

Chapter 13

I left Anders still sleeping and snuck out of the loft, heading down the path to the widows. My heart is in shambles, but there is work to be done. I knock on the door and the woman I helped before looks surprised to see me, but she leads me in and to the table, placing food in front of me.

“Thank you,” I tell her with a weak smile, tears welling in my eyes again.

She smiles sadly at me and takes the seat next to me, pulling me into a hug and letting me cry on her shoulder. She smooths my hair and rubs my arm, but she doesn't let me go until I straighten myself. She gently pushes the food towards me and stands, rubbing my back once more.

“Inga,” she tells me, touching her shoulder. She moves her hand to my shoulder gently.

“Eleanor,” I tell her through my tears.

I slowly eat the food, having no appetite after the early morning tragedy but not wanting to reject their generous hospitality. After I've eaten, I stand and walk toward where the pots were the day before, but today, they're gone. She comes behind me and places her arm over my shoulder, leading me to the door.

I guess this means that I'm not helping today. I wonder what this means for Anders' gift, but I don't think I can care too much about that now. I walk back towards the village, looking at the owers opening up. I watched someone die. I watched her husband mourn her in a way that felt like my soul would shatter. But the sun still rose, and the owers still bloom. It feels wrong for there to be so much beauty when there was such a tragedy.

I'm near the village when I spot Anders walking towards me frantically. There's so much relief on his face when he sees me and he runs towards me.

“Ost Mìn,” he cries, wrapping his arms around me. He looks down at me and I can tell he's confused, but he has no way to ask his questions. Instead, he takes my hand and leads me towards the barn in the center of the village. It's quieter than normal, no hustle and bustle that usually occurs.

“Catherine,” he calls and she appears from inside the barn, looking at the both of us.

She looks at me with a sad smile. “When someone dies, everyone mourns,” she says. “He was scared when he woke and you were gone. He was so terried that I had to tell him where you were, but I didn't tell him why.”

I chew on my lip. I didn't realize. Now it makes sense why they were not washing their laundry. “I didn't know,” I tell her softly and she nods. Anders reaches up. Gently tugging my lip from my teeth.

“I would have told you, but I didn't know until he got here,” she tells me. “What do you want me to tell him?”

Anders speaks up and says something to her rather gruy. “He wants to know why you were there. What business you had on a day like today.”

I sigh, looking up at him. “You can tell him about the arrangement I have with them.”

She says something to him and he looks surprised, looking down at me and saying something.

“He wants to know why.”

“I wanted to give you a wedding gift. It's important here, and I wanted to be able to keep your traditions,” I tell him while looking up at him.

Catherine tells him what I've said and his face softens. He reaches up, cupping my face with his large hand, and says something.

“You're his gift,” she tells me. “He doesn't want you to have to work for others. He's going to take care of your every need. He says things won't always be as hard as they are right now.”

“It's important to me,” I say softly. I want to tell him that I need to do this, because I know, in the end, he'd mourn me the way the man last night did for his wife. I know that, to the very depth of my soul. Except I don't say that, because that isn't something I want Catherine to hear. It's not something that I want her to tell him for me. I want to tell him myself, in words he understands because I, too, would mourn him the same way. So I settle for that and vow to tell him myself once I know the words to do so.

The two speak a bit, but he never takes his eyes off me as his thumb gently caresses my cheek.

“I told him how many days, though it may change now with today,” she tells me. “He said it's alright if you really feel that you need to do this.”

“Yes,” I tell him, but in his language and he smiles so brightly at me. I realize now, after this conversation, that there's nothing I want more than to be able to speak with him myself and I decide that no matter how much work it is, I will learn the language while he's away this time. When he returns, I will be able to talk to him, to tell him anything.

“He wants to know if you are alright after last night,” she says softly.

I chew on my lip, not sure how much I want to tell him, but he deserves to know why I am so upset. “My mom died giving birth, as did my sister. It was really hard to be there for it last night. It was just Father and me.”

He pulls me to him, wrapping his arms around me. “He says you don't need to go back.”

“No,” I say quickly, pulling back to look up at him. “I want to. I need to. I want to be able to help. I want to nd ways to prevent this. ”