

## Chapter 14

### Aleiri

Aleiri wakes from her restless sleep and unconsciously reaches to her side. She is just met with cold covers. Aleiri peels herself off the bed, a pool of sweat below her, and looks outside. The sun has yet to rise, only the dim light of a few torches etch the outlines of the furniture in her tent. She pads about the room looking from object to object, she tries desperately to imagine them as hers, but she fails. For in every way they are so opposite to the life she now leads, and so in line with the life she once had.

Suddenly a pang of anger shoots through her. She could feel it deep in her bones, she knew that Alyks was with Brena. Aleiri contrives a reason to leave the tent under the auspices of finding a protecting Brena, but deep down she knows that Alyks is probably just a knight in shining armor to save Brena from her dreary life. The stories don't have room for her. But even though she knows this essential truth her heart refuses to accept it, and still fans the flames of suspicion and mistrust. Alyks must have something wrong, she has yet to see, but she knows. At least that's what she repeats to herself while she walks towards his tent.

She steps on the mat leading into the tent. She peeks through the tent. Alyks is not in there, just the same spare room she found earlier. Yet that chest, looming like a dark monolith at the other end of the tent, calls to her. What secrets does it hold? Aleiri decides that this is it. She knows that Alyks will find her, and that she will be flogged for this, or worse, but then the thought of it pails in comparison to the potential of a real

damming piece of evidence. Something to drive the lovers apart. Something to save Brena with. So she walks to the chest.

The chest is wrought with iron and dark wood, it looks impenetrable, but Aleiri has been a petty thief ever since she was forced to leave her home. Maybe it all led to this. She reaches into her pocket and produces a small lock picking kit. She places the pick into the lock and starts poking the tumblers. With every second her excitement grows, its a morbid feeling though, because in her best case, Alyks turns out to be a true monster. This thought gives her pause, and she stops fiddling with tumblers.

*'What am I doing.'* Aleiri thinks. She looks down at the picking kit, and up at the chest. Suddenly reality hits like an ice cold bucket of water. *'I'm not doing this for her, I'm doing this for me.'* Aleiri slips the picking kit back in her pocket, then turns to leave, but something overtakes her. She quickly picks the lock and tosses the lid of the chest open. Aleiri avoids screaming at the sight, but only just.

Inside the chest are various pieces of clothing, jewelry, and undergarments covered in blood, and sitting in the center of this trophy gallery is a piece of Brena's underwear. Something cuts the dim light leaking through the tent flap. She shoots around and sees a figure silhouetted by torchlight.

For a second there is a silence. Tense although Aleiri is thankful, because she can feel the cold of death lingering around her. She knows not whether she will go to the sea with the wizard kings when she dies, but now prays. For the first time in her life she prays. She did not even pray when Frodgar attacked, but now she knows its different. The figure takes a single step and the prayers stop.

It's Frodgar, but his face only bears the ghost of what it used to be. He is missing all his front teeth, his lower jaw has two large pieces missing, where skin has been pulled

over it. He is missing an eye, and the other is red and filled with blood. His hair is missing in large patches, and the others are fine and wispy. His left and right ears are mangled beyond a recognisable shape.

He leaps at her, but she dodges to the side, she pats at her side to grab her knife, but its missing. She makes to leave the tent, but Frodgar grabs her by the angles. She kicks him in the face and rustles out of his grip, and manages to stumble out of the tent. Now in the pavilion outside of Alyks' tent Aleiri starts running. Frodgar is close behind her, maybe only a few paces. She finally makes it to her tent, and then a pang of unbearable pain shoots through her side. She turns around and sees Alyks standing just inside her tent holding a knife into her side.

Aleiri opens her mouth to respond, to decry him, to scream at him, to curse him to the darkest pits of nothing, but only blood dribbles from her mouth. Then suddenly she realizes what's happening, it all comes flooding in an instant. She is going to die. Her eyes fill with tears. Alyks goes to pull out the blade, but Aleiri stops him. She remembers never to pull out the blade, if the blood loss doesn't kill you the infection will. With one quick pull Alyks removes the blade and dislocates Aleiri's right hand.

So he watches, Aleiri opens her mouth to scream, to do anything, but nothing. All she can do is squirms under Alyks' gaze as he watches, and eventually a smile crawls across his face. The last thing she sees is Alyks' bright wide smile as she slips into nothingness.