

Finthick ran his hand over the worn headstone, smiling softly as his other hand held the vibrant bouquet of flowers. The tears were there, but he had long stopped caring about them, having stood in this spot too many times for it to be uncommon. The words were still visible to him, and he read them out loud.

“Here lies Talmeria Rehorn Albrotone; Wife, mother, and fighter till the end.”

He couldn't help the pride that swarmed through him everytime he read those words. It only caused more tears, and soon his eyes were cloudy, fogged by a cloud of tears. He set his hand against the willow tree, gazing up at the drooping branches and leaves, breathing in deeply to try and calm himself, smiling all the way. His fingers began to pick apart the flowers, letting the bright colors fall to the ground, until only a few blooms remained in his hand. These flowers grew only in the caves where his wife and him had wintered when they were together, far to the south against the rocky, cliff filled shore. They were of a soft purple, with specks of red or blue mixed in, depending on how late they were picked. They despised the sunlight, which is why he had shielded their beautiful blooms and soft, angelic glow with the bright, vibrant petals of wild flowers. He returned his gaze to the tombstone, setting his hand against it as he knelt before it, as he would a child.

“It's been another year, Tally,” his voice threatened to crack, but Finthick didn't care. The words still came, still meant the same, no matter how they sounded. Tally had taught him that long ago.

“Our anniversary, if you remember. Remember our wedding? How your dad begged me not to go through with it? How I told him I loved you too much to hurt you like that?” Finthick shook his head, closing his eyes and sniffing loudly, laughing weakly.

“I brought you some flowers. There was a nice couple that moved into our cave. I let them have it for free, because I know you wouldn't make them pay for it. You would have hit me if I had taken their money,” Finthick rubbed his arm absently, almost instinctually, having felt his wife's wrath on many occasion for some comment or mess up. Talmeria never meant to hurt him, but the short, petite girl hardly knew her own strength.

“I just wanted to stop by, Tally, give you these flowers. I wanted you to know I didn't forget, Tally. That I'll never forget,” his voice did crack now, and he closed his eyes, trying in vain to fight back the torrent that streamed now, despite the added obstacle. He busied himself, arranging the blossoms so that they stood resting in the shadiest spot, propped against the headstone. He took another quivering breath, and added, “I just wanted you to know that I love you, Tally. I'll never stop loving you.”

It was about this time he broke down. He laid his head down, his forehead resting against the forearm that supported himself against the tombstone. His voice cracked at frequent intervals, his sentences broken apart by sudden inhales as he continued.

“Why did I leave, Tally? That one night, that one, stupid night, why did I have to leave?” his hands bunched into useless fists, for he dared not strike anything under the willow tree, “I keep doing these things, Tally, these good things, hoping they’ll make up for failing you. I stupidly hope they’ll bring you back, or avenge your death, or something, anything! They don’t do anything, Tally. I miss you everyday, and all these things I do, this hunting, this avenging, these judgements, they don’t do anything for you. I just want you back, Tally, I want to love you, hold you, feel you again. By the gods, I miss you so much, I’m so alone.”

He sat and sobbed, saying the same thing, over and over again, tears streaming from his face. He missed her with all his heart. He blamed himself, everytime he thought of her, and thought of her lying dead in that clearing, that burning clearing. The three claw marks that marred her beauty. Blamed himself for the sleeping babe, lying in the inferno that was it’s bed, and the toddler that had held that little sword, which had laid two feet away, joined with his hands and head. He blamed himself, because he had left. The guilt flowed out of him, as it always did on this day, the day he loved and dreaded at the same time. The day that always ended with tears, and the same phrase, uttered over and over again amidst the sadness.

“Why’d it have to be you, Tally?”