

Traveling Adventures

MEMORIES OF SALT AND STONE DELETED SCENE

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This scene takes place while Ronan and Helia are traveling toward the Luminary Mountains. I took it out because their journey to the mountains was dragging a bit, but it has some Ronan and Helia bonding that I'm happy I get to share with you!

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It's close to dusk when we reach a suitable place to camp, and Helia shrugs off her new pack with a groan. I smile in sympathy, remembering my first few days traveling with weight between my shoulder blades and straps cutting into my armpits. I purposefully packed her new bag light, hoping to ease her into it...but that didn't mean it would be painless.

"No fire?" she asks as I hand her some of the salted fish the old knife collector traded us.

"It's too open here," I explain. "There are too many people close by."

She frowns at that, but doesn't argue. And though I expect her to ask more questions as we settle in, she stays silent. *Trust comes slowly for this one.* The stars have barely begun winking into view when Helia lays down, asleep in moments. *Strong, but not inexhaustible.* I'll have to be careful with her in the coming days. She isn't used to life on the road as I am.

I lean back against my pack, watching the familiar stars and wondering if the dreams will come again. It's strange, how I long for them and dread them at the same time. If asked, I'm not sure I could say which is stronger. But it doesn't matter, I suppose. If they come, they come. I can't avoid sleep forever. With that resolve, I settle closer to the ground and close my eyes, as the grass waving in the wind turns to the sound of water on stone.

It's too soon when I'm ripped away from the sound of those waves. I'm drawn out of the dream by cold, by unease, though I find myself clawing to stay. *No, please. I haven't seen him yet...at least let me see his face.* But whatever has disturbed my sleep doesn't listen, and I open my eyes to gray dawn and dew-covered earth. A short distance away, the sounds of hooves beating the ground sets a steady rhythm for the crickets. *Soldiers.*

I'm up in a moment, shaking Helia awake and stuffing our belongings into packs without heed to organization. Without my ear to the ground, I can't hear them approaching, but I know they're there. I didn't take us far enough off the road to hide from a mounted company, especially if they're searching.

"What's going on?" Helia whispers, swaying on her feet. I grab her pack and then her arm, tugging her away.

"Someone is coming," I hiss. "Soldiers, I think."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Neither of us have identification."

I don't know if she understands the significance of that, but I can't stop to explain it further. She stumbles in a hole, and I bounce on my feet as I help her regain her balance. A search of the horizon shows someone in the distance, a group too large to be anything but a patrol. *But can they see us?* I drag Helia downhill, into a small gully that ends with a drop off half my height. I release Helia and jump, landing awkwardly on the sandy bottom. A thump beside me tells me Helia jumped too. *Perhaps she does trust me.*

Crouched low, I turn and search for the soldiers. I can't see them, though I can hear them as they chatter in the early morning, likely trying to stay awake. I think they slow as they pass our camping spot. When their voices begin to fade away, I release a breath I didn't know I was holding. But I don't move. The sun is sending rays of gold across the mountains by the time I feel safe enough to turn to Helia and offer an explanation.

"In Offen, citizens and travelers are required to carry identification proving who they are and their right to be on these roads. I gave mine back to Emil. I'm assuming you don't have one?"

Helia shook her head. "Calbhach took it. What would happen if they caught us without them?"

"That depends," I say slowly. "You might be able to say you were separated from your parents, and they'd find a way to reunite you. If they thought you were an orphan, they'd stick you in an orphanage or with a family looking for an extra set of hands."

"And if they caught *you*?"

"At best, they'd assign me a few months of manual labor as punishment. But if they found out I'm an unregistered Emyr...I'm not even sure. It wouldn't be pleasant."

I resist a shiver at the thought of that fate, knowing that for me it would be even worse. If they found out my *name*, if they knew that I'd once belonged to the Luminaries...my exploits beside my old family were well known enough to draw retribution. I'd be lucky if they only had me executed.

"What do we do now?"

Helia's question drags me from my dark thoughts, and I look to the sky before answering.

"Back to the road," I decide. "They were headed the opposite direction as us, and patrols don't usually overlap. I imagine they're looking for a place to take shelter in case that storm lets loose."

Helia looks to the clouds with distaste, and I smile as I stand, handing her the smaller pack. She takes it with a considering look, and I wait for her question.

“What do we do if they catch us?”

I take a deep breath. “If we’re stopped by a patrol, our story will be that I’ve taken you captive. Don’t *ever* try to run.”

“Couldn’t you just sing to them?”

My smile is bitter, and I turn toward the road to hide it from her. “That wouldn’t work long enough for us to get away.”

“I don’t like that plan. It leaves you at their mercy.”

Now I do look down at her, smiling genuinely as we step onto the road. “Then we won’t get caught.”