

## Chapter 11

Gerard grabs Ealyn's shoulders and starts shaking her.

"We have to go." Gerard says.

Ealyn shoots out of bed. Gerard with two saddle bags slung over his shoulder pushes her out of the cave. Ealyn stumbles out into the pond with Gerard and Rycard at her back. They run from the entrance of the cave deep into the woods. The sun slowly peeks over the horizon bathing everyone in its golden glow.

"I think this is far enough." Gerard says.

Ealyn and Gerard stop, Ealyn grabs one of Gerard saddle bags. She rummages through it and grabs her medication. She unstoppers it and pours it down her throat. She puts the empty vial back in the bag then slings it back over her shoulder.

"So, what's the plan?" Gerard asks.

"At midday the sorcerers are going to draw the army's attention, and we rush for crystal falls." Ealyn says.

"When we get to crystal falls?" Gerard asks.

"We meet with them, and I fulfill my end of the bargain." Ealyn says.

"Then what?" Gerard asks.

“We can take a ferry along the crystal rapids to Wendwood, then we can walk to castle Talltree.” Ealyn says.

Gerard nods.

“It will work,” He says.

Ealyn shivers.

“It has to.” Ealyn says.

Gerard and Ealyn sit in a spot between three trees. The foliage of the three trees keep the small spot in the forest completely shaded, only letting small slivers of light through. Rycard sits between Ealyn and Gerard, his head planted in front of him. Ealyn and Gerard sit in complete silence occasionally darting their head towards the a gap in the foliage.

“Still a little while till midday.” Ealyn says.

Gerard nods, and they both sit staring at sticks on the ground.

“You want to play a game.” Gerard asks.

“What is it?” Ealyn asks.

“It is a game of pretend. I give you a place and a person and you have to tell me how they die either by murder or circumstance.” Gerard says.

“What a morbid pursuit.” Ealyn responds.

“I would play it with my men. Often they would just play it to contrive ways to kill commanders we despised. Maybe not the best game for polite company.” Gerard says.

Gerard sulks.

“The red wastes, a white priest.” Ealyn says.

“Well that’s easy. The white priest would die from any sort of monster or the toxic wind or water. I imagine him on the brink of dying of thirst finding a small pond and drinking from it. Only to die from some wasting disease in the water.” Gerard says.

“Oooh, dark. Do me.” Ealyn says.

“Lord Goldragon and Denland.” Gerard says.

“I think that he would die of starvation since there were no sweets in the immediate area.” Ealyn says.

They both laugh.

“But I hate to be so conventional, but the denlanders would murder him for his flaxen hair.” Ealyn says.

“You can do better than that.” Gerard says.

“While searching high and low for anything his sensitive palate could eat, or delicate tongue could drink he stumbled on a beast of a bear. Since the denlanders have so much untamed wild forests I suspect they might have beasts to match the forest's wild nature. So the bear would rip him to shreds, then wear his face and pretend to be him. Coming back to the south, and ruling better than he.” Ealyn says.

Gerard and Ealyn laugh.

“You got it.” Gerard says.

“Uh, a bard and the giant cities.” Ealyn says.

Gerard looks up through the foliage.

“Its time.” Gerard says.

Ealyn’s face sobers. She and Gerard get up and walk out of the forest.

“So, we need to make a run for the west, keep me in sight, if you need to stop yell to stop, but as soon as we get beyond the border of the forest we cannot stop running got it.” Gerard says.

Ealyn nods.

“Ok go.” Gerard says.

They both take off running westwards. Suddenly a flash of light comes beyond the edge of the forest. The ground shakes violently. Distant screams echo across the forest floor. Then they make it to the forest edge. Gerard stops and stares forwards, Ealyn stops as well. They both look at the field in front of them with wide eyes.

The field is covered in burned corpses and eviscerated corpses. Many soldiers are screaming looking around wildly. Another explosion goes off in a contingent of soldiers. The soldiers scream and start to scatter. Another explosion and the soldiers scatter. Ealyn and Gerard take off through the clearing. Both run along with the scattering soldiers. Someone is screaming orders. Gerard tackles into a soldier in his path. Ealyn stops for a second while Gerard gets his bearing back, then they continue.

An explosion goes off on Ealyn’s right. Rycard slumps to the ground as a piece of dark metal shrapnel embeds itself in his right leg. Ealyn stops.

“Run!” Gerard yells.

Ealyn runs as Rycard writhes in pain on the ground. Tears stream from Ealyn’s eyes as they run. Ealyn and Gerard make it to a small river. Gerard jumps in and Ealyn stands still face ashen white.

Gerard turns to face where Ealyn is looking. Brena is standing with a similar ashen complexion staring at Ealyn. Her wet hair is plastered across her face, and soaking the dress beneath. Ealyn takes a step towards Brena, and she stumbles back

falling onto the floor. Ealyn takes another step and she screams. Ealyn runs to her, but then Alyk steps out of the forest.

Ealyn freezes in place and starts shaking. Gerard jumps out of the water. Alyk draws his sword.

“It’s a sorcerer’s apparition, Brena, do not let them ensorcel you with their beguiling tricks.” Alyk says.

Brena scrambles behind Alyk. Gerard explodes from the water and leaps at Alyk. In two moves Alyk disarms Gerard’s white sword and sends him to the ground. Alyk raises his sword high, then a light brighter than the sun fills the bathes everything in white. Alyk covers his eyes and stumbles back. Gerard scrambles for his sword. Ealyn turns around to face Derk who has a large black staff with a glass ball at the top.

“Inquisitors!” Alyk yells.

A sound louder than thunder deafens Ealyn for a second, when she recovers the forest is filled with smoke. She turns to Derk who has a hole the size of a white coin in his chest. He opens his mouth and blood gushes out, and he falls forwards. The smoke clears revealing Alyk and the inquisitors, a smile plastered across his face.

“I know you are wearing her visage, but you could never fool me. Once I capture you and extract every last sin that you have committed against Broun.” Alyk licks his lips.

“I will send you to the white order to be burned.” Alyk says.

Gerard raises his sword, but the inquisitor steps in and wrenches his sword from his grip. Ealyn with staff in hand looks at the scene. Ealyn looks down at the staff as Alyk walks forwards his eyes growing more manic with every step he takes. Ealyn sees a small inline compartment in the staff. She presses it and a small metallic box pops out. The

box starts warming up. Ealyn grabs the box and throws it at Alyk and the inquisitors.

Alyk's eyes go wide. The small box hits the ground for a second nothing happens.

Alyk laughs then continues walking forward. Then the box starts to glow red hot. Gerard wrenches his way out of the inquisitors grip and runs for Ealyn. He tackles her to the ground as the box explodes. Shrapnel shoots in all directions. Brena, behind one of the inquisitors, is protected. Alyk's gets a small piece embedded in the right of his face. He screams as the metal so hot lights his skin on fire. The inquisitors silently writhe as they burst into flame and crumple to the ground. Ealyn dives into the river as Brena runs to Alyk's side. She pulls the debris from his cheek and plunges his face into the water. She starts sobbing over his body as Ealyn and Gerard swim across the bank.

The white water pushes them along. Ealyn tries to hold onto Gerard's hand, but the current forces her to let go. Ealyn struggles against the rapids, ragged rocks rip into her flesh, leaving a slim trail of red as she is pushed forward. She continues to struggle against the water until she washes up on the bank covered in deep gashes. Her blood soaks into the sand around her turning it a deep crimson.

As Ealyn's vision darkens; she is able to make out Gerard standing over her. His face is panicked, a couple tears streaming down his cheeks. He screams something unintelligible then everything goes dark.