

Chapter 12

Ealyn

It is dark for a time. It is totally empty, quiet, peaceful. The darkness does not have a temperature, but for lack of a temperature one could call it cold. Cold is in fact a lack of temperature. If I told you to imagine a barren expanse you would imagine a frozen tundra, or at least an average of you would. The void is then wiped away as Ealyn opens her eyes. She blinks against the harsh white light.

Her eyes gaze upon a cobblestone room. Vines grow in the cracks under a small hollow in the rocks that at one point might have been a window. Light pours through the many gaps in the stone unfilled by moss or vine. The floor is made of a similar stone, but has retained its cohesion. There is a small canvas curtain on the other side of the room.

Ealyn looks down, she is laying on a metal cot with a clear tube going from her arm to a leather bladder hanging from a wooden rack above her. Her eyes go wide and she pulls the tube from her arm. She winces as the tube leaves a trickle of blood behind it.

She looks down at her legs. They are wrapped in layers and layers of cloth bandages stained with blood. She pulls herself to the side, then falls out of the metal cot onto the stone floor. She looks down at her legs. Her right leg moves a little up but no more. The other matches the same. Panic spreads across her face as her legs refuse her commands. She drags herself across the floor to a small wooden cabinet tucked under the cart. She

pulls open one of the drawers revealing a set of sharp metal tools. She pulls one out; It resembles a very small knife with the sharpest point at the end, but ending very quickly into a long hilt longer than thrice the blade.

She tucks the knife between her teeth and drags herself across the floor to the curtain. When she makes it halfway to the curtain footsteps echo off the stone floors outside the room. Ealyn freezes then pulls herself back to the cot, hiding under it on the other side of the door. From beneath the cot Ealyn can only see black leather boots. She boots stop at the entrance, she slowly walk into the room. Ealyn pulls the knife from her mouth into her right hand. The boots start walking closer, then come to her side of the cot.

Ealyn leaps out, then when she sees the person's face she drops the knife. Gerard stands above her holding a tray of food and a glass of water. Ealyn grabs his knees and starts to cry. She tries to pick herself back onto the cot, but just falls onto the floor.

"The sorcerer says that give it a week or two and you will be able to walk." Gerard says.

Ealyn smiles, then frowns.

"Why are we trusting the words of a sorcerer?" Ealyn asks.

“He saved our lives.” Gerard says.

“He is a sorcerer, how can you be truly certain we are not to be used for some spell of ritual?” Ealyn asks.

“I can’t, but that means that we get to live a little longer than if he had not saved us.” Gerard says.

“Why are you so amicable with this sorcerer?” Ealyn asks.

“We have got to know each other.” Gerard says.

Ealyn’s eyes go wide.

“How long have I been indisposed?” Ealyn asks.

“Three weeks.” Gerard says.

“Three weeks!” Ealyn yells.

Ealyn starts to shuffle out of the cot, Gerard grabs her by the waist.

“Stop, he said if you exert yourself to much you may damage the tissue further and increase recovery time.” Gerard says.

“My sister is in his clutches Gerard!” Ealyn yells.

“We will get to her when you are recovered. Do you expect me to carry you to castle Talltree?” Gerard says.

“I would if it got me to the castle any sooner.” Ealyn says.

“She is going to be fine; it was announced they are to be married. He won’t do anything until she is married.” Gerard says.

Ealyn freezes and the color drains from her face.

“She is going to marry him.” Ealyn says.

Gerard’s face softens, then he nods.

“Yes, it seems so.” Gerard says.

“She was promised to the white order.” Ealyn says.

“He found a way around it. Citing precedent from an age ago.” Gerard says.

“My grasping father had no problem selling off another girl no doubt.” Ealyn says.

“These are worries for the future Ealyn. You need to rest.” Gerard says.

“How can I rest, when after I close my eyes I will only be able to see the new and imaginative ways Alyk has devised to torture my only true family.” Ealyn says.

“I have a trick.” Gerard says.

“What?” Ealyn asks.

“You know I used to serve in a mercenary company, right?” Gerard asks.

“Yes.” Ealyn says.

“Do you know why I joined a mercenary company?” Gerard asks.

“It never occurred to me as the why.” Ealyn says.

“Well, I grew up with two brothers. One older and one younger. My older brother was something of a genius when it came to cruelty. He would often make a sport of it, and he had a good enough head on his shoulders to find a way out of consequences. I often took his beatings even though he was a milk sop so my feeble brother would not take any beatings. That was until my younger brother died of illness. The day after he would no stop calling him a weak fool that deserved death as to not pollute our line with his blood. I had enough and I punched him across the jaw so hard it caused him to lose six of his back teeth. He ran to our father and my father disinherited me and sent me to the streets.

I lived doing odd jobs for a while, until I joined the singing blade mercenary company. I did horrible things then, things that will pay me another visit tonight most likely, but I always slept like a baby.” Gerard says.

“How?” Ealyn asks.

“I would lay with my eyes and come up with the most interesting and contrived way that I could take my revenge on my brother, by the time I made any headway my mind was so distracted from sleep or other dark thoughts, that sleep would often come to me by surprise.” Gerard says.

“So what should I do?” Ealyn asks.

“It is clear to me that whatever my brother did to you pales in comparison to whatever prince Alyk did to you. So tonight, instead of imagining what is happening to your sister. Imagine what piece you are going to take off Alyk first, and sleep will find you eventually.” Gerard says.

“Do I have to settle for a single piece?” Ealyn asks.

Gerard laughs.

“No of course not.” Gerard says.

Ealyn smiles.

“Well, I should leave you to rest.” Gerard says.

Ealyn nods, then Gerard leaves the room. She stares out the hollow. The yellow sun is colored with and red Ealyn starts crying. The tears continue as until they exhaust her into sleep. With one murmur of Rycard she falls asleep.

At first the darkness is cold and empty, then Alyk’s dark hungry eyes fill the sky overhead. A breathy laugh echoes across the empty fields. Ealyn looks forward and a small bed is summoned with a version of Alyk strapped to it. Ealyn snaps her fingers and the bed catches alight. Slowly the laugh dies, as it turns into a panicked scream. Alyk writhes as the flames melt the fat in his flesh. Ealyn smiles looking at the display, then Alyk and the fire disappear replaced by the glowing eyes of Salum staring down at her. Ealyn shoots awake startling someone next to her bed.

Bryden's metal face ornaments bounce the glow of the midday sun into interesting swirling light streaks across the room. He steps back a little, then composes himself.

"You should not startle anyone holding your life in their hands." Bryden says.

"I'm sorry." Ealyn says.

Rycard snorts then stands up, letting Ealyn's head hit the cot. Ealyn grumbles, then sits up on her cot. Bryden looks down at her with a scornful gaze.

"You still owe me an explanation of your enigmatic control over that beast." Bryden says.

Ealyn opens her mouth, then her eyes go wide.

"Where is my pack!" Ealyn yells.

Ealyn's eyes dart across the room. Ealyn eyes start darting across the room.

"If you are looking for your medication, I infused it into your water supply. As long as you don't rip out your tube, you will be fine." Bryden says.

Ealyn's panicked gaze settles into a quizical one.

"How did you know?" Ealyn says.

"While you were out I took the liberty of looking at your internal physiology to see if there were any internal damages, but all I could see was the buildup of blood in the lungs." Bryden says.

“Blood in the lungs?” Ealyn asks.

“Yes it seems that you were born with a rare genetic condition that left with a less developed heart, which has led to a slow travel of blood, causing build up and leakage in the lungs.” Bryden says.

Ealyn’s face darkens.

“I figure by the way you speak there is no cure.” Ealyn says.

“I am afraid not, it is a malady of birth, from what I have read, and the rare cases that I have spotted it is often caused by undue exposure to certain toxins in the parent.” Bryden says.

“Could one of those toxins be related to tonics of strength.” Ealyn asks while gritting her teeth.

“Perhaps, there is no common concoction for tonics of that nature, but assuredly any tonic taken for a long period of time could cause such a malady.” Bryden says.

Ealyn screams and starts crying. Bryden steps back and out of the room. When Bryden is gone Ealyn starts scratching at her skin, when blood is drawn Bryden comes into the room with Gerard. Gerard runs to her and pins her to the table. Bryden grabs a syringe and sticks it into her bladder. Ealyn stops thrashing and starts to calm down.

“What’s wrong?” Gerard asks.

“My father did this to me.” Ealyn says.

“Everything.” Ealyn says.

“What do you mean?” Gerard asks.

“He was an alchemist who sought fame and fortune so he brewed strength tonics to make him a great warrior. With the power of these he was able to fell a beast and gain a knighthood. Those tonics made him into the man he was and they ruined me.” Ealyn says.

“Oh Broun.” Gerard says.

“The closest I had to friends were the ones my mother forced to sit with me while I coughed in my bed barely alive. On many occasions my mother lamented that my malady did not simply kill me and get it over with. My sister even grew bored of sitting at my bedside all day. It was I who invented the tonic that made me able to get out of bed. I saved my own life, but by that point I was so weak that I could not do anything like anyone else. I was still relegated to watching my sister live out a childhood that was robbed from me. Robbed from me by my father!” Ealyn says.

Ealyn starts coughing.

“You can’t rattle yourself anymore Ealyn. You are still recovering from your more recent malady. If you overexert yourself, you will reopen those wounds and add weeks to your recovery.” Bryden says.

Ealyn nods, then lays back down on the cot. Bryden checks the bladder hanging above, then checks the tube. He leaves the room.

“When I was young I wanted to be a knight like my father.” Ealyn says.

“It’s not all it’s cracked up to be.” Gerard says.

“Maybe, but I wanted to be strong like my father. Learning of the tonic, then learning of this. I realize he was weak, and his weakness was passed to me.” Ealyn says.

“You are not weak.” Gerard says.

Tears fill Ealyn’s eyes.

“I hope your right.” Ealyn says.

Gerard leans down and wraps Ealyn in gentle hug. Ealyn cries as the warmth of his embrace spreads across her body.

“You are stronger than I could ever be.” Gerard whispers.

Ealyn slowly falls asleep in Gerard’s arms. When she has passed out he walks out of the room in the hallway. As soon as he is outside he slumps against the wall. He slides down the wall until his head is at a height with his knees. He stands back up and reaches to his side. He draws the sword and reveals its full length. He holds it out in front of him, studying the blade from top to bottom, then he sets the blade at Ealyn’s side, then leaves the room.