

BORN

FROM

FIRE

ASHLEY SPARRE

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To my husband.

Thank you for always believing in me.

PALYSIAN

ELVEN
LANDS

THE GREAT DIVIDE

FLYLIN

KNODELL

SPIRA

SILVERVEIL

SO WAS
LAURENT

Woody was here ♡



property
of
Mina



CHAPTER

1

Pebbles loosened under Mira's boot, falling into the chasm below. Stepping closer to the edge of the cliff, she could barely make out the hawk-like details of the massive boulder guarding the base of the stairs.

She tracked each step as they snaked up the cliff slide, gradually getting smaller, until eventually disappearing over the top. She had to be on the sixtieth flight—possibly the seventieth.

Mira shrugged.

Either way, she was definitely over halfway up by now.

Stretching to reach the next uneven step, her leg wobbled under her weight, threatening to give out at any moment.

The top of the cliff needed to come faster.

When they took this job, every bit of research she did leading up to their departure made Ardreth sound like a simple and elegant elven city. It conveniently failed to mention the inadvertent struggle to climb one hundred flights of stairs, up a cliff, just to reach the entrance.

Stopping for a second to catch her breath and retie her braid, Mira beheld the thick canopy above. Each monstrous tree, placed seamlessly in the forest, hid any potential streak of sunlight that longed to reach the grass below.

She loosened a couple strands of dark brown hair from her braid—her fingers lingering on her ears. If it wasn't for their pointed tips, she would be able to pass as a human.

Despite being slightly taller than the average female, there was nothing else about her that radiated elf. Instead, the pointed ears were a constant reminder of the *soiled* blood that ran inside her—something the townspeople would never let her forget.

She rested her hands along the hilt of her dual blades set at each hip—her muscles relaxing against the familiar coolness of their leather. Surveying the depth of the forest, her eyes hovered over the soft blue glow emitted from the plant life—softening her breath. Despite the intense exercise, she had to admit that Ardreth Forest was peaceful.

Leaning back against the cliff, Mira wanted to take in every little detail, from the floral vines wrapping around the tree trunks to the smallest lightning bugs twinkling throughout the forest—their yellow light contrasting the blue atmosphere.

The tip of her mouth curved up.

If they didn't have a deadline for this job, she would be inspecting every unique detail to sketch and document in her journal by now.

Sighing, she lifted off the wall. A mental picture will have to do.

Shaking her head, Mira reached for the next step, ignoring the ache in her knees as she lifted herself up. Now would've been the

best time for the elf part of her to take charge today. These long strides were not made for a human.

She placed her foot on the next deteriorated step, careful not to put all her weight on the cracked edges. On the plus side, at least she wore her favorite hiking boots. They may have a few tears here and there, but they still did the job.

"How are you doing back there, Faye?" A deep voice chimed from flights above.

The hint of laughter behind her last name released a swarm of butterflies into her stomach. Judging by the distance of his voice, her partner had to be close to the top.

"Just fantastic...Remind me when we get home, I need to add cardio to my nonexistent workout routine!" Mira yelled back, bending her neck up towards the top of the cliff.

Her heart quickened as her gaze met his. Even from a distance, she could still make out the sparkle behind Laurent's dark eyes.

She was never one to find humans attractive, but there was something about his long, tawny hair that cut off at his shoulders and his neat, bearded jawline that made her heart quicken. His athletic physique in those tight trousers and shirt didn't help either.

"I'll make a note for you," Laurent laughed, turning his attention back towards the stairs.

Mira threw a thumbs up, her eyes following him as he climbed the rest of the steps effortlessly. Somehow, he had to have elf in his blood too.

The butterflies turned into a pit in her stomach.

Only friends, she reminded herself. She and Laurent can only be friends—business partners. Since the day they first met, her best friend had eyes on him before Mira had a chance to. But that didn't mean she couldn't look at him—did it?



Reaching the last step, Mira collapsed, using the momentum to roll onto her back. Who would have thought she would ever make it—not her.

The scraping of metal next to her was dulled by her labored breathing.

“Took you long enough,” Laurent chuckled, sitting cross-legged in the glowing grass. His sword glistened under the blue light as he continued to sharpen it.

Mira gave him an obscene gesture before focusing on the swaying trees above—her breath returning to normal.

A couple blades of grass fell onto her head, landing on her cheeks and forehead. Laurent looked down at her, his eyes crinkling against a smile that should have been too wide for his face.

“Next time...I’ll grow wings...and fly up here,” Mira said in between breaths. “I thought those steps were going to be the death of me.”

“I thought so too. Well, my death of course.” Laurent pretended to grip his heart before walking out of view. “I thought I was going to die from old age up here by the time you reached the top.”

Mira gently sat herself up, throwing a glare at Laurent. The blades of grass fell into her lap. “Glad I got up here just in time then. There is no way I would be partners with an old man.” She raised an eyebrow, pointing towards the cliff. “Even just the thought of carrying you back down those steps...I don’t see myself doing that...ever.”

A devious smile stretched across his face, lighting a spark in her chest. “Yes, you would.”

Mira rolled her eyes, trying to hold in the smile fighting to escape, but her body failed her. Yes, she would.

Pushing herself off the ground, her eyes trailed to the area behind Laurent—her jaw dropping to the ground.

Etched into the cliff wall, a massive arched two-door gate towered over them. She could barely take in the whole thing without tilting her head back.

Scorch marks covered the left door while the right was splintered in half. Faint vine-like patterns lined the surface of the doors, encircling three eight-point stars arcing in the center. She squinted at the trim above the frame. Covered in a thin layer of smog, a handful of runes were carved deep into the stone. Parts of the characters were indistinguishable.

Mira clicked her teeth. Something powerful must have blasted through the entrance.

Taking a step forward, her eyes didn't sway from the symbols as she tried to swallow the lump forming in her throat. All the work the artist put into each detail, the time they spent, and the history it once told—all gone.

"It never seems to get easier," Mira whispered, reaching into her satchel and pulling out a journal and pen. Her fingers traced the worn leather of the book before opening to a clean page. A few loose sheets attempted to escape.

After ten years of documenting and researching, the journal has seen better days, but no matter how many times she was told to buy a new one, she couldn't bring herself to do it. It was the only tangible item she had from her mother.

Her hand scribbled down the runes on top of the arch, taking note of each possible character the indistinguishable ones could be.

Mira gazed back up at the arched doors, trying to imagine what they would have looked like before—no doubt utterly divine.

Mira's eyebrows furrowed, gripping the journal harder in her hands. "Elves value innovation, art, and intellect. It's hard to believe they're the reason the human lands are dying." She pointed towards the detailed vines. "Even looking at the remains of these doors, they seem to be one with nature and harmony. I can't imagine them killing the earth just for revenge."

The scent of oak and rain washed over her, calming her muscles as Laurent stepped next to her. "I know, but looking at what my kind has also done, I wouldn't blame the elves one bit for retribution," he sighed, his eyes trailing over the destruction. "I guess everyone has a breaking point."

Mira returned to her journal, sketching the next rune. "I'm just glad we can look past their rational arrogance," she said, looking up at Laurent. Her soft smile grew wider. "I love having a *human* best friend."

Before Mira had a chance to blink, Laurent grabbed her journal, lifting it high above her head. A daring look plastered across his face. She wanted to be annoyed, but the butterflies in her stomach had other ideas.

Mira pushed down their flutter as she reached for the journal. Even though she was taller than average height, he still had at least four inches on her—six inches if you didn't count her boots. "I wasn't done documenting tho—"

He lifted a finger, stopping her. "First, we need to find this so-called Morningstar Chest. Then, if we have time, you can document whatever you like. Don't forget we're raiders, not archeologists."

“Correct, but my notes always come in handy later,” Mira reminded him, crossing her arms. She held his stare, waiting for the rebuttal.

The journal was nice to have as a reference. Even in the past, they’ve needed it more times than not. He had no argument.

Laurent shrugged as if acknowledging it too and handed her the journal with a wink.

Mira quickly stuffed it in her satchel and walked towards the chipped door, hoping to hide the heat flooding into her cheeks.

He was right. Their buyers only gave them three days to find the location of the chest and make it back to Silverveil before the last nightfall. After traveling here already took a whole day, they only had today to find it.

Mira ducked through the narrow hole in the gate. She didn’t need to look behind her to know Laurent was close behind. The calmness of her body told her that.

Stepping into the clearing, her eyes widened as she beheld the city before her. “Make that double the cardio when we get back,” she said over her shoulder.

Her legs ached as if acknowledging the hundreds of stone pathways filling the view. Some weaved around trees, while others spiraled up towards the canopy, interconnecting the glass treehouses high above.

A handful of the windows were shattered, though the few intact adorn a light blue glow, mimicking the flora around them. A couple of stone columns holding up the overpasses had cracks along the shaft—giving them a precarious appeal.

“Ardreth, the City of Glass,” Mira whispered, taking in each gorgeous detail of the architecture that was still standing. What it

would have been like to stand in this exact spot a hundred years ago. To experience the life that used to live here.

Glancing over her shoulder, Laurent's eyes lightened to a dark chocolate under the soft glow. His gaze darted between each tree, trying to take in the entire scenery as she did.

"Do you still have the stone from the buyer?" Mira questioned, snapping his attention to her. Hopefully, the stone will have some clue as to what this Morningstar Chest looked like or what exactly it was.

Laurent narrowed his eyebrows, then pulled out a gray rounded stone from his pocket, handing it to her.

Keeping the stone steady in her hands, Mira focused on the continuous heat nestled in the center of her chest and willed it to the palm of her hands. Flames flickered behind the stone, summoning words as if it were transparent.

The only perk of being a half-elf, she guessed.

Her eyes trailed over the message inked into the rock.

Wanted: Morningstar Chest. Deliver by nightfall on the 3rd day. Twisted Tavern, Silverveil. Details: Woodland Elf's Treasure. Navy chest with a crescent moon and sun. UNOPENED. 550 gold coins.

~ The Red Dragon.

Laurent's idea of their bounty assignments being delivered on rocks was genius, but annoying when it came to the amount of detail one can put. On the contrary, it did keep their jobs a secret by mimicking a regular rock. Only fire can reveal the message inside.

Even after years of using this technique, Mira still wondered how Laurent came up with the idea—it was brilliant.

"You know I find it awesome that you can create fire, right?" Laurent muttered, staring down at her hands as if seeing the flames she produced from her palms for the first time.

"I know," Mira said, mustering a smile. Ever since she could remember, she could will flames without a single thought—but to control them once they were out—that was a different skill.

She closed her hands into a fist before the flames increased, simmering them into nothingness.

"Can you pull out the map?" She asked, changing the subject.

Laurent nodded, pulling out a tattered map of Ardreth—one Mira was happily able to *borrow* from their last job. Her chest puffed out slightly as he unrolled it. She knew the map would come in handy eventually.

"Let's start with these two," Mira said, pointing toward the two circled trees. Before they left Silverveil, she analyzed every possible spot on the map where the chest could be. After hours of deliberation and a few beers later, she concluded two trees out of thirty had the highest probability.

One appeared to only have a single entry point facing the center of the city, while the other had a wavy line, indicating a water source, next to its sole entrance.

"Works for me. Do you want to split up, or can I continue to annoy you with my charm?" Laurent teased, stuffing the map back into his bag.

Mira crossed her arms, the corners of her mouth turning upwards. "As you said before, we have a job to do, and we're running out of time. Let's split up, and if we discover anything, press the stone." She motioned to the simple black bracelet around her wrist, then to his.

She was proud of herself when she found it at a market years ago. The shop owner told her all she had to do was cover the small black gem on the bracelet, and the sister gem would glow. It was a steal for the price.

Mira glanced between the direction of the trees. "Nose-goes for the drier tree," she said, quickly lifting her finger and placing it on her nose.

"You can't be serious." Laurent crossed his arms. "Mira, I've seen you fight off creatures four times the size of you, take on that one raider...Asher?...with only a scratch, escape tons of booby-traps...and you're afraid of getting a little wet?"

Mira huffed. "On the contrary, I figured you needed a bath," she said, flipping her braid at him before heading towards her chosen tree. "You're beginning to smell ripe."

It wasn't true, but she sure as Hell wasn't going to tell him that. She needed space before she stupidly admitted that she would much rather have his company.

As she turned the corner, Mira could've sworn she saw Laurent sniff his armpit before disappearing out of sight.