

Village Head 79

Chapter 79 Privileged Tala

After trekking along the clay road, I arrived at the village Chief's compound. This time, the guards at the entrance were the same as yesterday. They recognized me and, with a sense of familiarity, I handed over my wooden chip. After promptly examining it, they returned it to me, granting me entry into the compound.

As I approached the hut, my eyes immediately caught sight of the gathering outside. It was no surprise to see that some of the others had already arrived, but what I hadn't expected was the full turnout of men and women I had met during the first day of the awakening ceremony. And there, amidst the crowd, stood the village chief and his messenger, Thak, with his daughter standing closely by his side.

I furrowed my brows, racking my brain for her name, but it remained elusive. It dawned on me that she had vanished on the first day of our awakening, just before the majestic astray crystalized tree materialized. What perplexed me was that Thak had told us she would take part in this year's ceremony. But as the confusion threatened to overwhelm me, I dismissed it from my mind, realizing I hadn't even noticed her absence until now. So, why should I start caring about her whereabouts now?

Without warning, her head snapped in my direction, and our eyes locked. Her narrowed gaze suggested that she thought I had been staring at her. I quickly averted my gaze, pretending not to notice her. Instead, my attention was drawn to an object of unknown origin, neatly arranged on a platform. As I approached, I squinted at the round black spherical globe that was being held up by a long stick. Even though I had no clue what it was, I could sense its significance. It was positioned prominently in the midst of the teachers, with Fiona standing close by, lending it an air of importance.

Shortly after, the village chief stepped forward and cleared his throat, a hush fell over the crowd, and all eyes turned to him. He surveyed us before beginning his speech. "I trust that you have all arrived on time for the final day of your awakening ceremony," he said, pausing briefly as if expecting a response. When none came, he turned to Fiona and added, "It appears that your students aren't as brave as you led me to believe. Stage fright in the presence of such a small audience is hardly a commendable trait." As I looked around, I could see the evidence of nervousness in the form of small beads of sweat on their foreheads, indicating the weight of tension they were carrying.

Although I could have easily responded to his question, I found myself in a less-than-sociable mood, particularly with the palpable awkwardness pervading the air. Fiona heaved a deep, disappointed sigh before scanning our numbers and confirming to the village chief, "Everyone is present." He nodded in response before turning his attention back to us. "Excellent. Then let us begin at once," he declared, adding with urgency, "Stand facing the black crystal in a straight line, all of you."

As soon as the village chief finished speaking, the group promptly formed a straight line that extended towards the mysterious black crystal orb. While positioning myself on the line, I noticed Sura and Ursa, but it was too late as Sura had already taken her place at the front while Ursa managed to stand just in front of me. However, my surprise was amplified when I saw Thak's daughter assertively positioning herself at the very front of the line, thereby increasing our numbers to seventeen.

A fleeting thought crossed my mind, wondering if Thak's daughter enjoyed some privileges due to her father's position as the village chief's messenger. Because it seemed apparent that she had certain advantages she could leverage.

Once we were in line, the village chief continued, his voice carrying a sense of seriousness. "With the black crystal, we will test and determine who among you is capable of unlocking their inner strength, so that we may know where you belong, as this is the final day of your awakening ceremony," he said, pausing to let his words sink in.

He then added, "All you need to do is place your right hand on the black crystal and channel your gift into it. If you haven't awakened your gift yet, simply allow the energy from the crystal to flow into you. Once you're done, remove your hands and let your teachers take care of the rest." His eyes scanned over each one of us, and he asked with authority, "Do you all understand?"

A collective nod of silent agreement rippled through the group as the village chief spoke. "Let us begin then," he said with a commanding tone before he strode away to stand at the side with Thak.

One of the men stepped forward with a rigid expression and declared, 'The first person should come forward.' The anticipation was tangible as a boy, who was first in line, eagerly approached, stopping just inches away from the glistening black crystal. With a nod of approval from the man, the boy extended his right hand and gingerly placed it on the crystal's smooth surface. Within moments, the crystal began to emit a dazzling, milky white light that was so radiant, it could be seen by everyone, even under the blazing sun.

After a few tense seconds, the blinding light slowly dissipated, and the boy carefully withdrew his hand from the black crystal. Even though I had a prime spot to watch, their actions were hidden from my view. However, I could see that the man's eyes were locked onto the crystal as if they were scrutinizing it for something specific.

As we waited with bated breath, a full minute passed until the man's voice suddenly boomed loudly, "One star!" The pronouncement echoed loudly in the silence, causing a few disappointed sighs from the village chief and the teachers. The man's subsequent voice was much quieter, almost regretful as he continued, "Unfortunately, you are incapable of awakening your inner strength."