

In her life, there were three things Sophia always knew she could count on. One, was the house was always immaculate, never one particle out of place. Two, her butterflies that floated around her would always be there, no matter what. And three, there would never be a day where her parents would not have at least one fight. That last one always made her sad because from what she could understand from listening in when she shouldn't have been, it was *her* fault. According to her father, they had been a perfectly happy family before she was born and he blamed her mother for how she resembled her so much and for not having her do the climb as all of the rest of them had. Meanwhile, her mother told her father that he hadn't acted like this until after she was born and wished he would go back to being the person he was before then. Sophia never approached them about this of course because they already acted cold around her. Better to deal with the chill than the yelling they gave to one another. At some point as she was growing up, she started playing with the cursed butterflies which only added onto the yelling her parents did but she couldn't bring herself to care at that point. The butterflies were hers, after all.

At some point not long after turning twenty-two, she heard a crashing sound from the other room as she was about to lay down for the night. Startled and thinking someone had broken into their home, she ran to see what was going on, only to stop outside her parents bedroom as she heard them screaming at each other again. Terrified, she retreated and magically locked her door and windows. A few minutes went by and someone tried the handle but when it wouldn't budge, they banged against the door, trying to break it down but it held sturdy. They stopped after several attempts. Sophia did not sleep that night.

The next morning, she left the house early to do some research. The city had a massive library and she knew she could find something there to help her with what she wanted to do.

*If I go all the way down to the Basin and make the climb, maybe that will make them stop fighting,* she thought as she made her way down the road. She still got passing glances, either for the butterfly curse which she still had no idea where it came from or because people found her differences unique and odd enough to be something to stare at. She stopped letting the staring bother her a long time ago.

As she stepped through the threshold into the library where she had spent many of her days, she inhaled the scent of old parchment and relaxed. She had used the place as a hideaway from her parents since she was young enough to walk herself there without getting lost. Saying good-bye to this place was going to hurt but she reminded herself that it would not be forever. Plus, she might find even more libraries on

other layers of the cascades as well! She had read about one on layer three that she was wanting to visit badly, making a mental note to make a pitstop on her way from layer three to four.

The librarian there smiled when he saw her but his smile faltered when he saw that she seemed a bit out of it.

“Are you alright?” he asked. She jumped, having been stuck in her own head.

“Oh, yes, actually, I need help finding something...err or someone,” she started. He gave her a surprised look.

“Since when have you ever needed help finding something?” he asked. She blushed though he was right, she hadn’t asked for help finding anything since she was a child and it was only the one time.

“This...is a little different,” she started. He saw that she was nervous so he stopped joking around with her.

“Whatever you’re looking for, I will help where I can,” he said. She smiled slightly and leaned over to him, not wanting to be overheard.

“I need to get to the Basin, is there some sort of transportation spell I can use to get there? I know it’s very high level magic that’s sealed away and I don’t have the proper paperwork to get into those sections but I’m mostly self taught anyways so I can figure it out with rudimentary scrolls and...” she stopped talking when a shadow fell over. Turning around, she saw a tatsukoi that was taller than anyone she had ever seen before.

“Don’t try it,” he said. She almost started shaking.

“Then how else will I...”

“I know a mage that can get you there but don’t you dare try doing it yourself. There are some magics that trying to be self taught will get yourself dead,” he said. “When do you want to leave?” he asked.

“Tonight if possible,” she said. He gave her a long hard look. “I-I can pay if need be,” she stuttered, wondering if she should even be trusting this man. He eventually nodded.

“Bring twenty gold with you,” he said as he pulled out a card, “and be there at midnight at this address. I’ll be there with the mage,” he said. She smiled at him, thankful she didn’t have to wait as long as she thought she might.

“Thank y-” she said but he was already gone. She whirled back to the librarian who seemed as pale as she felt.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea? I mean, it’s not illegal to charge for those types of things but that was a bit shady,” he warned. Sophia sighed and gave a nervous smile and shrugged.

“What other choice do I have?” she asked and left.

She immediately went home, going in through her window and packed what she thought she’d need. She already had food stashed in her room and gold that she had been saving since she was a kid, always hiding it in various places so that no one would find it. As she went to leave, she could hear her parents screaming at each other again. Before she could talk herself out of it, she wrote a quick note and left it on her table. It read; *Dear mother and father, I don’t want the fighting to continue and I know it’s my fault. I’ll make things right by climbing the falls. I’ll see you again soon! ~ Sophia*

She then left through the same window she came in, magically unlocking the door again as she descended so they could find the note when they came in wondering why she was so quiet as they often did. To kill some time, she went around to different places to buy some extra provisions and other things she thought she might need for the trip. Holding the card in her hand that the man had given her, she decided to head over early.

It took thirty minutes to get there and she was an hour early though she hoped they wouldn’t mind. She knocked on the door which opened immediately and she was ushered in by a strong wind that came from nowhere, closing the door behind her.

“You’re rather early,” said an older voice. The room was very dim until a bunch of candles were lit simultaneously. Sophia blinked until her eyes adjusted and she saw the large tatsukoi from earlier there as well.

“Yes well, I figure it’s better to be early than late,” she said, unsure what else she should say.

“What made you want to risk your neck to get to the Basin?” asked the large tatsukoi. “In trouble with someone? Or trying to get away from someone?” he asked as he leaned non-threateningly against a wall on the other side of the room. When her mouth opened and closed with nothing coming out, he looked away. Slowly, he rose from where he was leaning and walked over to her. “When you climb the falls and you get back here, do not go back to the reasons why you left in the first place. You hear me?” he said in a voice softer and more gentle than she thought possible for him.

“But I-”

“No buts. I promise, it’s going to do nothing but hurt you,” he said. She nodded slightly, not fully understanding what he was saying. Her parents loved her, didn’t they? She never kicked her out, never starved her. That proved they loved her, didn’t it? The large tatsukoi nodded to the mage. “This one’s on me,” he said. The mage shrugged.

“You’ve always had a bleeding heart,” he said and beckoned Sohpie over to an open space. “This is how this will work. I will start the incantation, do NOT say anything or move too much while I am working or some of you may not stay connected. Once you are at the Basin, you are on your own, understand?” he asked, fixing her with a stare that left no room for misunderstandings. She nodded. “Good!” he said as he clapped his hands together. “Be still,” he directed and she did as she was told, clutching her bag. She glanced over at the other tatsukoi.

“Thank you for the help,” she whispered. He only nodded as the mage started the spell. It was a lot of jargon she didn’t understand, a few words here and there that she picked out that she did but other than that, it was something she knew would have taken her far too long to learn. After several moments, she stopped being able to hear him and a mist enveloped her, the next thing she saw when she opened her eyes again was green grass in a field. Looking up, the cascades grew up at a dizzying height, making her disoriented enough that she had to sit down to sort out everything that had happened. She had run away from home, made it to the Basin, was about to start her journey back up to prove to her parents she was worthy and capable but...the man had told her not to go back to her parents. But it wasn’t like he knew that was why she was leaving, he didn’t know anything about her. Still though...the look in his eyes had made her think that maybe he knew more than what he was saying. She shook her head to wipe away her thoughts, holding a hand out for a butterfly that landed without hesitation.

“Well, I guess it’s just you guys and me now,” she said and smiled. Because for the first time in her life, she was free to make her own choices without someone breathing down the back of her neck or yelling about how she screwed everything up.