

Chapter 10

The dim light of the sunset allows the full moon to shine. For a time, they share the sky, but slowly the sun dips below the horizon. The deep orange light of the sunset slinks away as it is replaced by the silver light of the moon. The moonlight causes the trees to cast jagged black shadows on the ground below. The shadows knit together in a web of inky darkness. Ealyn continues walking as night falls, the light textured by shadows projects across her body, as the light from Rycard's eyes stands out from the suffocating darkness.

Ealyn steps foot onto the bank of the pond. Ripples from the waterfall cause the sky's reflection in the pond to undulate, creating new patterns of light. Ealyn watches the reflection move, then she swallows and walks behind the waterfall. As she approaches the entrance, someone reaches their hand out and stops her. She reaches her hand to her side, but grabs at nothing.

"Its me" Gerard says.

Ealyn turns to face him, he is blanketed in shadow.

"You shouldn't hide in shadows like that. I could have hurt you." Ealyn says.

Gerard chuckles.

"I'm plenty hurt already." Gerard says.

Gerard steps out of the shadows. His face is mottled with black and purple bruises, some of the bruises surround open wounds, leaking blood. Ealyn brings a hand to her mouth and gasps.

"On Broun." Ealyn says.

"Don't fret, it will be healed by tomorrow, besides I am very lucky." Gerard says.

"How?" Ealyn asks.

Gerard smiles revealing his perfectly white teeth.

"Still got them all, it's a small miracle." Gerard says.

"I shouldn't have let you do that." Ealyn says.

"It's nothing I have not been through before." Gerard says.

Gerard clasps a hand on her right shoulder.

“Let's get somewhere, where the forest will dampen our voices.” Gerard says.

Gerard leads Ealyn out from behind the waterfall, then he looks down at Rycard and frowns. He leads her to a small path leading to the outcropping above the waterfall. As they climb the side of the waterfall Ealyn slips on a rock. Gerard reaches out his hand, and catches Ealyn. He winces as he pulls her up. Ealyn looks at his pained expression and frowns. Once they are both at the top, they take cover in a small nook in the rock to the right of the outcropping. Ealyn looks at his bruised face.

“Why did you not yield quicker?” Ealyn asks.

“It couldn't have it play out differently then it has before.” Gerard says.

“Before?” Ealyn asks.

“This is the seventh time I think.” Gerard says.

“You have dueled him seven times?” Ealyn asks.

“Yes, and I would care that we not talk about it.” Gerard says.

Ealyn frowns then her face softens. She reaches a hand up to his cheek. He winces when she lightly touches one of the bruises.

“When we make it back to the cave. I can make you a salve to reduce the healing time.” Ealyn says.

“I'm fine.” Gerard says.

Ealyn scowls, Gerard looks down at Rycard.

“Has the plan changed?” Gerard asks.

“Yes, I have hired mercenaries to attack the Lightfeather army.” Ealyn says.

“You are lying.” Gerard says.

“Then I am in good company.” Ealyn retorts.

“This is not jest Ealyn, this is too dangerous a thing to be obscured by falsehood.” Gerard says.

Ealyn frowns.

“You are safer believing the lie, then knowing the truth.” Ealyn says.

“You can't determine that.” Gerard responds.

“Then a truth for a truth.” Ealyn says.

“What truth do you wish?” Gerard asks.

“What happened to your wife after she was found to be consorting with sorcerers?” Ealyn asks

“I know not what happened in the immediate, as I only figured out what she did after seeing her corpse burning on a pyre in the courtyard.” Gerard says.

Ealyn pales.

“He burned her in the courtyard?” Ealyn asks.

“No, he only slit her throat. It was the local bishop who set everything up. He liked attention, so he made a spectacle of the ordeal. My first duel with Salum was on that very night, in that courtyard.” Gerard says.

“What happened?” Ealyn says.

“I am no match for him. He disarmed me over and over for hours. I would just pick the sword back up, scream and run at him. When the sun rose I was listing on my feet. I had to use my sword to stay standing, then I collapsed. I lost due to being unfit to continue to duel. So, he won by default.” Gerard says.

“Is that how all the duels went?” Ealyn asks.

“Pretty much, for the next month I made it a habit to challenge him once a week. I would use the week to recuperate then I would challenge him again. I wished he was not so merciful.” Gerard says.

“Why?” Ealyn says.

“Maurika had my heart for safe keeping. So, when she died my chest was left empty.” Gerard says.

Tears well in the corners of Ealyn’s eyes.

“That is a feeling that I can share.” Ealyn says.

“How?” Gerard asks.

“When my father left my world ended. He was the pillar my life was built upon, so when he left everything crumbled into itself.” Ealyn says.

“You must have loved him dearly.” Gerard says.

“Maybe, I was so young, I don’t know if I ever chose to love him or not. I just knew that when he left everything would be worse forever.” Ealyn says.

A tear falls down Ealyn’s cheek. She wipes away quickly, then stands up straight.

“Well, now that I know what will happen to me, I will reveal the truth.” Ealyn says.

Gerard eyes go wide.

“No, please don’t say it.” Gerard pleads.

“I have enlisted the aid of a sorcerer.” Ealyn says.

“No, Ealyn, No, Please.” Gerard pleads.

Gerard grabs Ealyn’s hands.

“Please tell me this is a jest. Please dear Broun.” Gerard pleads.

Tears fall freely from Ealyn’s eyes.

“There is no jest, I was captured by a sorcerer and his apprentice and we came to an accord. He would spare my life and help me if I gave him the formula for the physic.” Ealyn says.

“Oh Broun.” Gerard says.

Gerard wraps Ealyn in a deep embrace and lets the tears wet his shoulder.

“I don’t want to die.” Ealyn cries.

“You won’t, I won’t let you.” Gerard says.

“He is going to kill me.” Ealyn cries.

“He won’t, I won’t let him.” Gerard says.

Gerard pulls Ealyn forward so he is looking into her eyes.

“No harm will come to you. Do you understand me.” Gerard says.

Ealyn nods.

“Good.” Gerard says.

He wipes away Ealyn’s tears, and something behind his eyes changes.

“Okay, now what we are going to do is this. I am going to wake you up before the break of dawn. We are going to leave the cave. The inquisitor only sleeps for a couple hours a night, if we leave before he wakes up I will make sure he can’t track us.” Gerard says.

“We can’t leave Salum.” Ealyn says.

“Yes we can! It’s not about me and him anymore Ealyn! It’s about getting you out safe!” Gerard yells.

Ealyn nods.

“Okay, so we are going to go back down there then head straight to sleep. I know when he is going to sleep so I’ll pretend to sleep then get you up when he dozes off understand.” Gerard says.

Ealyn nods.

“Good, lets go.” Gerard says.

Gerard leads her back down the rock outcropping. They step into the cave. Gerard lays down at the back of the cave keeping himself covered in shadow. Ealyn sleeps next to the dead fire. Salum pokes and prods at the coals, his eyes staging into the middle distance. Gerard keeps his eyes peeled open staring at Salum. When the moon is at its apex Salum drops his prodding stick and lays down. Gerard reaches to his side and as quietly as possible draws the white sword. He slinks across the floor until he is next to Salum’s sleeping form. He raises the sword and brings it down. In one quick slice Salum’s head is removed from his body.