

Chapter 6

Ealyn peels open her eyes then winces, she retreats under the cover of her eyelids. Shadows break the has light through her eye lids. Many pass for a short time, but one stays constant, lying low in her vision a dark lump that she has yet to identify. She opens her eye just a slight and sees a dirt clearing in the forest. Soldiers wearing dyed green leathers with chainmail with a tree emblazoned on their chest dart from place to place. Four soldiers stand with spears stand at the tow ends of the posts. She looks down at her wrists and sees the rope tying her to a post stuck in the ground. She turns her head, and Gerard lays still against the same post to her side tied to the same post. His eyes dart around the camp, and he catches something, Ealyn turns her vision to his focus and hey eyes widen. Rycard sits chained within a metal cage a gaping wound in his side seeping blood onto the ground. Ealyn gasps, then turns and spots a small clearing with many bags and chests, one of them being her saddle bag. Ealyn coughs, then her eyes widen, she coughs again. She nudges Gerard, he turns to face her.

“I need to get to my saddle bag.” Ealyn rasps.

“Is something wrong?” Gerard asks.

“The black vile, my medicine.” Ealyn croaks.

She breathes in deep then out, slowly her breaths grow raspy, and the wheezing starts. Gerard’s eyes go wide, and he darts his head to one of the guards. He turns his head back and reaches into his back pocket. He withdrawals a small book with shackles

etched into the leather cover. He opens the book, and a small knife slips out. He finagles his fingers until he pulls up the knife. He cuts the bonds, and he turns his head to the forest, then he looks at the stash.

He gets up and runs for the stash. The soldiers yell and take off after him. Ealyn's breathing quiets to a whisper. Gerard reaches his hand into Ealyn's saddle bag and he retrieves the vial of medicine. He takes off the soldiers behind him, one dives for him bringing him to the floor. He tosses the medicine at Ealyn; it lands in front of her. She snatches it and pours it down her throat. She looks back up and three soldiers are around Gerard kicking him with steel toed leather boots. Ealyn winces as a couple of sickening cracks echo across the yard. Soldiers turn to face the commotion many cheering. Once they stop and step back Gerard's skin is covered in deep purple welts a puddle of blood forming beneath him. One of the soldiers drag him back to the post and tie him to it.

"I'm sorry." Ealyn says.

Gerard turns his head and smirks with a miraculously full set of teeth.

"The didn't get the face that's what matters." Gerard croaks.

He coughs and a sputter of blood dribbles onto the ground from his mouth. He lays against the post and goes limp. Ealyn's hands spring to his throat, she sits for a second gazing intently at his throat, then she sighs with relief. She lays back against the post staring at Rycard's cage. He sleeps soundly, his breath ruffling the grass in front of the cage. A man with short brown hair peppered with grey, wearing a dark wooden chest piece with a tree carved into the front over green dyed leather and a dark wooden sword

sheathed at his side steps into the courtyard. The soldiers turn to face him and rigidly salute, he raises a hand they relax going back to their duties. He turns and walks towards the post where Ealyn and Gerard are tied.

“Russwyn, get over here.” the officer says.

“Yes milord.” the post guard says.

“Get on your knees.” the lord says.

“Please milord, he was trying to escape.” Russwyn pleads.

“Did I misspeak?” the lord asks.

Russwyn gets on his knees, and the soldiers turn to face him, a couple in the crowd turn pale as they face him.

“I know Russwyn was not the only one! If you step forward now I will not have your head!” the lord announces

Three men step forward and walk to Russwyn’s side and get on their knees. The third one cries openly. The other soldiers look on with eyes peeled open. The lord unsheathes his wooden sword. He lifts the guard’s shirt, and presses the blade into their skin. The blade pierces the skin, from the blade tiny roots grow outwards and dig under the flesh into the muscle below. The guard screams tears pouring from his eyes. The lord withdraws the blade and roots along with it. The man passes out and falls to the floor. The other two look at the passed out man’s form and wet spots form beneath them. The lord lifts the second man’s shirt and brings the blade within a finger of touching the skin, then he pulls it away. He bends down until he faces the men.

“I think you have learned well enough.” the lord says.

The lord stands up and looks down on the soiled men as they scramble back into the crowd. He turns to face the rest of the soldiers.

“This prisoner is not to be harmed!” the lord says.

The lord points at Gerard and Ealyn.

“Yes sir!” the soldiers say in unison.

The lord turns his back, and the soldiers go back to their duties. The lord walks to Gerard and Ealyn and pulls out the wooden sword. In one quick swipe he cuts the ropes tying them to the post. The lord turns to two soldiers standing near a rack of spears trying desperately to look busy.

“You two pick him up.” the lord says.

“Yes sir!” They say.

They walk to Gerard and slump him between their shoulders. Ealyn stands up, the lord turns to face her.

“Who are you?” the lord asks.

“Wynda milord.” Ealyn says.

“A commoner?” the lord asks.

“Yes milord, one in service to Gerard Blackwing.” Ealyn says.

“Interesting.” the lord says.

The lord walks away, Ealyn follows behind him. She takes a glance at Rycard in chains, then turns her head forward. They walk past the rest of the prisoners. The closer they get to the center of the camp the more they are in cages and shackles instead of looped around wooden posts pressed into the ground. Ealyn gasps when she sees Salum. He still has the collar digging into his neck, now with the rivulets of blood stained into his dull brown shirt. Blood still seeps from the wound slowly dripping onto the ground and pouring out of the cage. He has no mouth, only vertical slits under his nose which air escapes. Apart from his mouth his face is covered in healed scars, and burns. He is completely hairless, his glowing eyes set deep in his head. He is gripping the bars of the cage his head facing the ground as breath escapes from his mouth slits.

The lord turns looks at the inquisitor and looks at Ealyn, then continues walking deeper into the camp. They pass the holding areas and make it into the tented portion. The tents are made of brown canvas draped over hastily procured sticks of various sizes. The ground is muddy and brown matching the tents. The entire landscape is a mire of brown, highlighting the tent in the center. It is a bright green, the color of wet grass. The lord leads everyone into the tent.

“Put him there.” The lord orders.

Ealyn stands next to Gerard as the two soldiers depart the tent.

“Sit.” The lord orders.

Ealyn sits in the chair next to Gerard.

“So where did you come from.” The lord asks.

“Castle lightfeather.” Ealyn answers.

“Why did you leave?” The lord asks.

“We were sent to find the prince’s bride to be.” Ealyn answers.

“I will be taking care of Gerard for now, let my guards escort you to a comfortable resting place.” The lord says.

“Yes milord.” Ealyn says.

“My name is Logric” Logric says.

“Yes milord Logric.” Ealyn says.

The lord points to the tent flaps, and after a forced curtsy Ealyn leaves the tent. The two guard lead Ealyn to a tent three tents down. Inside the tent is a bedroll and a small table with a cushion beside it. Ealyn takes a seat on the bedroll and reaches into her pocket and withdraws the vial of medicine.; it is half full. One of the guards return with a small bowl and a loaf of bread in hand. He lays them on the table in front of her then leaves. Ealyn takes a cautionary sniff of the bowl, then a small prick of the tongue. She then gulps the bowl down, then wolfs down the bread within moments. She peeks outside of the tent and spots nearly fifty soldiers moving from place to place. She ducks back into the tent and lays down on the bedroll. Ealyn closes her eyes and falls to sleep.

The stars runs across the sky until the moon is at its Zenith, and Ealyn shoots awake in a cold sweat. She takes a deep breath in then one out. She gets up from the bedroll and peeks outside the tent. The camp is almost silent asleep. A couple soldiers stand by braziers holding their shivering hands over the fire. Ealyn ducks out of her tent and makes her way through the canvas alleyways. She makes her way past the edge of camp to the holding area. She keeps to the shadows avoiding the occasional guard or

two. She passes Salum cage, his eyes still open staring at the ground. Ealyn pauses and looks at the cage. She raises her hand then puts it back down. She steps past him and makes her way deeper into the holding area. She reaches the place that she and Gerard where held only a few hours ago. She looks at Rycard's cage, and stares into his glowing yellow eyes. He stares back then blinks and lays back down. Ealyn rushes to the stack of satchels and chests. She starts rummaging through the bags.

“Wynda.” Logric beckons.

Ealyn pales and turns her head around. Logric is standing next a man wearing a long black coat with a sigil of a wolf biting a monster's throat emblazoned on a leather chest piece underneath. The man pulls back his hood revealing a pale gaunt face with long black hair pouring down to his shoulders, framing his face on both sides.

“This is Aret, a beast kin in my service.” Logric says.

Logric turns to face the shadows.

“Come out.” Logric orders.

Soldiers step from behind crates some from the shadows of trees, others emerge from the brush. Ealyn pans he gaze across the amassed soldiers her face growing more panicked as she turns.

“Russwyn give me the saddle bag.” Logric orders.

Russwyn reaches to his side and runs to Logric, handing him the saddle bag.

“Wynda, I had a conversation with Aret and he mentioned encountering someone that truly perplexed him. Someone that as he said, “Does not have the eyes”. He

mentioned that this was the woman accompanying the heir Blackwing. I would have brushed the entire exchange aside, but after that display that the heir showed to protect you, I must say that I was intrigued.” Logric says.

He hoists the saddle bag over his shoulder and approaches Ealyn.

“Why would an heir apparent risk his life for a commoner?” Logric asks.

Ealyn looks back into his cold grey eyes for a moment.

“That was a question.” Logric says.

“I don’t know.” Ealyn says honestly.

“I guess I should have expected no other answer. No matter, I am here to ask you a simple question.” Logric says.

Ealyn nods slowly.

“How did you tame the beast?” Logric asks.

“I don’t know.” Ealyn says.

“Interesting.” Logric says.

He pauses for a second, then his eye twitches and he looks at the group of amassed soldiers.

“I a treatise on the behavior beasts, and it said that the only reason these beasts don’t attack each other is scent based.” Logric says.

Ealyn shudders.

“So, one can deduce that if one made a physik to make yourself smell of them you would not be harmed. Something akin to becoming a beast kin, although instead of a connection to one beast, one would have an affinity with all beasts. I surmise that you were able to brew this physick.” Logric says.

Ealyn scowls.

“I do not need you to tell me, but it would certainly make this process less tedious.” Logric says.

Logric turns around to the massed soldiers.

“Russwyn step forward.” Logric orders.

Russwyn steps apart from the crowd. Logric pulls rummages through the bag and withdraws a vile filled with gloopy green paste. Logric unstoppers the bottle.

“Open your mouth.” Logric orders.

Russwyn shakily opens his mouth.

“Wider.” Logric orders.

Russwyn opens his mouth wide, his eyes darting to his fellow soldiers who are taking a few steps back. Logric lifts the vial over Russwyn’s mouth and tilts it. The gloopy substance falls out of the vial in thick clumps. Logric tips the vial back and stops it again when the vial is half full. Russwyn swallows then shudders, and coughs.

“Follow.” Logric orders.

Logric goes to Rycard’s cage, and takes off the lock. He unlatches it, then opens it.

“Go in.” Logric orders.

Ealyn and Russwyn’s eyes go wide.

“Excuse me sir?” Russwyn says.

“I said walk in. If the physick worked, then you will be safe.” Logric says.

Logric turns to his soldiers who all take a step back. Russwyn turns to Logric his pleading eyes meeting those of pure steel. Russwyn swallows then steps into the cage. Logric shuts the cage door behind him. Ealyn starts shaking as Rycard stirs from his slumber. He shakes his head, then looks at Russwyn, his fangs bare, and within a second Russwyn is no longer in one piece. Rycard tugs against the chains binding him to the cage, but he cannot make it to the door. He steps back to the center and starts growling.

“Demric step forward.” Logric says.

A soldier steps forwards. Logric searches through the bag, and withdraws a ball of dry red paste.

“Open your mouth.” Logric says.

Logric deposits a portion of the paste onto Demric’s tongue. Ealyn watches shaking as Demeric steps towards the cage. Tears leak from her eyes as he puts his hand on the latch.

“Stop!” Ealyn yells.

“Will you enlighten us as to the correct physick?” Logric says.

“Yes.” Ealyn says.

Ealyn walks up to Logric and reaches her hand into the saddle bag. She pulls out a vile of thick black liquid. Logric eyes the vial, then goes to a soldier and whispers in his ear. The soldier takes off into the camp. While he is gone Logric stares into Ealyn's eyes. She breaks contact after the first unblinking minute. The soldier returns with Gerard in chains next to him.

"Open his mouth." Logric orders.

"No!" Ealyn yells.

"Did you just remember the right potion?" Logric asks.

"Yes." Ealyn says.

"Well, Gerard is going in that cage within the minute I sure hope your memory catches up with you by then." Logric says.

The guards starts dragging Gerard to the cage. Ealyn grabs her saddle bag and rummages through it until she finds the physick. She takes the brown ball rips off the piece and runs for Gerard. Before they toss him into the cage Ealyn makes it to him and puts the physik in his mouth. Gerard is tossed into the cage in front of Rycard. He sniffs, then backs down and sits on the other side of the cage.

"Interesting. Take him out!" Logric orders.

He rips the physick out of Ealyn's hands. Soldiers take Gerard out of the cage and march him back into the camp.

"How long does it last." Logric asks.

Ealyn stays silent.

“Toss her in.” Logric orders.

Soldiers approach her and grab her by the shoulders.

“You’re going to need this.” Logric says.

Logric hands her one does of the physik, as she is dragged to the entrance of the cage. The soldiers toss her in, and she pops the physik into her mouth. Rycard eyes her from the other side of the cage, then settles back down. She crawls to the other side of the cage and sits next to him. He lays his head on her lap, and she strokes his back. She looks at the guards and they turn their gaze away.

As the night passes, she refuses to let sleep enthrall her. She watches as the sun passes over the tree tops and pour into the cage. The farther the day progresses the more agitated Rycard gets. As the edge of the sun last touches the tips of the trees Rycard pulls his head off her lap, and walks to the other side of the cage. The sun crawls further into the heavens and Rycard stares at her. Eventually his froth forms at the edge of his mouth. Tears form in Ealyn’s eyes as she watches Rycard bear his fangs. Rycard starts growling, then he gets into a crouched position, his legs ready to spring forwards. Ealyn grips the edge of the cage and whispers a prayer.

“Broun who has liberated us from evil. Broun who has broken our chains and set us on the path of light. Please I beseech you, when I die there will be none left to care for my sister. In my absence give her guidance and give her peace. For if I die without seeing her again, I will die peaceful in the knowledge that she is safe.” Ealyn whispers.

Ealyn lets go of the cage bars and takes a deep breath.