

Chapter 18

Ealyn shivers as Alyks walks towards her. He stops inches from her face, and he crouches to be eye level with her. He looks down at her legs and frowns.

“What happened?” Alyks asks.

“I slipped.” Ealyn says.

Alyks grabs Ealyn’s cheeks and points and forces her to stare at him.

“It has been too long apart for you, but I do not play those games.” Alyks says.

He lets Ealyn’s face go, tears leak from the corners of Ealyn’s eyes.

“For a time I was wearing a leg brace, the leg brace snapped and it buried itself under my flesh. The pieces were removed, and I was bandaged.” Ealyn says.

“So no one hurt you.” Alyks says.

Ealyn mustered the last of her resolve.

“No one.” Ealyn says.

“It will heal in a time then.” Alyks says.

“Yes.” Ealyn lies.

“Well, we should get you in a warm bed, I will be visiting your apartment later. Do your best to be presentable.” Alyks says.

“Of course.” Ealyn responds.

“Salum!” Alyks yells.

Salum walks back into the room without his white armor, instead wearing the traditional feathered silver armor of the light feather knights.

“Get her to her apartment.” Alyks says.

Salum walks towards Ealyn and she starts coughing. She continues coughing and Salum starts to walk faster panic building in his eyes. Ealyn starts heaving and the coughs start to build up something in the back of her throat. As Salum reaches her side the main fit of coughing stops, but the buildup still sits in the back of her throat. She gives one last cough to dislodge it. Out of her mouth rolls a wet glob of blood. Salum sweeps her up in a hold and starts walking out of the room.

In the moment as Alyks runs to her side something pricks the back of her mind. Alyks needs her, he needs her alive, he needs her well, so that he can make it not so. She has the power. The blood has dark thick pieces in it. The blood is clotted, she realizes she has not much time left. But the ceiling of the hall is reflected in the pool of blood. Something truly dazzling, she missed it, but right above the throne a scene is carved depicting a man standing on the top of an askr tree peering out at the clouds around. She wonders if this might be a glimpse of what comes after death. Never have the arms of Broun been depicted with such beauty. Maybe if she dies here the gods of this place will forget her religion and take her to where the carving depicts.

“Stop!” Alyks says.

His face has gone from composed and smug to panicked.

“What’s wrong with her!” Alyks yells.

“She has some malady of birth, once we get to an alchemist we can get the tonic.”

Salum says.

For a brief moment Alyks is relieved. Ealyn smiles blood staining her teeth red.

“I won.” Ealyn croaks.

“What.” Alyks asks.

Alyks walks to her side.

Ealyn spits blood in his face and croaks in something approximating a laugh.

“What does she mean?” Alyks asks Salum.

“She is delirious sir.” Salum says shakily.

“I am the only one who can make the medication Alyks. I will die you can’t stop me.” Ealyn says.

Alyks face controls from concern to rage, then back to concern. Tears form in his eyes and he bends over clasping his hands around his head and lets out a blood curdling scream.

“You can’t leave me!” Alyks screams.

Alyks runs to her side and grabs her face. He digs his fingers so deep that his nails start to draw blood, then he bits her cheek enough to grab a small piece. Alyks backs away pail staring at the small piece he left with. He drops it to the floor and starts shaking, then he regains his composure and stares down Ealyn.

“You will make the tonic, or I will kill your sister.” Alyks lies.

Ealyn freezes. Alyks pulls a twisted smile.

“Make the tonic or everyday I will cut one piece off of her and send it to you. I will do this until there are no pieces left, so will you make the tonic?” Alyks says.

“Yes” Ealyn croaks.

Alyks smiles. Ealyn sees the face of Brena in her mind’s eye. Maybe she can endure a life of torture if she knows Brena is safe. While she is around Alyks will not torture her. Maybe Broun be good Alyks will die before her, and she will be free along with Brena. She can endure this hell on earth if it means Brena will be safe. Salum carries her up the carved wood stairs into a stately apartment.

There is a luxurious red carpet covering almost the entire floor, a silver and oak desk in one corner, a bed frame extruded from the floor making a seamless bed from with a canopy. There is a single large window leading to a balcony. Salum lays Ealyn on the bed, from the bed she has a view of the sky and forest beyond the castle walls. She watches the sun move across the sky, time turning into a malleable paste as it passes by both quick and slow, then the rhythm is broken right before sunset when Salum walks in with a fully equipped Alchemy set. He lays it on the floor and ducks back out of the room. He returns shortly with a small table in toe. He sets the kit on the table and carries it across the floor and lays it beside the bed.

“I know Broun will send you the black wizard, and I hope he fucks you bloody in the dark place.” Ealyn says.

“I’m sorry,” Salum says.

“Don’t say sorry to me, the only apology I want are your guts in my hands. I know why Gerard killed you, you are a fucking bastard piece of filth that deserves nothing more pleasureable than castration.” Ealyn says.

“I don’t remember Gerard killing me.” Salum says.

“You don’t remember?” Ealyn asks.

“I actually don’t remember much.” Salum says.

“What?” Ealyn says.

“My first memory is waking up staring at my lord father Alyks. He said that I was his son, and that I should do what he bid. He said that in a past life I was a man named Salum, he said that I was to take that name, and that I should pretend to be this man to bring you home. He said you were his true love, and that you abandoned him.” Salum says.

“Oh Broun.” Ealyn says.

“I did not understand when he gripped you like that. I know little, but that didn’t seem like love to me.” Salum says.

Tears start leaking from Salum’s eyes.

“I am so sorry, I didn’t know he would do that.” Salum says.

Salum crumples to his knees and starts crying.

“What have I done.” Salum cries.

Ealyn studies Salum, everything makes sense now. This is Salum no longer. Alyks has reformed him into man anew.

“Save me.” Ealyn pleads.

“I can’t, I can barely hold a sword, father’s guard would carve me up quicker than a chicken.” Salum says.

“Do you know where princess Brena is?” Ealyn asks.

“Yes.” Salum says.

“She is probably under minimal inner guard. Grab her and take her somewhere far away. Keep her from Alyks, or he will do what he says. He will cut her up to small pieces and it will be your fault.” Ealyn says.

“I can’t father would kill me.” Salum whines.

“You bloody craven! Leave me.” Ealyn says.

Salum opens his mouth.

“Leave!” Ealyn screams.

Salum darts out of the room crying. Ealyn looks behind him. There is a spark of compassion that Ealyn quickly suffocates before it can catch alight the kindling of guilt. Someone walks in, she stares at Ealyn.

“You are sick for taking the face of my sister.” Brena says.

“I am not an imposter, please Brena.” Ealyn says.

Tears leak from the corners of her eyes.

“You will not sway me sorcerer, so please do not try.” Brena says.

“Please.” Ealyn says.

“No, speak one more word and I will tell my husband that you tried to seduce me.” Brena says.

Ealyn frowns defiantly then opens her mouth. The thought passes her mind. What if Brena is not supposed to come here. If Alyks new she came she would be moved probably behind bars and Brena would never be able to see her again, and if Alyks was going through one of his fits she would be put under heavy guard. So Ealyn closes her mouth and lays back in the bed, staring at Brena. Tears water from the corners of both of their eyes. Brena walks until she is at Ealyn’s side. The tears have turned from a trickle into a stream.

“You have done a remarkable job, it's a perfect replica.” Brena says.

“Do me one favor.” Brena says.

Ealyn nods.

“Say that you love me, and that you forgive me.” Brena says.

Ealyn cries.

“I love you, and I forgive you.” Ealyn says.

Brena crumples to the floor crying, for a second Ealyn watches, then she inches close. Brena recoils and gathers herself and walks out of the room. Ealyn cries when the door closes. Ealyn grasps desperately onto her pillow soaking it with her tears. The crying carries her to sleep.

Ealyn wakes with Alyks staring at her from the other side of the bed. She suppresses a scream, swallowing like an overly large slice of spoiled ham. He walks to the alchemy station, and looks down.

“No progress then.” Alyks says.

Alyks dead eyes pan to her, half of his face is still covered by the white mask. Ealyn can just barely see that flesh around the eye on the white side of the mask. It is red and pink swirled together with black accents. Alyks reaches into his red velvet dress pocket and pulls out a small embroidered cloth. Ealyn recognises the design, they are a signature of Brenas. Brena, Oh Broun. Alyks unfurls the white cloth casually letting the finger plop on top of the bed. Ealyn swallows another scream, this one more difficult than the last.

“Keep up the good work.” Alyks says.

He turns to Ealyn and tries to force a smirk, but he fails. His face goes dead pan again and he walks out of the room. Ealyn sees a figure standing peering out through the door. She waits for Alyks to clear the hall.

“Come in Salum.” Ealyn says.

Salum inches in. Before he makes it to the side of the bed Ealyn scratches at the bottom stump of the finger making the wound look more grizzly. Salum makes it to her and his eyes immediately move to the white embroidered cloth and the digit sitting on top of it. The color drains from his face, he turns to Ealyn.

“This is your fault.” Ealyn says.

Salum starts to tear up.

“Don’t cry like a little girl. Do your duty as a man. Or did Alyks cut your cock off. That would explain your turn to craven. Maybe you are more girl than man now.” Ealyn says.

“He didn't, I'm not craven.” Salum says.

“Prove it.” Ealyn says.

“He’s my father, I can't defy him.” Salum says.

“How many more pieces do you need to see?” Ealyn says.

“I don’t want to see any more pieces.” Salum says weakly.

Ealyn picks up the finger and presses it to his face.

“Look at it!” Ealyn screams.

Salum recoils stumbling backwards and landing on his bottom. Tears drip from his eyes.

“Please, just make the tonic. He will stop when you do.” Salum says.

“Yes, and when I come back to health, he will torture us both and make me watch.” Ealyn says.

“You don’t know that.” Salum whines.

Ealyn flicks the finger at him. Salum doubles back leaving it on the floor.

“Maybe I should rip off my own finger right now, something in solidarity with my sister.” Ealyn says.

“Don’t please.” Salum says.

Something dark settles in Ealyn’s mind. This is a not a man this is a child.

“Maybe I should rip my finger off and tell Alyks you did it.” Ealyn says casually.

Salum blanches.

“You wouldn’t.” Salum says.

“I have nothing to lose, you everything.” Ealyn says.

Salum starts crying.

“Please, don’t.” Salum grovels.

“Or maybe I should say that you rape me every night.” Ealyn says.

“Please, Please, Please.” Salum chokes out.

“Then do it!” Ealyn screams.

Salum sits crying on the floor in a heap. Ealyn looks at the alchemy set. She grabs one of the flasks and grabs it. She holds it in hand. In it she catches her reflection. At first she is in disbelief. She is not herself anymore. There is barely any skin hanging off her bones, her eyes are sunken and dark. Her skin is pallid and sickly. Her hair is patchy and going white in places. She thinks a corpse is staring at her in the reflection. A spirit sent to haunt her, a trick of some sort of pagan creature. Or maybe just maybe this is who she is. Who she has always been, maybe after what Alyks has done this is what she looks like on the inside, it has just been externalised. She cracks the glass in her hands. Blood leaks onto the fabric in a small pool. Ealyn opens her mouth. Salum’s eyes go wide and he rushes to her side.

“Aly..” Ealyn is cut off by Salum putting a hand on her mouth.

“I’ll do it.” Salum says.

Ealyn closes her mouth and Salum backs up collapsing onto the bed in front of her.

“Do it tonight, if I know Alyks he is going to have one of his raucous parties tonight. Today feels like the day for it. Seeing that expression on his face makes me doubly sure.” Ealyn says.

“How are you so sure?” Salum asks.

“When the darkness comes over him he always wants people around to distract him.” Ealyn says.

“Can you be certain?” Salum asks.

Ealyn slaps him.

“Stop being such a craven.” Ealyn says, then pauses.

“Tonight come by my room just before sunset, I will give you three tonics. The green one you will make Brena consume. The first yellow you will light and toss into a dry wooden place in the castle. The second yellow you will toss on the ground when you are far from the castle.” Ealyn says.

Salum nods.

“Now go before Alyks gets suspicious.” Ealyn says.

Salum darts out of the room. Ealyn smiles, letting a sliver of hope wash over her light sunlight. She breathes in then starts working at the alchemy station.