

Chapter 15

Brena

Aleiri has been missing for two days, Alyks sent out a few patrols, and they have come back with nothing. Brena has spent the past few days fretting and spending every spare moment doing anything to take her mind off the dark specter representing the thought she dare not think. She finished beating the rug, sweeping the dust, and cleaning the glasses, and now she just sits on the corner of the bed. The specter peeks out again. She can't make out its features, but Before it can speak and walk into the light she shoots up and tosses on leathers and her family's sword. It stays silent, and it moves back into the shadow. Brena fears that if she lets it speak it will tell her the truth, and right now she can't bear that.

She ducks out of the tent keeping in mind to avoid the gaze of any errant patrols or guards. Once clear of the camp she draws her sword and stalks through the woods. She stays low to the ground cutting through branches and bramble like Aleiri taught her. Every errant shape and lump in the forest gives her pause, but on further inspection they are just piles of leaves of sticks, but one does not pass with such simple explanation.

Brena moves towards the suspicious mound her steps growing shakier as she inches towards it. Within a few paces she freezes, all she sees is something pale beneath the brush. She moves some twigs out of the way and she screams.

Sitting under the brush is Alleiri's body with only a small portion of her face exposed. The exposed patch is covered in long dried wounds, now purple and pale along

with the grey flesh around the edges. The scars are deep, and do not show any signs of leaking. Brena can't bear revealing any more and runs towards the camp. She suppresses the images of how Alleiri's face might look, her errant mind extrapolating all sorts of terrible and gruesome visages that could possibly be sitting under the branches that Brena refused to move. When she makes it back to camp she collapses in front of Alyks' tent and cries.

Alyks shoots out of the tent and scoops her into a hug.

"What's wrong?" Alyks whispers into her ear.

"She's dead." Brena blubbers.

"We'll find who did this." Alyks says.

Brena continues to cry, and for a time they sit together embraced as slowly over the course of the day Brena's cries until she has no more tears to shed, then all she feels is pain. A Desperate pain, a hollow pain, something that sits in her chest and claws at her ribs. It crawls up her throat so she wants to gag but can't, but she can't cry so she just shivers. Alyks picks her up in a bridal grip and carries her back to her tent. He lays her on the bed and sits at her side. She continues convulsing and Alyks sits at her side as the rest of the day passes and is consumed by night. Once the moon is high in the sky a Lightfeather man at arms walks through the tent entrance.

"Prince, to make the meeting time we need to move within the moon's turn." He says.

Alyks steeples his hands together and presses his fingers to his forehead and scowls. He schools his expression and turns to the man at arms.

“Do you need me right now?” Alyks asks.

“Yes, my prince, we have to mobilize everyone by sunrise.” The man at arms says.

Alyks sighs, then stands up. He moves to leave, but Brena shoots out her hand and grabs his tight. He turns and grabs onto Brena’s hand with his other. He kneels down at her side with her hand in his.

“I will be back shortly. Keep in mind you are not alone I am here for you.” Alyks says.

He lets go of Brena’s hand and walks out of the tent. Now alone Brena rolls over and stares at the tent flap. Subtly and slowly everything grows colder as the darkest thoughts start to remerge, leading the charge is the specter. It walks amongst kind company in shadow until it finally steps into the light and reveals its face. Brena goes pale at the sight. It’s Aleiri, beautiful, but pale deathly pale. The dark vision glides across the tent floor and touches its hand to Brena’s lips. Brena reaches her hand to meet with the specter but Brena’s hand simply passes through and only touches the place where Aleiri kissed her. The specter smiles and disappears. Now without their vanguard the rest of the dark thoughts disappear and Brena is left hollow staring at the tent flap.

The vision was so clear, clear enough that Brena no longer pictures Aleiri’s face as a morphing collage of the worst possible disfigurements. Now she only pictures Aleiri’s face as one with the specter, beautiful as it ever was, but with the pallor of death marring her once so bright complexion.