

Chapter 7

Brena

After a little tense conversation with the head of help Aleiri managed to get Brena and Herself assigned to a detail cleaning a lower marshall's tent. Right now Brena and Aleiri stand side to side beating a large rug outside the tent. Brena smacks the rug with a large stick and a puff of orange tinted dust explodes outwards. Staggers backwards and attempts to shield her eyes and mouth.

"I am never gonna get used to this." Brena says.

"It aint that bad. You should be on your hands and knees thanking me you didn't get assigned to the butchery." Aleiri says.

Brena grumbles and goes back to beating the rug. Aleiri stands slumping against the tent, her stick sitting at her side. Aleiri squints and looks at something down the path, she immediately grabs the rug beater and beats the rug viciously with expert precision. Brena stands frozen, unable to land a single blow in the flurry.

"You ain't looking very busy girl." A soldier says.

Brena turns around and looks wide eyed at the man.

"We need help in the mess, that should keep you busy." The soldier says.

He grabs Brena by the shoulder and shoves her forward. 'That horrid bitch'. Brena turns around and scowls at Aleiri, she returns the look with a toothy grin. As Brena walks through the camp she spots the serving girls bouncing from lord's tent to

lord's tent. 'Those easy sluts, How can they have enough time to clean themselves before entering another tent.'

"Here," The man points to the mess tent. A large pavilions covering enough area to comfortably fit three benches. Four women are cleaning the table from right to left, three are cleaning while gossiping amongst themselves. All have deep brown hair and are almost indistinguishable apart from their differing eye color. One has eyes of a deep green similar to pine needles, Another a hazel, and the last a dull red. while one stands cleaning her own table on the other end of the tent. Brena squints and realizes that the one on their own is Feydra. 'Need to avoid Feydra.' Brena walks in and grabs a bucket and wash rag off the far end of the table. She makes her way to the group of three cleaning off the rightmost table. She approaches slowly, leaning in trying to catch their conversation.

"Have you had duty with that Feydra girl?" The red eyed woman asks.

"No, today's my first. I usually serve Frenden Gallblight." The hazel eyed one responds.

"Ooh I don't hear much about Frenden, anything you can spare me to put a stopper on this boredom?" The red eyed woman asks.

The hazel eyed woman frowns then her eyes open wide.

"I heard one night that he hired a prostitute outside of Brikin Burg, and they said she left and when she asked the prostitute why she said that he couldn't get hard." The hazel eyed one says.

They all chuckle under their breaths.

“Ooh, that's good, that's really good.” The red eyed one says.

“Why do you ask about Feydra?” The hazel eyed woman asks.

“She has the dennish look about her.” The green eyed one responds.

“That would explain a few things.” The hazel eyed woman says.

“Explain what?” The green eyed one asks.

“I heard she is sneaking into the prince's tent at night.” The hazel eyed one says.

Brena Leans in too close and the three women quiet. Brena turns her gaze onto Feydra. As soon as she sees Feydra stand from her table her stomach starts to boil and twist. Brena sees her newly cleaned curls so vividly now. They are blond like hers, but they are neater, and more luscious. She is skinnier too. Everything about her makes her look like a porcelain doll. Feydra goes back to scrubbing the table but leaves her bucket precariously balanced on the edge of the table. Brena casually walks over to Feydra's table, then she turns to the other ladies who meet her gaze. As soon as Feydra passes under the slop bucket, Brena tips it over. The slop bucket lands on top of Feydra. Brena starts laughing, and then the other girls pick up. Like a symphony of hyenas they all cackle at Feydra who now sits in a puddle food refuse. Brena scurries back to the other table.

“Didn't know you had it in you new girl.” The red eyed one says.

“She is a dennish slut, any good Aurican lady would have done the same.” Brena says.

This starts the laughing anew, until the soldier peels open the tent flap and they immediately all go silent. He pans his gaze about the tent, then his eyes catch on Feydra who is sitting on the floor.

“Get back to work.” The soldier says.

Feydra scrambles back to her feet and continues cleaning the tables. It is a herculean effort, but the women swallow their laughter and work. The soldier closes the tent flap, and after a few moments the women restart the conversation.

“I like you new girl, what did you say your name was?” The red girl says.

“I didn’t, but anyway my name is Genna.” Brena says.

“Is that name southron?” The hazel one asks.

“I knew a lady who was named that. She was from around Crooked Foot bay.”
The green eyed one says.

‘Shit,’

“No, I am actually from Whitefall.” Brena says.

‘Good enough.’

“Whitefall, you from the city proper?” The red eyed one asks.

“No, my family is from a small town outside the city,” Brena says.

“Where is Broun’s cross?” The red eyed one asks.

‘Denwill street, frokhead, Brouns Cross!’

“When you take Denwill to frokhead, you take a turn into Broun’s cross.” Brena says.

“Who sells the best hot pie in the city?” The red eyed one asks.

“No one, the hot pies are dreadful, can never get proper beef anywhere.” Brena says.

“Ha I knew it! You have the look of a city girl about you, but can’t be too careful, Denlanders are abound you see.” The red eyed one says, then points to Feydra.

Brena turns to Feydra and sees a couple tears welling up in the corners of her eyes. For a second Brena pauses, but then she scowls. ‘There will be more where that came from Dennish filth.’ Brena turns back and rejoined the conversation.

“So, new girl, what detail are you assigned to. Never seen you around here?” The red eyed one asks.

“I am a servant to sir Windmen.” Brena says.

“Ah, a soft position for a soft lass.” The red eyed one says.

Brena grins.

“Not too soft, sir Windmen is hard as a rock everytime I leave him.” Brena says.

All the girls start laughing.

“You’ve got spirit, actually I have been looking for someone like you. Ever heard of the marshall’s club?” The red eyed one asks.

“No.” Brena answers.

“Go to the northwest, you'll find a tent flying the banner of Blacksky. Go inside if you're interested.” The red eyed one says.

Brena nods, then the soldiers ducks through the tent flap.

“Mess call ladies, those tables better be clean.” The soldier says.

The soldier walks in perusing the tables, and the red eyed servant winks at Brena. Brena winks back. Once the soldier finishes looking at the tables he bids waves his hands. Everyone starts walking out of the tent, but before Brena gets out of the vicinity she notices that Feydra did not follow. She turns around and sees that the soldier is talking to Feydra. She starts shaking then nods and walks out of the other side of the tent. ‘Probably just propositioned her, and now she's off like a fox on the hunt.’ Brena turns back to walking back to sir Windmen’s tent. Brena walks in and sees that Aleiri is sitting in the corner knitting a hold in a dress.

“Is that for sir Windmen’s daughter?” Brena asks.

“Yes,” Aleiri responds.

“She told me to do that.” Brena says.

“Well, I finished all the other chores, and you were gone, so I just got started.”

Aleiri says.

“Gimme that.” Brena says.

Brena snatches the dress from Aleiri and inspects the sitch work.

“You are trying to mend with a cross stitch, you need to do a double back.” Brena says.

Aleiri scoffs, and plops onto the floor next to Brena. Her face softens and looks at Brena.

“I am sorry about earlier today, that was unkind.” Aleiri says.

“You should be sorry, but I did get a tip that may just help me see who we came here for.” Brena says.

“What is that?” Aleiri asks.

“There is a marshals club that is meeting, and I was invited to apply to accompany the men.” Brena says.

Aleiri scowls.

“Don’t go to that.” Aleiri says.

Brena scowls.

“Why?” Brena asks.

“Just don’t okay.” Aleiri says.

Brena scowls.

“You don’t want me to see my love, do you.” Brena says.

“What?” Aleiri asks.

“I see the way you look at me, the times you grab me in my sleep. I’m not as stupid and as naive as you think I am.” Brena says.

Aleiri successfully hides a blush.

“What are you talking about?” Aleiri asks.

“Admit it!” Brena yells.

“Is this about earlier today?” Aleiri asks.

“No it isn't, and I am going no matter what you say.” Brena says.

Brena finishes the stitches quickly and jumps up, then walks out of the tent.

“Wait!” Aleiri yells.

Brena ignores Aleiri pleas as she walks out of the tent towards the northwest end of the camp. As the sun gets lower in the sky Brena inspects each tent, the farther she gets from the center of camp the more she sweats. By the time the light is a deep orange and the moon is in the sky Brena finally spots a tent flying the Blacksky Banner. From under the tent candle light seeps out like a malformed tongue of a frog. Brena peels open the red tent flap and walks in.

The tent is not large nor small, just enough to comfortably fit six people laying across. The only light in the tent comes from a silver candelabra sitting on an oak wood table. The light flickers causing more or less of the tent to be revealed at a time. Unilluminated corners are so dark they seem to stretch into infinity, like looking into a sky with no stars. Brena can feel something in the corner of the room, a figure distorting the darkness, but there is not enough movement to be certain. What she can make out is the old lady sitting on a stool next to the table. Her white hair cascades off her head spilling onto the table in long silky strands. In front of her is a sheaf of papers, in one wrinkled hand she has a quill in the other a long pipe that reaches all the way from the table top

to her mouth. She turns to face Brena and places down her quill. Brena holds in a gasp, she could not be older than one and twenty.

“What do you need, girl?” The old woman asks.

‘Her voice is smoother than silk, richer than chocolate.’ Brena gawps at the woman. The woman frowns.

“Speak girl.” The woman hisses.

“I wanna join the marshall’s club.” Brena spills.

The woman’s frown turns into a grin.

“Spin around girl.” The woman says.

Brena awkwardly twirls around.

“What do you think?” The woman asks to the darkness.

Emerging from the darkness a tall handsome man looks Brena up and down. He is wearing a blue and black doublet matching his house colors. His figure is athletic, but slim.

“She’ll certainly do, besides its not like I have much choice. You have come at a very opportune time...” The man pauses.

“Brena.” Brena says.

“Alleric, so you are interested in the marshall’s club?” Alleric asks.

“Yes.” Brena responds.

Alleirc circles her like a vulture.

“Do you understand what that entails?” Alleric asks.

Brena frowns.

“Yes.” Brena says.

Alleric smiles in a toothy grin, revealing his sharp canines.

“Well, then Brena, meet me tomorrow morning outside this tent, and I will be sure to show you a good time.” Alleric says.

Brena nods, Brena makes a move to walk out the tent, but she hesitates. Alleric catches the small movement.

“Do you need an escort?” Alleric says.

“No, I just don’t want to head back to my tent.” Brena says.

“Why is that?” Alleric asks.

“I have a conflict with the servant I am working with.” Brena states.

“Oh, well I know a place you can stay, just follow me.” Alleric says.

Brena nods, and follows Alleric out of the tent. Alleric and Brena walk down the tented corridors. Brena turns to Alleric, but can’t seem to speak.

“You want to ask me something, so go ahead.” Alleric says.

“That woman in there, who is she?” Brena asks.

“You’ve never heard of Old Willa?” Alleric asks.

Brena shakes her head.

“Well as she tells it she was cursed by a sorcerer, because she rejected his advances, but the story I know is that she fell in love with a youth much younger than herself. Fearing rejection she went to a sorcerer and begged him to bring her youth back, or at least her once famed beauty. The sorcerer accepted the deal, and gave her youth back to her. She rushed to her love, and the day they were married, but the next day in their wedding bed the man turned around and found she was nearly decrepit, all except her perfect face.” Alleric says.

“Is that true?” Brena asks.

“I have no idea, but it sure makes a good story, so I choose to believe it.” Alleric says.

Brena turns contemplating the story. Before she can come to any true revelations Alleric grabs her shoulder and leads her into an opulent tent. The tables have gold filigree in their linings and beautifully embroidered carpets cover the tent from back to front. In the center is a large feather bed covered in silken sheets.

“Whose tent is this?” Brena asks.

“Never mind that, just know you can stay the night, and don’t forget meet me in the morning.” Alleric says.

Brena nods excitedly, then she rushes and plunges face first into the mattress. Alleric looks down on her and smiles, then leaves the tent. The mattress makes her think of home, and through a small slit in the side of the tent she can see the stars. She starts counting, and she finally gets a true full night's rest.