

Sable

The bird was dead, and Sable had only minutes to hide the body. Panic was setting in.

Its death had been quick, so much so that it was as if the bird was there one moment and then in the next, evaporated into a cloud. Yes, it had been quick. But it had been gruesome. The remnants of its body stained the small library, and for a moment Sable stood in a sort of grim existential awe, marveling at just how much gore the creature had had inside of it, size be damned. Blood flecked her blonde hair and face, blended in with her scatter of freckles in a macabre counterpoint, and her desk was now decorated with an assortment of viscera; a bone here, an organ there, and a whole host of light gray feathers now steeped in red.

The spell that had killed it, well that was her own creation, and why Sable at this moment was hurriedly sweeping her desk clear with a robed arm, papers and books and gore all bunching together to fall to the waste basket at her feet. It wasn't supposed to be deadly, not at all. It was a spell for keeping, a spell for holding something somewhere, so that others may pass freely while that singular thing remained. A tether so to speak. As she cleaned she murmured to herself, dissecting the moments that led up to the little death. It was a habit she'd brought with her from her lonely childhood, wherein she adopted a point and a counterpoint in her own mind and threw them at each other. Today though, both selves were quickly in agreement. She hadn't been clear in her weirding, in the defining of 'inside' and 'outside' and 'creature' and what exactly that meant in a physical sense. As far as she could tell, she'd turned the thing inside out in a burst of energy, and that was an easy enough fix, provided no one found out. Provided Madam Generous did not find out.

Madam Generous who, true to her name, had taken Sable in as her pupil, her very own charge and first in a decade. It was a remarkable honor, something Sable knew all too well, as she was told this very often and with jealousies bared. No, disappointing Generous was not an option, and this failure would *certainly* be a disappointment. Maybe even enough of a disappointment to lead to her exile from the Madam's tutelage, from the weirding school, and the Miramir in its entirety. Thus, the panic.

But with her bloodstained notes shoved into the basket, along with her bloodstained frock, she was blessedly close to getting away with it. All she had to do was lug the basket out to the balcony, stash it behind one of the hornflower bushes that bloomed thick and fragrant, wash her face, and at the end of her lessons take the evidence of her miscalculation somewhere and set it alight. Easy.

"What are you doing?" A voice drawled from behind her and Sable jumped, her heart clawing up her throat as she whirled, wild eyed, a plea for mercy welling on her lips. A boy stood there, a youth about her age, with a fiery mop of hair, lively green eyes, and a grin like he'd just heard the most marvelous joke.

Sable's face relaxed and she heaved a sigh of relief, turning back to her task. "Leir. Shut the door."

"Sable." He returned, stepping further into the room and closing the door behind him. He sniffed the air curiously and his grin widened. "Uh oh. Why do I smell blood?"

Sable glared at him, fumbling the balcony door open. "Did you see Madam Generous on your way here?" She asked, pointedly avoiding his question.

Leir shrugged, enjoying the game of being calm where Sable was so clearly not. "Maybe. Why? Are you worried?"

"Damn you Apollonius," Sable spat and Leir bristled at the use of his first name, a thing few knew and even fewer used, "this is important. Did you see her or not?"

"Well, yes and no." Leir relented, pouting a little at his game having grown serious. "That's why I'm here. There's a ship- stars and swords, but you are *covered* in blood. Did you kill something? Should I be worried?"

Sable growled an exasperated noise and shoved the overflowing basket behind a hornflower. "Focus Leir. A ship. So?"

"Sooo..." Leir drew out the word purposefully, intent on annoying her just a little in retaliation for the scandalous use of his name, "it came from the Mists. Deep in the Mists, they say. And it looks a mess too, so I believe it. The Madam is meeting with the captain now. Thought you might want to come do some investigative sneaking."

Sable scratched an eyebrow, internalizing the new information, reformatting her mindset. First and foremost there was relief. The Madam was not on her way to the library, there was no immediate danger of discovery and expulsion. Second, there was a dawning excitement. A ship from deep in the Mists. That was a rare thing indeed. Third was annoyance as Leir moved closer, craning to peer over Sable's shoulder into the hornflower thicket to where the basket had disappeared.

"It's a dead bird." She told him flatly, placing a hand in the center of his chest and pushing him backward. He stumbled away, clutching himself in a mockery of shocked pain and she rolled her eyes as she shut and locked the balcony door. "Stop it. We both know I'm not that strong."

This was true. Sable was small and soft, with mousy blonde hair and pale, watery grey eyes. She didn't look particularly strong, or for that matter interesting or beautiful. And she didn't care to, really. Not anymore. Leir by stark contrast was tall and dashing, handsome in a way that people couldn't help but notice, in a way that earned him enough attention that his overinflated ego was a foregone conclusion. It was like a dark cloud with rain, or Agwaz with her sister. One followed the other. It was mathematical. It just made sense. At least that was how Sable saw it. However Leir's attractiveness was of no interest to her, no man's was, and she suspected in large part that was why they were friends. That, and their joined fascination with pushing boundaries, with seeing limits as a challenge and not a guardrail. And, as Leir put it, with investigative sneaking.

The Miramir floated at the wavering edge of the Mist-Veil, sometimes consumed so fully by it that one could almost lose the hand in front of their face. Those were charged days, cold and productive and strange. But today the Miramir hung in the sky like a spent match, charred and jagged against the astonishing blue of the morning, the Mists a distant omen tame as any cloud. It was early yet, and the spire was empty of the normal clamor of students and academics, and Sable and Leir saw only a few stray cats on their way to the school's portyard.

"Why would a ship go deep into the Mists?" Sable asked, somewhat redundantly. It was a difficult undertaking, and not unheard of it was the government, with their swollen armored vessels and their heavy artillery, were the ones who often made such journeys. But in her years at the Miramir,

Sable had not seen a single sanctioned ship take port. She doubted one might even fit. “Do you think it’s about-”

“What else?” Leir answered before she could finish, eyes glittering with barely restrained excitement. “Little boy Reile,” he noted her look of disapproval and amended the moniker, “*the young man I tutor*, said it flew in with the dawn, said the thing hadn’t even docked before the captain was asking for Madam Generous. Seems like they need someone with experience in matters strange and dangerous.”

“Seems like.” Sable echoed, stopping at the bottom of the stair to turn and face Leir. They were now but a short few hallways from the portyard, the air already cooler for it. “Maybe we shouldn’t. If this is really about the toppling...” She pulled a face like she was tasting something bitter. “I mean, that’s for people so far above us they may as well be Waz.”

“Sable.” Leir looped his arm in hers and began to pull her along with him. “You wouldn’t be saying this if the Madam weren’t involved, would you?” Her expression answered the question for him. “So come on then. Don’t make me go alone. I won’t tell you what I find out if you do.”