

Chapter 10

Aleiri

Aleiri is wrestling with the shadow of a man, his smile stands out white against the black. He holds her down, and an oily black tongue rolls out of his mouth, dripping oily ichor onto her stomach. He drags the tongue across her until it slips itself into her mouth. She starts choking, and coughing out black oil. She tries to breathe, but her lungs fill with the substance. She tries to breathe, but she can't. The figure becomes blurry.

Aleiri gasps awake covered in enough sweat to seep through her night clothes into the bed spread. She looks around the overly lavish tent. The elaborate stitched carpet depicting the destruction of the wizard capital. The baroque carving of the table across from her. Even the feather bed that she is currently sleeping in. Initially when Brena said she was here to seek out prince Alyks she was afraid that this whole endeavor was for a child like crush, but when she went to Alyks and told her Brena what happened there was such a fury in his eyes that she could not imagine anything other than a deep connection. A deep connection that disturbed her. After that night he escorted her to this tent, and Brena to an adjacent one. A surgeon saw Brena, and Alyks asked her if Frodgar did anything to either of them. She said that Frodgar was not able to. Alyks nodded and left. Now she sat in her lavish empty tent in the morning so early the sun had yet to rise.

She turned to her right, Brena's tent is right next to hers. She's probably not awake yet, but she needed to thank her. Brena saved her life. She walks out of the tent into the cold air. Autumn is coming to a close. There is a bite to the wind now, and the

trees are almost naked. They would be at Split River soon. *‘Maybe he’ll send us away when we meet with the Whitefall army.’* Aleiri dismisses the thought and walks to Brena’s tent. Inside Brena looks like she is sleeping, but Brena turns and spots her in the entryway.

“Can I come in?” Aleiri asks.

Brena nods, and scoots a little to the left on her feather bed. Aleiri walks in and plants herself next to her. They both sit in silence for a few moments, then Aleiri wraps Brean in a deep hug.

“Thank you.” Aleiri mumbles into Brean’s shoulder.

Brena starts to tear up.

“I was so afraid, and after that man went into your tent. It was going to be all my fault.” Brena cried.

Aleiri and Brena grip each other tight, when the tears end Aleiri brings Brena in front of her.

“I owe you my life.” Aleiri says.

“I am never doing rug beating again.” Brena says.

“Surely not.” Aleiri says.

They both chuckle, then a nervous expression is cast across Aleir’s face.

“Are you okay?” Alleiri asks.

Brena stares back at Alleiri.

“I don’t know.” Brena says.

Alleiri’s face turns sorrowful.

“Oh, not like that.” Brena gasps.

“What is it like then?” Alleiri asks.

“I don’t know.” Brena says.

“You sure you're okay.” Aleiri asks.

Brena hugs Aleiri.

“I'm better.” Brena says.

Brena smiles, but Aleiri is put off by something hiding behind Brena’s eyes.

“Good,” Aleiri pauses.

They sit in silence for a few seconds, Aleiri desperately searches the recesses of her mind for something to revive the dead air. Finally she comes to it, but as soon as she says it she regrets it.

“What was it like?” Aleiri asks.

Aleiri internally curses herself, but Brena does not frown, if anything her eyes brighten.

“It’s interesting, it's not like the stories,” Brena says.

“What’s it like?” Aleiri asks.

“Well, The stories always make death seem like some struggle, some epic encounter or great duel. What I found was just how quick it was. It seems there is little that separates us from the arms of Broun.” Brena says.

Aleiri shivers, Brena frowns.

“I was so close wasn’t I?” Aleiri asks.

“I would have never let that happen.” Brena states.

Aleiri smiles broadly.

“I don’t want to feel that helpless ever again.” Aleiri says.

Aleiri pauses.

“Can you teach me?” Aleiri asks.

Brena smiles from ear to ear, then pulls Aleiri into a deep embrace.

“Of course I can!” Brena yelps.

Caught in Brena’s golden curls Aleiri takes in a deep breath. Brena’s smell has changed. Gone are the scents of expensive perfumes, and gran soaps. Now it's just the slight smell of pine, and her smell, something deep, something rich. Brena pulls away, and Aleiri has to lean back lest she fall forwards.

“When do you wanna start?” Brena asks eagerly.

“Tomorrow?” Aleiri proposes.

“Yes, tomorrow morning, well that means we should get some sleep.” Brena says.

Aleiri maneuvers to the edge of the bed, Alleiri hesitates. Brena grabs her wrist and pulls her back with a feather light touch.

“Stay.” Brena says.

“Thank you,” Alleiri says.

They cuddle together in the center of the large feather bed. Alleiri closes her eyes for sleep and she sees the man again. He leaps onto her, pinning her to the floor. He reaches down one of his black hands and tries to enter her, but he stops, and red syrup pours from his mouth onto her face. The man falls to the side, a pool of blood forming beneath her. A woman in white stands above her. The woman grabs her like the man, but she doesn’t squirm. The woman pulls in close and kisses her. The kiss chases the darkness away and for the night she sleeps soundly.