

Chapter 1

Alyks

I watch her run from me. I see her and Salum's horse disappear into the forest on the outskirts of the castle grounds. *I hate her, I hate him, I hate them all. I wish they would supplicate before me and open their guts to me.* I should not have let her leave, I can control myself when she's around. I should have noticed something. Maybe if I wasn't so self absorbed I could have seen past my nose. Oh god I can see in the reflection of the glass. What a ghastly thing, what cruel god would bestow a perfect jaw and such a disgusting ornament to sit above it. *I should cut it off, maybe I should cut all the servants off. Then no one would have a nose to judge me with.*

I need to find her. What if I lost control while she was gone, and I was driven to total madness before I could control myself again. What if I hurt Brena. I can't think like that. Melancholy is the enemy. A guard bursts through the door.

"Prince?" The guard asks dumbly.

"She wouldn't be in her quarters if she escaped would she!" I yell.

The guard turns pale. I can't let my anger control me, take a breath. The candelabra in the corner is silver, the window is made of fine glass that elegantly captures strings of lights in its curves. Take another breath.

"Sorry, that was rude of me. My wife has left me totally absent of my composure."
I say.

“There is no need to apologize, prince. I should be whipped for my insolence.”

The guard say.

That might help. Maybe just enough to sate my appetite, maybe I should make him beg, maybe I should make him cry to Broun. Maybe I should make him piss himself in fear everytime he sees my face.

“You may go.” I say.

The guard bows then runs out of the room. That coward, he should not simper so. *If only he took out his dagger I could have cut his achilles tendon. Watching him stumble on his foot bleeding out would have been a treat.*

I feel the headache now that often comes with these paroxysms of wrath. There is a pain behind the eyes that until the need is sated grows backwards into the head. The pain is sharp and concentrated like a spike. This headache was promising to be one to compete with the worst of them. Maybe it is just that it has been a moon since I last had one. I have grown complacent in routine, and now the pain feels magnitudes worse as it is unaccustomed. I grab my sword and run out of the room.

Wandering the castle at night is often something I relish. The cold calm of the moonlit corridors keep things in focus. Often the day is so full of noise both visual and auditory that one cannot appreciate the beauty of the simple things. Only the perfect white light of the moon and the calm winds of night allow the world to display itself in its true perfection. This night was not like that.

Guards scrambled from the barracks forming small search parties darting from one part of the castle to the other. The guards give me a wide berth. I see the look on

their faces when they look at me. Yet again I curse at my younger self. The only person in this castle that doesn't look at me like that is Brena. Oh brena. I sheathe my sword and run to the west wing of the castle. I barrel through her doors.

"Brena!" I yell.

Brena pulls back her covers revealing her perfect face. What person could believe Broun was not real when proof of his genius exists so plainly in her delicate features.

"Have you seen Ealyn?" I ask.

"I have my prince." She responds.

I could eat her right now. Consume every morsel greedily. Then we would be together forever.

"Did she hint at where she was going?" I ask.

A crestfallen expression mars her beautiful face.

"No, all she did was spout lies about you." She says.

No please no.

"What did she say?" I ask.

"She only said you were not who you seemed." Brena says.

I am going to rip that girl's vocal cords out if I catch her.

"The announcement was to happen tomorrow, but she is actually my intended. I love her more than a bee loves honey or the moon loves the stars, but it seems she has run off with a servant." I say.

“What an indecent thing to do. I hope she dies poxy in the slums with him at her side.” She says.

I have to suppress a broad grin.

“I must do my duty, she is to be my wife.” I say.

Brena scowls, then smooths her frown into something colder.

“Of course.” She says.

“Well, I must go meet with the guards, maybe they have found a trace of her.” I say.

“I am so unsettled, maybe you could stay with me until sleep finds me.” She says.

Oh Broun, why do you tempt me so? If only I would not corrupt her. If only I could truly be worthy of her. If only I could truly be the person she sees me as. I can't let her gaze turn sour like the others. She is promised to the white order. She will marry no other. So it would not be indecent to admire her from afar, to make sure she has everything she could ever want.

“I am sorry Brena, but I must leave.” I say.

I pull myself out of the room with great effort. I dare not look upon her face, for if I did I would be ensorcelled and would never leave that room again. On the other side of the door I breathe in deeply hoping to get some of her scent that has seeped through into the soft wood.

“My prince.” Gerard says behind me.

I scramble back into place and stare Gerard down.

“Report.” I say.

“The princess has fled into the woods, we cannot make heads or tails of the dense woods at night. I suggest sending parties of no more than ten soldiers at a time.” Gerard says.

“Why ten soldiers?” I ask.

“Those woods are not safe, my prince. There are reports of valdyr making a home of the place.” Gerard says.

“Anything else?” I ask.

“The horse master gave them a thoroughbred.” Gerard responds.

I clenched my fists around my sword.

“Where is her now?” I ask.

“He is in the dungeons.” Gerard says.

“Take me to him.” I order.

Gerard nods, then starts leading me through the labyrinthian castle hallways. The deeper we go the smoother the stone becomes. Before the fall of the white tower the white order built this castle as an outpost in the mountains. I was never the one for history, but something about the architecture of the old parts of the castle fascinates me. The way the stone is still smooth and shiny like it was formed of glass.

As we get closer to the dungeons the slow whines and hollow cries of the hopeless wretches start echoing off the smooth walls. *The louder they get the more excited I become.* I take a breath for control. Without Ealyn I need to be careful. I can’t black out

again, not like last time. I am pulled out of my thoughts when we stop in front of a guarded cell. There is little light except for a torch at the end of the hallway casting harsh shadows through the cell bars. Occasionally a bar of light illuminates the man's face. It's bloodied and bruised.

“Who was his torturer?” I ask.

The man on my left stands forward confidently. He is young with a dark farmer's tan, his hair is black as pitch, and is cut short at his shoulders. The older soldier on the other side shakes his head.

“Me, my prince.” He says.

I walk in front of him, he is at a height with me. I look into his eyes then punch him in the stomach. The young man collapses at my feet. I pull a knife from my belt.

“Do that again without consulting me and I’ll castrate you, then leave you as a plaything for the beasts.” I whisper in his ear.

My knife hovers over his pelvis. *One quick thrust and I can make good on my promise.* I can’t lose control now, there is too much at stake. The man starts crying as I pull away and stand up.

“Open the cell.” I order.

The older man fumbles with a set of keys on his belt, then reaches up a large iron key and unlatches the cell door. Walking inside the cell I grumble at the lack of light. Many simple minded people assume that a dingy dark cell is exactly the place to drain someone’s spirit. This is not the case. Torture and breaking are an art, they require well

lit rooms with plenty of light. If I can't see what I am doing then there is no point of doing it at all. I think that torturing and surgery are the same practice. A surgeon would not muddle around in the dark fumbling to remove an organ. So a torturer should not sacrifice precision for ambiance.

"Get me a torch." I order the younger man.

The younger man scrambles up from the floor and runs to the hallway. He returns with a torch in hand, his knees shaking. I reach my hand out and he hesitantly hands me the torch. I walk to the mans side, holding the torch aloft. His bruises are not deep, there are no broken bones, and from what I can tell from the scratches and bruises there is no sign of internal bleeding. I can work with this. I gently tap him on the side of the face. His eyes flutter open, then flinch at the sight of the torch. He squints his eyes shut as he turns to face me. The color drains from his face when we meet eyes.

"Hello, I don't know your name, nor will I need to learn it. You know my name, and you know what I want so tell me." I say.

"I was paid to get a horse for someone that's it. There weren't nothing planned with me I swear." I pleads.

"Okay, thank you." I say.

I walk to the bench in the corner and start laying out what I have. In the kit I have a paring knife, a chef's knife, a dagger, a peeler, a needle, and a bottle of mineral acid. This is not the most complete kit. Although I have made do with less.

"Gerard." I say.

Gerard walks to my side, his face going green at the sight of my tools.

“Organize a search party, your best men, and take your inquisitor with you.” I order.

Gerard grimaces at the order, but he nods nonetheless then walks out of the room. I pick up the paring knife, then pocket the needle and acidic solution. I walk to the men holding the paring knife. Often the knife is the least painful of my instruments, but I always keep it on display as people are usually ignorant to the more obscure instruments. Often people forget that most of torture is in the mind. Pain is something that can be mastered or grown accustomed to, fear is something no one can master no matter what inquisitors and white priests profess. They just learn to fear Bround more than earthly horrors. The source of the fear is different, but the fear is all the same.

“Anyone want to watch?” I yell into the hallway.

There is no response. I turn back to face the shaking man.

“So, first I am going to start with the feet. There is more hardened skin on the feet so the pain will be less. It will set a good baseline. If I don’t get any answers I will move up the leg onto the stomach. If you continue to fail me, then I will move to the shoulder finishing at the hands. If you still refuse to cooperate then I will move to the face. If you give me what I want before I get to the face. I promise any disfigurement will not be noticeable and you can move on with your life. After I get to the face I make no such promise.” I say.

The man starts pissing.

“P.P.Please.” The man says.

“Let's get started.” I say.

For the time being this will be enough to tide me over.