

## Chapter 9

### Brena

Brena and Aleiri arrive at camp just as the sun dips below the horizon. They navigate through dim torchlight and make it back to sir Windman's pavilion. Aleiri makes to go inside the tent, but stops when Brena lets go of her hand. Aleiri turns around spotting Brena with her hands stuffed under her frock. Brena uses her fingers to pick at the skin under her nails.

"I think we should sleep in separate tents." Brena says.

Aleiri sighs, then nods and walks into her tent. Brena turns around and walks into a tent on the other side of the pavilion. Inside the tent is filled with open closed crates. Brena peers into one of the open crates and sees a stack of dried apricots. She peeks over her shoulder, then snatches one and pops it in her mouth. On the other side of the tent behind some closed crates Brena lays a sheet on the dirt floor, and lays down.

Brena closes her eyes, but sleep does not come easy. She rolls over, and Unconsciously she reaches out but only grabs air. Her eyes peel open and she looks through a small hole in the top of the tent. Through it she can see the stars. But within a minute she counted all of them. She breathes in and thinks of the warmth that usually lulls her to sleep, but that only makes her chest ache. She opens her eyes and sits up.

She gets up and walks out of the tent. She looks up at the stars. It's harder to see her favorites out here. Brena wonders where the sky went, and thinks that maybe Alyks' mother was right to fear that the stars could leave. Brena scoffs then chalks the missing

stars to smoke from the torches and continues walking around the pavilion. He stops abruptly when she sees a figure in a cloak keeping to the shadows on the far end of the pavilion. Brena ducks into the shadow created by the central tent, and watches the figure move across the camp.

Her heart rate picks up when she sees that the shadow is walking towards Aleiri's tent. The figure makes a misstep and his face is revealed by the torch light. Frodgar steps back into the shadows. Brena is shaking barely, yet unable to move as the figure walks in front of Aleiri's tent.

For a second Brena gets up to leave, she even turns to face the edge of the pavilion. But then the grim image of Aleiri's body appeared in her mind. She has only seen death once, her mother on the birthing bed. She was laying in a pool of blood still seeping from her sex. The baby died as well, but unlike her mother the baby just seemed asleep. Her mother seemed brutalised, the baby murdered her, while the baby itself just went to sleep. Aleiri's face on her mother's body is what came to her in the moment. Aleiri laying on the tent floor laying a pool of blood, the pallor of her face. In that moment Brena was not courageous, just the image of Aleiri's dead body scared her more than her own. She would not see her own dead body, it would be just like her father described it that day. 'A peaceful slumber.' So she turned around and walked to the tent.

In the center of the tent Aleiri squirmed under Frodgar's grip. Frodgar had tied a cloth around her mouth. Her muted screams barely reached the edge of the tent where Brena stood. She palmed the sword under her frock, and slowly walked towards Frodgar. Once barely a few steps away Brena drew her sword. Frodgar successfully tied Aleiri's wrists to the post in the middle of the tent, and was working at undoing the

strings on his pants. Brena drew the sword as silently as she could, but Frodgar whipped around.

He leapt to his feet dagger in hand and leaped at Brena. Brena blocked the slash of the knife, but Frodgar was quick with another. He cut her forearm deep enough to draw a trickled of blood. Brena blocked as much as she could, but Frodgar was pushing her to the other side of the tent. Then it happened, a small knick in the rug caused him to fall forwards. He tried to recover but Brena simply pushed the blade forward into his neck.

It was not as hard as she thought it would be. She simply pushed and Frodgar went limp. She pulled the sword out, and cut Aleiri's bindings. Aleiri scrambled out of the tent, and Brena just stood and stared at Frodgar. The blood pooled beneath him like it did with mother, but she murdered him. All she had to do was push. It was just so easy, and something else. Brena was curious, she pulled the blade out and then moved it to another part of the body, she pushed it in again, and it was just as easy as before, although there was not an accompanying gush of blood like the first time. This time it just lazily leaked out like a wine skin scraped against a loose branch. She tried again and it yielded the same result. It was just so easy. 'Are we so close to death?' Brena thought. Something took her energy away and she collapsed to her knees.

She gazed at the dead man. Then the smell came, and she started gagging. She was able to crawl to the other side of the tent. Unwilling to let the man out of her site she stayed, staring at the corpse as the perfunctory processes of death made their appearance one after the other. She studied the body as it continued its change. There was so much movement in death. The gas builds, the liquids move, Brena always assumed death was still. Still like nothing, still like cold, but just like life death had a

movement to it, a rhythm. Maybe the best dealers of death are like dancers, they can understand this movement, this rhythm and simply just need to follow the steps.

Somebody entered the tent, Brena looked up and it was Alyks. He was not dressed in the finery she was used to, but the way he held his short sword still gave him the look of a true knight, even if he lacked his shining armor. Alyks knelt close to her, and Brena leapt at him. Before she knew it she was crying. She didn't understand why, but then everything hit in one flash of emotion. But even through the haze of fear, and rage, something kindled, it was hazy hard to tell in the roiling wroth of so many emotions, but clear as a ray of sunshine during a hurricane. She looked back at the body and smiled.