

*** gonna try something new this chapter ***

Chapter 14

Ealyn and Bryden stand over a small chemistry set like two distressed parents staring at a recently born child. They tend nervously to the silvery thing in a similar manner. Occasionally Bryden ducks out leaving the thing exposed. It is a small metal beaker over a small fire with a silvery green solution frothing within it. Occasionally Ealyn grabs a glass stirrer and disturbs the solution. Bryden comes back from these occasional escapes and returns with various vials filled with multicolored liquids and dusts.

Ealyn's knees buckle, and her knees start to shake. Bryden turns his bloodshot eyes to her legs.

“Only a few moments now.” Bryden says.

Ealyn nods and continues staring at the liquid. The frothing starts to subside as Bryden turns down the heat with a metallic nob at the base of the alchemy station. Bryden pulls out the liquid, Ealyn eyes it as he grabs the beaker and brings it to the other side of the room. He pours the liquid into a small metal canister. He loads the canister into a large wood and metal stick propped against the wall. He grabs the weapon and slings it over his shoulder. Ealyn walks off lagging ever so slightly behind him.

They prowl through the stone corridors as the leave the scattered light pouring through the cracks in the stone for the darkness of the castle depths. Ealyn looks around

as the light disappears. She thinks about the castle itself. Something of a interesting construction at the least. There are bits of the castle that seem contemporary. Ealyn would not consider herself much of an architect, but she has read plenty on the advancement of building technology since the fall of the white tower, but before her train of thought could continue it is halted by a sharp pain in her leg.

“Ealyn?” Bryden asks.

“I am just tired, keep on ahead of me.” Ealyn says.

She looks down at her legs. Two more weeks have passed, she has progressed to walking with Bryden’s custom leg supports, but the supports dig into her flesh and pinch it in the most awful of places. She winces again as a lancing pain passes up her leg into her hip. The first time she got one of these pains she screamed with agony, Bryden came into her room and said that due to her constant illness her muscle has healed incorrectly pinching around the bone, so occasionally there is a slip and the bone pinches a nerve. She does not scream with the pain now, she only silently winces.

She leans against the wall for a couple more minutes, perspiring at the forehead. Droplets of sweat plop against the stone floor. Although the light is spares her reflection is still plain in the puddle. She is haggard with deep set eyes with deep dark rings in the bags under them. Her hair is more a bush than the silken stream she is accustomed to. She never put much stock into her appearance, that was her sisters bid. Yet now that the features that betrayed her position are not so obvious she finds herself longing for them. Less for how they made her feel, or how others would fawn over her, but as signifiers of the times before she had to be so creased with worry and stress.

But then she looks again, and she smiles. These lines and bags may betray a less dignified, maybe even less beautiful face, but certainly a more honest one. She is no

longer encumbered by her beauty. She pushes herself off the wall and continues walking down the hallway. With every step she winces in pain, but she steps forwards nonetheless.

She finally catches up with Bryden who is standing in front of a barred metal door. He is lit only by a single mysteriously glowing orb above the door. He sees Ealyn, then presses into the door. The room is gray and empty with only one glowing orb illuminating the entire room. On each side of the room are metal pens with beasts chained inside. Each groaning in pain in different pitches and decibels.

Bryden walks to one of the cells containing a long snake like beast with the signature leathery pink skin and tufts of shaggy fur. Its coiled in the center covered in healed burns and scarred flesh. As Bryden steps forward to lift his weapon the snake lifts its head. Its snakelike face is covered in oozing burn scars, but its eyes still glow a pale yellow. They are remarkably expressive, a common characteristic among all beasts, but something is off in its watery eyes. Ealyn looks closer, it is not obvious in the dim light, but there is a thin trail of water pouring down its cheeks. Ealyn holds in a gasp.

Bryden pulls the trigger on his weapon the small cannister lets loose, and Ealyn forgets the thoughts of horror that once plagued her mind. The canister in air releases a tiny needle that pricks into the beast. Ealyn looks on with pleading eyes, Bryden does his best to stay stoic, but even if less plain his eyes still betray a hint of pleading. The snake shoots back to the other end of the cell, then lets out a wail and starts writhing. The snake stops writhing then falls limp onto the cell floor.

Ealyn curses internally then collapses onto the floor. Tears threaten to escape, but Ealyn chokes them back. Bryden reaches his hand to her shoulder, then turns back to the cage, and steps back mouth agape. Ealyn looks back at the cage. The animal is no

longer limp. It starts to stiffen, then the scars and burns starts to flake off, revealing pink healthy skin. The leathery skin turns supple, and the tufts of fur are replaced by streaks of silken hair.

The beast pops its head up then stares at the two of them. The rivulets of water on its cheeks have completely dried. There is no smile on its thin lips, but those deep expressive eyes show the deep happiness buried beneath. Ealyn yelps with joy then hugs Bryden.

“We did it!” She yelps.

“You know what this means!” Bryden yells.

“I can have me legs back.” Ealyn says.

“Oh yes of course, but this is the first step in rediscovering genetic augmentation.” Bryden says.

Ealyn steps back.

“Yeah, I suppose it is.” Ealyn says.

“All we need to do now is find the genetic triggers and the tracers and we could truly rediscover true real magic. Not this petty sorcery.” Bryden says.

“We?” Ealyn says.

“Of course we, you just saw what we could do.” Bryden says.

“I need to leave as soon as the treatment is ready.” Ealyn says.

Bryden sobers.

“Of course, I’m sorry. I let the wind of this victory carry me off. Yes I will use the solution to create a medicine, then you are free to leave, but remember you will always have a place here.” Bryden pauses.

“Thank you. I must be off to bed, my legs are not cured yet, and I have asked too much of them today.” Ealyn says.

“Oh yes of course, Thank you.” Bryden says.

Ealyn nods then ambles out of the room. As soon as the light of the sun pours through the cracks in the walls Ealyn pauses.

What have I done? Ealyn thinks.

Ealyn ponders the question, then goes over the possibilities in her mind. She has given him the secret to genetic augmentation. Using the base of her physic as a starting point she has essentially re engineered the secret used by the wizards of old. Bryden may use it now for healing his sick beasts that reside in the castle depths, but what if he raised an army of wizards. Ealyn decides that Bryden is not that type of man. Ealyn turns a corner and stumbles into Gerard.

“Sorry” Gerard says.

“No, its my fault.” Ealyn says.

“No, actually I should always walk cautiously with you around. With your head constantly in another place you are a danger that I should have anticipated and not walked with such reckless abandon.”

Ealyn frowns, but hides a smile, Gerard chuckles. Ealyn starts to move down the hall.

“Oh no time for me then?” Gerard teases.

“I am in a sour mood.” Ealyn says.

“Oh, why is that?” Gerard asks.

Ealyn peeks down both ends of the hallway, then grabs Gerard by the collar and pushes him into a room to her right. The room is bare except a small window lighting half their faces in orange as the sun starts to set.

“Get all of our things ready to leave.” Ealyn says.

“You finished the tonic?” Gerard asks.

“Yes.” Ealyn says.

“Good.” Gerard says coldly.

Ealyn gives him a quizzical glance.

“Is there something wrong?” Ealyn asks.

“I don’t know, but for the last few nights I saw Bryden walk out of the castle to a place in the forest that I could not make out. I was determined to follow him tonight, but now I figure I shouldn’t.” Gerard says.

“What do you think he is doing?” Ealyn asks.

“I don’t know, but it has put me ill at ease.” Gerard says.

“Well, all the more reason to get out of this place as fast as possible.” Ealyn says.

Footsteps echo down the hallway into their small room. Ealyn peeks her head out, and Bryden’s distinct shadow starts pouring into the corridor. Ealyn pulls Gerard out of the room, then starts walking down the hallway to her room. Ealyn enters and leaves Gerard in the hall behind her. She pressed herself against the door then slides to the floor. The pain from her legs subsides as she lets the cold stone floor numb the pain. She lays down on the floor and stares at the rotted wooden ceiling. With the pain slowly ebbing away the fatigue no longer kept at bay by adrenaline slips over her like a weighted blanket. She closes her eyes and passes out on the floor.