Tabatha, yes. She helped me today. How could I have forgotten, what a fool am I.” Brena chuckles.

Missy sighs.

“Will you need any more help, milady?” Missy asks.

“No, thank you Missy you are dismissed.” Brena says.

Missy leaves the room and shuts the door behind her. Brena rushes to her closet and opens the doors. Aleiri is holding her mouth closed only barely keeping herself from bursting out laughing.

“What?” Brena asks.

“There is no Tabatha you dolt.” Aleiri says.

Brena scowls, then Aleiri starts laughing. Brena’s attempts to keep her sour expressions but it slowly melts, and she starts laughing too. Once they have recovered from their fit Aleiri smiles brightly at Brena.

“Well, I think you’re ready. Well at least as ready as you could ever be.” Aleiri says.

“Thank you.” Brena says.

Brena pulls Aleiri into a deep hug. After a moment Brena lets go and leans against the edge of the closet.

“What was that for?” Aleirir says.

“Thank you for helping me. I would not be able to do this without you.” Brena says.

“Don’t thank me yet, you still owe me twenty five coins.” Aleiri says.

“Don’t fret, you will have your money by sundown, then we will be off.” Brena says.

“Okay.” Aleiri says.

Brena frowns.

“I’ll actually get it now. Stay here, feel free to do anything you want. I give you free reign over my tiny kingdom.” Brena says as she makes an exaggerated bow.

Brena hugs Aleiri once more then takes off out of the room. Aleiri stares at the room. She takes in the fine silks, the crocheted clothes, and gold trimmed doilies. She turns around and runs her hands over the dresses laden with jewels, inlaid with fine metals and even finer silks. When she makes it to the last dress she pulls her hand away. She stares at the grey dress lined with silver embroidery.

*‘This looks exactly like the dress mom wore to the wedding.’* She brushes her hand over the embroidered tower, and traces the patterns of the pattern she pulled from her memory. That of a dove in flight. She can remember the wedding like it was yesterday. The most vivid image is that of her mother standing on the dias in her red dress with gold filigree, next to a man with the sigil of a dove in flight embroidered on his chest. The perfumes covering the entire wedding made the palace intoxicating. She walks out of the closet to the small mirror just outside. Sitting under the mirror is a small vanity. She pulls out one of the drawers and smells all the perfumes inside.

She brings the perfumes to her nose and takes a deep breath. The scent triggers memories of her sixteenth birthday. The visual comes back, she reveal in the memories of the fine dresses, and finer foods, but then the memory turns dark as she gets to the day's end. SHe puts down the perfume and shuts the drawer. Even though the scent is lost the memory still plays out. Aleiri tries to stop thinking, but the more she tries to stop the stronger the memory grows.

“Come, come.” Sitrin said.

“No, I can’t.” A young Aleiri responded.

“What are you craven?” Sitrin asked.

“No, I'm not.” Aleiri responded.

“Then, come.” Sitrin said.

Sitrin walked down the wooden hall. The walls were carved from oaken logs, shaved down to a smooth flush surface, then inlaid with carvings. The orange light leaked from the great hall illuminated a carving of a great battle. On one side there was a legion of men with knitted leather armor holding swords, standing above in the clouds was a wizard with sapphire gems for eyes, and a painted red and yellow crown on his head. On the other side a legion of men wearing white armor with staffs held pointing at the man in the sky.

As Aleiri followed Sitrin down the halls the carving continued. The Wizard fell from the sky onto the ground, and the white soldiers surrounded and dug into the corpse like maggots. As the carving continued the white soldiers stood over the men in

knitted leather armor who are now in chains. They marched to the other corner of the wall so when Aleiri took a turn she spotted her favorite part of the carving.

A man in black robes with sapphires for eyes stood amongst the clouds, lightning pouring from his fingertips onto the incoming white army. Behind him is a legion of dragons, monsters and giants all tearing the white soldiers to pieces. The painted carving finishes with the black wizard bowing to the king of the knitted leathers and walking into the sea.

As Keiri continued down the halls deeper into the wooden fortress the orange light from the hall dissipates, replaced by an ambient violet. When she turns a corner the carving stops and a hallway filled with tall windows, that lets the deep violet light in long rectangles, making the floor banded with light and shadow. For a second she stopped and looked out the window. There were no stars in the sky. The only light comes from the purple lamp on top of the silver spire. In the distance she can spot other purple lamps dotting the landscape. She has never seen stars, she has only heard of them. She imagined that maybe the stars were like the purple lamps, and lit distant kingdoms like the purple lamps did.

Sitrin leaves the hallway taking a right. Aleri goes to follow her, but Sitrin is nowhere to be found. She figured that Sitrin went on without her. Too excited to see the soldiers' dressing room to keep track of her. Taking it as a small blessing, she decided to head to her sister's room. Her sister disappeared from the party quickly after the main celebrations started. It was odd as her sister was the one who she would stick to at parties. Her sister was magnetic, the most beautiful woman she has ever seen. She had deep black hair, made a slight blue by the ambient light, along with deep green eyes. She

was surprised as many people claimed to have green eyes, but their eyes seemed blue because of the violet light, but Yeira's eyes always looked bright green no matter the light. It's almost like they glowed. She once overheard her mother tell her sister that it was a trait inherited from her wizard ancestors.

At first Aleri was jealous of her beautiful sister, but she quickly found she didn't like being the center of attention, and having a beautiful sister was a good distraction when it came to parties. Which is why she had such a dismal time at her birthday party, and dipped out early with Sitrin. She had never done this before, the thought didn't worry her though. She was known to dip out of things at odd times. At that time she pegged it for a flighty nature. Her thoughts stopped when she walked to the hallway outside her sister's room.

There was a faint sound, like a thumping. As she moved closer to her sister's room the noise grew louder. Until when she was outside her sister's door the sound was all she could hear. The door opened a crack, she peeked through. Ever since that day she has regretted that decision; it even haunts her now. Aleri is brought back to the present when Brena steps through the door with a coin purse in hand.

"I got it." Brena says.

"Great." Aleiri says.

Brena walks over to Aleiri and hands her the money pouch. Aleiri grabs it unenthusiastically.

"What's wrong?" Brena asks.

"Oh, it's nothing." Aleiri says.

Aleiri quickly fixes her expression into a smile and gives Brena a hug.

“Thank you, this will make all the difference in the world.” Aleiri says.

“It was nothing, thank you for helping me.” Brena responds.

“Don’t thank me yet, we haven’t even done the hard part.” Aleiri states.

Brena nods, her brow furrowing into a determined expression.

“Today is the day.” Brena says.

“Well, then I’ll wait outside. Get what you need.” Aleiri says.

Aleiri grabs her rucksack, slings it over her shoulder and walks to the window. She pulls herself up onto the sill.

“Remember only what you need.” Aleiri says before falling into the bushes.

She rolls expertly into the patch just in front of the bushes. She stares up at the window and watches Brena run from one side of the room to the other. After an hour Aleiri, now sitting just stares at the window with her face twisted into a deep scowl. Brena finally emerges onto the window sill with a bag that’s larger than her.

“What we agreed on!” Aleiri yells.

Brena frowns, then pushes the bag behind her, and climbs down from the sill back into her room. Only a few moments pass before she returns to the window with a reasonably sized rucksack next to her. She pushes herself out of the sill and rolls out of the bushes like Aleiri taught her. She is wearing a dark brown overcoat with a hood, covering a servants outfit that Aleria made from what was once her green dress dyed and combined with scraps she could scavenge from the lightfeather tailor.

Aleiri starts walking into the forest beyond, Brena runs to catch up. The village of Jack's wend is a fair distance away. It took the army garrisoned in castle light feather three days to traverse along the black stone road to make it to the encampment outside of Jack's wend. Aleiri feared they would be found if they took the black stone road, so they would have to take alternate footpaths and hike through the forests. They had two sennights until the army started their march to Split River. Aleiri turns back to Brena and sees that she tripped on a root and is now pulling her new boot out of the hollow under said root. She cringed and realized that maybe she should have forced her to leave earlier.

Hours pass as they walk through the forest, they are travelling light with Brena only having a small satchel with her belongings and basic survival gear. Aleiri's rucksack is much heavier carrying bedrolls for the both of them along with dried foods and waterskins. Aleiri carries the weight gracefully walking over roots and bushes with ease. Brena does not match Aleiri's grace, stumbling over every other root, and catching her cloak in the most awkward of places.

Once the sun touches the horizon, and the sky starts to purple Aleiri holds her arm out to stop.

"We should make camp." Aleiri says.

Brena nods and drops her small satchel onto the ground like it was filled with rocks. She visibly stands straighter and breathes when the satchel is on the ground.

"I'll go out to get firewood, stay here." Aleiri orders.



Brena nods, and plops down next to a large tree and lays back. Aleiri walks into the forest, and looks back to see if she is far enough away from Brena. Brena, not in sight, reaches under her dress, and pulls out a short sword. The sword is engraved with a burning tower that spans the length of the blade, with the fire reaching to the tip. She gets into a stance and starts swinging it experimentally at a bush. She fells the bush, and smiles.

“What are you doing?” Brena says.

Aleiri whirls around to face Brena, hiding the sword behind her back.

“Nothing.” Aleiri says.

“I saw you, don’t treat me like I’m stupid.” Brena says.

*‘Well it's not like I can treat you like you're smart.’* Aleiri stifles a chuckle.

“I found this while cleaning Elayn’s room after she fled.” Aleiri says.

Brena cringes at the mention of Ealyn’s name.

“Well, she must have stolen it, because that’s my father’s sword.” Brena says.

“Awfully small for a man.” Aleiri says.

“It’s ornamental.” Brena says.

“Okay, ” Aleiri scoffs.

Brena walks until she is barely a hands length away from Aleiri.

“Give it to me.” Brena says.

“No.” Aleir says.

“It’s mine, give it.” Brena says.

“Well, take it then.” Aleiri says, then runs into the forest.

Brena gives chase, but does not stand a chance. Aleiri flees into the forest, the dimming light giving her complete cover in the bushes. She hides for a moment, then when she sees no sign of Brena she stands and laughs to herself. She looks on the ground for dry twigs then carries them in a bundle back to the campsite.

When she arrives at the campsite there is only the dimmest of light left. She frowns as Brena is nowhere to be seen. Then when she walks into the center of the sight, she is taken to the ground. Brena now straddling her chest with a ravenous grin pulls the sword from her hand. She holds the sword aloft reflecting the little daylight that is left.

“I win, the blade is mine.” Brena says.

“No fair, you cheated.” Aleiri responds.

Brena frowns.

“Well, how about a game then.” Brena says.

“What sort of game?” Aleiri asks.

“We have a duel to see who is the better fighter.” Brena says.

“Fine, but let me set up the fire first.” Aleiri harrumphed.

Brena nods and rolls of Aleiri. She gets up to set up the fire. Brena, now sitting, watches Aleiri make the fire with her chin balanced on the pommel of the sword. Once the fire is crackling and casting undulating light across the small clearing Aleiri stands.

“Well, I challenge you sir Brena to a duel.” Aleiri says.

“Can I be lady Brena?” Brena asks.

“I have never heard of a lady fighting in a duel.” Aleiri says.

“Well, I want to be a lady.” Brena says.

“Fine.” Aleiri scoffs.

“Well, I challenge you, Lady Brena to a duel.” Aleiri states.

“I accept sir Aleiri.” Brena says.

Aleiri smiles, then reaches down and picks up a stick, Brena does the same. They both get into a fighting stance. Aleiri’s is loose and unformed, Brena stands stark still with her feet planted in the ground. Aleiri starts circling Brena, Brena only turns her head to face her. Once Aleiri thinks she finds a weakness she runs in with a thrust. Brena deflects the stick with ease and pokes Aleiri in the stomach.

“Ow, you pricked me cunt.” Aleiri says.

Aleiri stands up to Brena looking down at her stick.

“Did you see that!” Brena gasps.

Aleiri nods.

“Where did you learn to do that?” Aleiri asks.

“I watched Al- I mean a soldier in the training yard every chance I got, and when I could I would do his drills with him.” Brena says.

“Ah I see.” Aleiri smirks.

Brena flushes, then she regains her composure.

“Well, I proved myself I am the one to hold the blade.” Brena says.

“Fine.” Aleiri says.

Aleiri undoes her belt and sheathes the sword in it.

“Get on your knees.” Aleiri says.

Brena gets on her knees and looks at the ground.

“Lady Brena of White Fall, I Sir Aleiri hereby knight you into the order of the...”

Aleiri pauses.

Brena looks up.

“The order of the green dress.” Aleiri says.

Brena scowls, and Aleiri laughs. Aleiri raises the sheathed sword above Brena’s head and taps her left and right shoulder.

“Now repeat after me, With this knighthood I swear to uphold my virtue, to protect the innocent, to defend my sworn brothers with my life, to defend the innocent and purge the corrupt. On this I stake my place in the arms of Broun.” Aleiri states.

“With this knighthood I swear to uphold my virtue, to protect the innocent, to defend my sworn brothers with my life, to defend the innocent and purge the corrupt. On this I stake my place in the arms of Broun.” Brena swears.

Aleiri hands Brena the sword, and they both start laughing. They laugh uproariously on the ground and roll into each other's arms. As their laughter slowly quiets, their fatigue catches up with them, and they fall asleep in each other's arms.