

Chapter 19

The sun is low in the sky when Ealyn finishes the final solution. She lays the yellow powder filled vial on the counter, then breathes deeply, completely spent and exhausted. Her aching legs complain from the exertion. She sits in the pain breathing in deeply, then she smiles. She realizes Pain has been her constant companion. All the pain that she has gathered now sits still with her right now. A deep reminder of the distance she has travelled and the things she has done, but for what. She is stuck in a room in a castle, far from her sister who has alienated her. What has really changed, all one would have to do is change adjectives and her position a few months ago would be exactly the same as now. This realization is enough to bring her tears, but she has simply run out. She is too tired, too in pain, and too sad to cry, so she resolves just to take a simple pleasure of watching the sunset. She has changed in one way from this adventure. She now prefers the sunrise to the sunset.

When the sky turns purple pink and orange Salum walks into the room.

“You’re late.” Ealyn grumbles.

Salum frowns.

“At least i’m here.” Salum says.

“Yes of course, after learning that I could destroy you. You are truly a craven at heart.” Ealyn says.

Salum scowls then walks to her side. He opens his mouth, then Ealyn shoves the potions into his chest. He scrambles to grab them all.

“The pink vial needs to be consumed by Brena, it will ensure she sleeps through the ordeal. The yellow ones are filled with dust that can catch easily.” Ealyn says.

“Where am I supposed to light it?” Salum asks.

Ealyn looks around the room.

“Are you a dullard? This castle is made of wood. Find somewhere on the other side of the castle to Brena, light it then go get her.” Ealyn explains.

Salum scowls then sags and nods.

“Good, well get going and light the powder before nightfall. Also remember tomorrow morning use the second vial of the yellow powder to light a pyre so that I can see you were successful.” Ealyn says.

Salum nods again.

“Well get going.” Ealyn says.

Ealyn shoos him off, he leaves the room with vials in his hands. He closes the door behind him. When he has been gone for a while she realizes that she does not really expect that fool to pull anything more than a farce. At least this will draw up some drama before she gives into Alyks’ demands. She can say that she fought before she gave up. Something that will alleviate her guilt and make her not feel as powerless. She will be able to hold onto this when Alyks is carving new intricate symbols into her back, or burning as yet untouched areas. Long ago she realized it was the small acts of rebellion that kept her alive. She only broke out of the castle because she figured Alyks would kill her after that small act of rebellion. Why did she do that, deep down she knew that Alyks would beat the mercenary. Maybe she wanted to spin Alyks into a frenzy, then a dark thought slips into her mind.

Maybe she knew Alyks would be in enough of a frenzy to kill her. She could disguise suicide as murder so that Broun would still be able to embrace her. A sort of moral gymnastics, every single piece of the puzzle is justified, but when you look at them on the whole one would realize it was suicide. Did she really think she could deceive Broun? Well I guess that was hubris enough to start this entire farce. She hopes that maybe this adventure she has been on will be made in a song or a play, but she hopes it will be a comedy, because that is what it was. A stupid play about a lady trying and failing at every turn. Then she smells something in the air. Smoke.

Ealyn smiles as the bells of the castle start ringing. Even from her apartment she can hear guards dart about the castle. The smell of acrid smoke is sweeter than the best honied pies or roasted pigs. She dares to let a sliver of hope break the bitterness. She sits patiently refusing to let herself give into cynicism as she stares outside her window to the castle grounds. As night passes people dart from building to building holding buckets of water. One soldier slips and drops a bucket from his hand onto the floor. Ealyn laughs, maybe this will be the climax of the farce. Ealyn breaks her focus on the comical guards when the sun rises.

She again realizes that she now prefers sunrises as a column of smoke raises from the forest beyond the castle walls. She laughs out loud until tears fill her vision. Alyks barges through her door in a fury. He is still wearing his disheveled night clothes covered in patch of mud and soot. Ealyn pans up his body, in one hand he is holding a dagger. She continues up and she sees his face and stops laughing. The side of the face that she burned is no longer covered. The skin is a swirl of black, pink, and red flesh. Streaks of flesh still ooze onto the floor, his eye is stuck open, in his mouth his teeth are exposed.

“What did you do!” Alyks screams.

“I won.” Ealyn says.

Alyks runs to her side and plunges his knife into her bandaged leg. She winces but refuses to scream. He takes the knife out and goes for her chest. He scrapes the knife against her skin. She runs out of resolve eventually and starts screaming. When he makes it to her throat he stops.

“I’ll kill you.” Alyks says.

His eyes are dead, as he stares into hers. Then it hits her. She is already dead, Alyks may be powerful, but death is a force that no one no matter how powerful cannot beat. This realization takes the pain away, it slips off her like mud washed with a torrent of water. She coughs and Alyks steps back. Bloody phlegm gathers in the back of her throat. She starts whispering, Alyks steps closer, and she spits the flem into his face. He stumbles back falling to the floor.

“I won!” Ealyn yells.

She starts cackling and Alyks raises his dagger then his face falls as he sees the blood dribbling out of the wounds he created. He rushes to her side and grabs bandages. He tries his best to stop the bleeding, tears are pouring from his eyes as he tries to plug the wounds, Ealyn continues laughs.

“I’m sorry, please, please, no.” Alyks cries.

Ealyn ignores him as life slips out of her body. Finally her laugh turns into a shallow wheeze, blood drenching the bandages. Finally darkness embraces her and then for a time there is nothing.