

Chapter 16

Brena

Brena spends most of her time staring at the vision of Aleri's face. She does not eat, she does not move, prince Alyks had to pick her up and put her on a wagon when they left for the camp outside Split River. Brena stares at the clouds above, occasionally she is overcome by a paroxysm of horrible weeping and shaking. On the night before they left she tried to sleep, and her dreams were so horrible that every night since she has refused to sleep. So now here she sits staring out of the small window on the side of the carriage watching the forests move in a blur. She refuses to sleep at night so as the days pass her days become more of a dream. Hazy movements of people shaped blobs. The trees passing in a flowing torrent of green water, sometimes the green pours through the window and spills onto the floor. She swears she drowns in it, but then it simply leaks back out again leaving the carriage as dry as a desert. Everyday Alyks brings water and food, but Brena refuses to eat most of it, but even her desperate cloying sadness sometimes loses out to her hunger and she picks morsels off the side.

On this particular day she stares out the carriage window as the ocean of leaves recedes into a perfect blue sky. The sun melts and moves along with the clouds scrambling like an egg. Brena winces at the pain of looking at the sun and stumbles to the floor. She peeks through a window in the top of the carriage door outside. It seems they have stopped, even though the ground is still moving like quicksand, but it is moving less. So she pushes through the door. On the other side of the door is a perfect green field surrounded by trees, some soldiers move across the field and melt into pools

of mercury. The mercury flows into small rivulets and streams and pools in places.

Brena is drawn to the balls of mercury, but then is quickly distracted by a perfect replica of the sky at the other end of the field. She chases the sun across the field until she steps in something cold. She looks down, apparently she was running after the reflected sun, not the real sun. Reflected in a lake in fact. She looks down at the lake, then sees a grim figure. A gaunt and pale woman wearing a dress that billows around her, dark circles under her puffy red eyes, and stringy blond hair that is missing in places. She recoils at the sight of the witch, but then the witch recoils at the sight of her.

She moves her hands back and forth and the witch does the same. Suddenly she realizes she is that witch. She touches her head, she now remembers the times she has pulled her hair out, she looks at her eyes and remembers the time she cried until she could cry no longer. She touches her waist and does not remember a time where she ate. She continues staring at the grim reflection but then it warbles and distorts. Suddenly a beautiful woman stands before her, a princess from a story that her mother told her once. Her mother told her many stories of the exploits of her fathers. A knight errant killing beasts and saving maidens, but this one was her favorite.

Her father was sent to save a maiden from a terrible tyrant of a warlord in Dennland. He arrived at the foot of the castle and demanded the tyrant stand and face him. The tyrant refused the challenge and instead sent his best fighter to make quick work of the knight, but the knight won. And every day the tyrant would send another fighter to kill the knight, and every day the knight beat the fighter. Eventually there were no fighters left, and the knight just walked into the now unguarded city. He walked across the city, and spotted a beggar woman. In tattered rags she was with a marred face

and waifish figure. He went on his way and made it to the castle ready to face the tyrant. He made it to the castle, but the Danish tyrant used fell wizard spells to make the castle impossible to navigate. The knight made it to the throne room, but two weeks had passed. So he confronted the warlord and demanded he give him the maiden. The warlord said 'Ha, but you have failed knight. I sent her on the streets with no food or money, and made her most horrible to look upon. So in the time you were waylaid she must have died on the streets.' The knight was distraught, the tyrant saw this and attacked the knight. The knight still made quick work of the tyrant, but he thought he had failed his mission. So he walked back out of the city with his head low, but he thought of the good he was able to do in giving that beggar his coin. So he visited the beggar to find them still alive and desperately thankful for his kindness. He offered to take the beggar out of such a fell place, and the beggar agreed. So they left and along the way they fell in love. So when he arrived back in his castle he asked to be married. Yet when Broun was sent to bless the marriage he saw the curses set upon the beggar and revealed her true beauty and it was the maiden he was sent to save. So they were married and it is happily ever after.

Brena thinks maybe she is under some fell magic. But then she realizes there is no fell magic. This is all too real, but maybe not so on the other side of the water. Maybe instead of falling into water she will emerge on the other side of it and be staring at her world in the reflection of new water. She is so enamored with this idea that she goes rigid and falls into the water with her arms crossed on her chest.

The initial hit was not painful, but holding her breath is getting harder and harder, eventually she gives up and water enters her lungs. She has to remind herself

that the process of change is painful that it always takes a cost to enter the realms of dreams, that the hero never emerges without paying a heavy price. So she stays under the water. Eventually her vision starts to blur and the edges of her world blacken. Its time, its happening, she will be in another world soon. Maybe that other world Aleiri will still be alive. She will be able to say how she truly feels. She will be able to save her from not just death, but also her life. She could do anything.

Suddenly light pierces through the darkness and she starts coughing up water. She opens her eyes and with panic clear across his face Alyks looks down at her. She is disappointed it was not Aleiri, but maybe this Alyks knows where she can find her.

“Do you know where Aleiri is?” Brena asks.

Alyks starts to sob.

“She’s gone Brena.” Alyks says.

“But I went through the portal, she cannot be gone here too. You must be some sort of djinn or demon thats trying to trick me.” Brena says.

Alyks pulls her in tight.

“I’m so sorry, I should have been watching.” Alyks cries.

“Watching what, I am going to the other side. The transition was not permanent, you must have tried to draw me back.” Brena says.

She squirms out of his arms and tries to crawls back to the water. Alyks scrambles to grab her.

“Let me go! I need to find her! She will die without me!” Brena screams

In tears Alyks grabs her and slings her over his shoulder. Brena starts punching down at him.

“Let me go fiend! I am going to save her!” Brena yells.

Slowly the water slips away into the shifting emerald landscape, then she is placed back in the carriage. Alyks ahs to hold her down and someone else comes in and ties her hands.

“You can’t keep me here! You are friends!” Brena yells.

The figure holds something to her mouth and she goes unconscious.