

“Casper, run!” The sounds were approaching, coming for me.

“No Astrid, my Queen, I am not going to leave you.” If I was less frantic, I would’ve told him not to call me a Queen, though technically I was, and coming from him it meant an entirely different thing than from everyone else. As of now I was the Queen of Entransia, my father had just passed on before me, in my sight, and I ran here to escape through the servants’ passage.

“The Blood King sent them for me, all of these people just got in the way. Now get out of here before I lose you too!” I struggled in his grasp but it was useless, his arms were rock solid.

“You don’t know that that’s why they’re here. And if I leave, Astrid, I will lose you! I need you to stay with me, so that I keep you safe.”

“Keep me safe? No Casper, the Blood King wants me because I am the marked assassin. Have you ever wondered how I was naturally skilled in weaponry, how I always hit the target from the first shot I ever took? That, Casper, is how I know he wants me. He needs someone to do his dirty work for him and never get caught, never leave a trace, and I’m the only person like that.” I sagged against him, “Casper I need you to trust me on this, I need you to believe in me. I can do this, if I give myself up to them, they will take me to the Blood King and-“

“He will kill you. He will take you as a prisoner, use you for what he wants, and then he will kill you. I won’t let you turn yourself in.”

“Let. Me. Go!” I broke free of his grasp but Casper grabbed my skirts before I got very far.

“You are not turning yourself in Astrid. I won’t let you go and get yourself killed! Run away with me, please...”

“Too late,” came a husky, low-pitched, obviously pleased voice. We whipped around. The Blood King was standing three feet away. “Casper, thank you for holding Astrid for me, but you can go now, I’ll be fine.”

“Over my dead body.” Casper moved in front of me.

“Oh, I can make that happen if you really want.”

“You-“

“Casper! Just go, I can take care of myself.”

“You should really listen to the girl.”

“I will get you out of there; I swear it on my life.”

“Goodbye Casper...” He said with a smirk.

“You stay out of this!”

Reluctantly, he turned to leave. He went down the servants’ passage in the wall of my chamber and left with one lingering glance behind him, he disappeared.

“Well, now that that’s over, why don’t we get going, but first, do you have anything red to wear? It looks adorable with that golden hair of yours.” He reached out to touch one of my long golden locks of hair, but I jerked away before he could touch me. “Oh come on darling, that is no way to treat your father.”

“You are not my father! My father is the man you left lying in a pool of his own blood in the middle of his thrown room! My father is the man who cared for me, who taught me how to use my skill, who never stopped loving me, no matter what I did.”

“That man was not your father!” He exploded in my face, “He stole you from me when you were little. He took away my pride and joy, my secret weapon, and the only family I had left! He stole you from your room when you were four, you don’t know anything.”

“He was a better man than you could ever be! You killed him; you bring shame to all mankind by your cowardice.”

He grabbed me by the arm and started to steer me through the home I had loved since I was a child. “You will regret ever defying me in this way! When we reach our home, you will be locked in your room for three days straight with nothing to eat but bread and water.”

“That would be a grateful reprieve from you, you vile creature.” His grip on my arm tightened to a painful extent.

“You best watch what you say.” His voice was a growl right in my ear. By now, we had reached the main entrance and he shoved me through the doors and into the arms of his guards.

“Take Astrid to the carriage and make sure you lock the door and keep someone stationed at it, she has an awful reputation of slipping away.”

The guards, two burly men in full out armor, picked me up by my forearms and drug me to the carriage and locked the door after they threw me inside. I reached for my lock picks, but thought better of it since there was only one door and two large men standing in front of it. Then I grabbed one of my many hidden knives and shoved the tip into my chest. “You have ten seconds to let me go or I will kill myself.” I heard the guards rush off and a few seconds later I heard them return and the carriage door unlock.

I jumped out only to have my arm caught by the Blood Lord. “Now Astrid, I can’t have my star assassins killing herself on me, now can I? And my insurance? Guards!” I heard feet stomping and the sound of something being dragged along the ground. When the guards came around the corner, I saw that the thing they were dragging was Casper. “One wrong move and I slit his throat.”

My breath caught in my throat “You said you would let him go.”

“You’re right, I lied. And now I have leverage on you so you have to do all that I say, although, you should be doing that anyways since you are my daughter.” He paused to get in an evil smirk. “And before you object to that, you are my daughter and no amount of rejecting the fact will change it, now get back in the carriage and sit still like a good girl. I will be there in a bit then we will head out.”

I turned around and slowly trudged back to the carriage. Once inside, the door locked and I was alone with my thought and worries. Was Casper going to be okay? Was *I* going to be okay? What was going to happen when we got to the city, if we got to the city? I still had my knives, but they were a last resort.

I must have drifted off because I awoke to the thump of my head against the carriage wall as we set off. I opened my eyes and saw my father sitting in front of me. Our eyes met and I looked away to avoid talking. The forest stretched on in front of us and after about five hours of the uncomfortable rocking of our carriage, we arrived at the gate to Trianna, my new prison. The Lord got out of our carriage and discussed something with the guards. He got back in and we set off through the city.

The palace was massive, at least twice the size of my old home. As I walked through the giant main entrance, flanked by two guards, was awestruck by the openness and the cheerfulness of the space. It was even bigger than it looked on the outside. It's too bad I couldn't get a tour; I was herded to my chamber right away and locked inside.

The chamber itself was the size of our throne room. With a monstrous wardrobe filled with dresses of all styles and colors, a large on suite, and a door that connected mine to the one next to it, later, I found out it was Casper's. The door itself was at least six inches thick, had four deadbolts, and three guards outside. There was no escaping.

Three days took forever to pass. The only sign of humanity was the guard that gave me my loaf of bread every day and that, sadly, was not enough. The man was rude and I missed the niceness of Casper, my father and my servants.

Finally, when my sentence was up, Casper came to my room and took me to the dining hall. "If I thought it was possible, I'd say you were thinner, what has he been feeding you?" We got to the door and I froze. Casper looked back at me, "It's okay, nothing bad is going to happen to you, I promise."

We walked in together and I sat at the table to the Blood Lord's left, Casper sat across from me to his right. "Ah, Astrid, so nice of you to finally join us." I opened my mouth but before I could utter a sound he cut me off. "Now you know it was your actions that got you into this situation and there is no denying it so don't start." My stomach rumbled and he must have heard because he waved a servant over and had him start serving the meal. The rest of the kitchen staff, it seemed, bustled around us, loading our plates with exotic dishes and foods that I have never seen or even heard of.

In the middle of our meal, the Lord put down his utensils and looked at me until I stopped eating. "Astrid, I have your first assignment. Now, before you object, you have two weeks to get it done, and that's generous so I doubt it will take you more than four days. You are also allowed to bring Casper if it would please you. You leave tomorrow, so get plenty of sleep and I'll have the kitchen staff pack you food."

I looked to Casper, and he shrugged his shoulders, he knew. I stood up and walked out of the room. The scrape of a chair on hardwood told me that Casper was following me. "You knew?"

“Yes, I’m sorry.”

“Do you know who it is?”

“No, but we’ll find out tomorrow when we leave, that’s all I know, we are in this together.”

“I don’t want to do this, but I know I couldn’t do it at all without you.”

“I know, but I will always be there for you, now go get some sleep, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

I went to my room but didn’t sleep a wink. I kept thinking of my assignment. Who would it be? Would I know them? How hard would it be? Would I get caught? Of course, I’m never caught.

I woke up to Casper shaking my shoulders. “It’s go time!” His sarcasm was clearly evident. “Get ready; I’ll meet you in the dining hall.” Then, he spun on his heels, and was gone.

I took my time getting ready and by the time I got downstairs, Casper was done and packing the carriage. When he was done double and triple checking, he came and watched me eat. When I had had enough, we walked out and I received my assignment envelopes along with the instructions not to open it until we reached our final destination.

We hopped into the carriage and set off on our journey. At first, we rode in an uncomfortable silence then tried to make some small talk and, since that wasn’t working, we fell back into silence. We stopped by a stream around noon to walk around, and then set off again.

That night we made camp in a clearing, ate fish I caught in the stream, and slept until dawn. We headed east and I was dreading that the guy in my envelope was Robin. His palace was a two day journey from mine and we only had a half day left to travel before we arrived..

At lunch we reached our destination, Robin’s palace, he was my target. But he was also my friend, and I didn’t think I could do this. But if I didn’t, Casper died. If I had to choose, Casper would win every time.

“How do I do this? I can’t get close to him or I won’t be able kill him, I mean, he was my betrothed.” Casper flinched at that sentence, “I’m sorry but you know it’s true, my dad wanted a King to succeed him.”

“I know, it’s just hard to think about that.”

“I’m sorry I brought it up.”

“Ok,” I knew he wasn’t over it, “What’s the plan?”

“I go in and kill him quickly.”

“You want them to see you, and then know you disappeared right after he died?”

“I have no better idea right now.”

“What if you snuck in at night?”

“That might work.” And we had our plan.

My nerves were wacked all day as we figured out the specifics; I crawl through the window, hug Robin, and stab him in the back, escape. We had all of our details worked out, where to go in, how to leave, what happens if I am caught, where to meet up when the deed is done. By dusk, I was fully prepared.

As soon as darkness fell, I snuck through a hole in the wall around the palace and snuck across the yard. I scaled the wall of the palace and found the loose window on the third level. I peaked inside and saw a guard come around the corner. I backed out and stayed out of sight for about twenty seconds then, I went in.

The hallways were dark, but my night vision was decent so I had no trouble finding my way. I snuck into Robin’s room and tried to get to him without waking him up. Too bad for me, the floorboards creaked and woke him. “Who’s there?” He was definitely spooked, “Astrid? Is it really you, or am I dreaming?”

“No Robin, it’s me.”

“Well what are you doing in my palace? In my *room*?”

“I was going to wait until tomorrow, but I couldn’t wait to see you. I am sorry if I spooked you.”

“What? No, it’s okay.” He got up and crossed the room to where I was standing. “Look at you, Astrid; you’re all grown up now.” He gave me a hug, that was my chance, and I froze. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing” He hugged me again and this time I got it over with. I whipped out my knife and stabbed him through the back.

He collapsed to the ground and I strode to his window in case someone heard him fall. “Astrid,” His voice was a harsh whisper, a huge struggle, “Astrid why?” And then he was gone.

I crawled out the window with tears prickling at my eyes, threatening to break free. I gave Robin one last look then scaled back down the wall and I was almost to the wall when I heard a scream. They found him. I crawled through the hole in the wall and climbed into the carriage, and then we were off.

Cradled next to Casper, I let my tears fall. Our carriage was escaping into the night. “I can’t believe I just did that”

“It will be okay Astrid. It was either him or me. Thank you for choosing me.”

I let out a laugh through my tears, “I would always choose you. No matter what.”

He held me closer then, “Get some sleep, you must be exhausted.”

“Thank you Casper. You’re always there for me and I couldn’t live without you.”

“Funny, I think I said that same thing to you earlier this week.”

“Good night Casper.”

I woke up the next day around noon. We had already stopped for lunch for the day and were scheduled to get to Trianna within a few hours. All though lunch, Casper snuck peeks at me, making sure I was doing okay and just completely healthy.

Casper and I chatted the whole way to the city. We spoke of anything that would keep our minds off of what had just happened.

We entered the city through the gate and went straight to the palace. We strode through the doors into the throne room. “It’s done”

The Lord looked up with an evil spark in his eyes, “Excellent!”

Casper spoke up from beside me, “It’s not actually done yet.”

“Casper, what are you talking about?”

As a response, Casper grabbed a knife from my hip holster and threw it at the Lord. It hit him and a spot of blood blossomed on his chest.

The guards snapped to attention. “They killed the Lord, seize them!”

“We can’t punish them, she is the Queen now. She has authority over us now.”

“Wait, what?”

“Astrid, don’t you see, you are the rightful heir to this throne. You are their ruler now.”

My breath caught in my throat and I thought I was going to faint, “Oh, my goodness, I’m not ready to be queen.”

Casper grabbed me by the shoulders, “Astrid, you would make a great queen, I know you will.”

“O-okay.”

“Astrid, I know what you are capable of, you can do this.” He pulled me into his arms and we stayed like that for a while.

“Thank you,” I kissed his cheek.

“Anything for you my Queen.” He got down on his knee, “Astrid, will you be mine?”

“Casper, do you know how long I’ve been waiting for you to ask that? Did you ever think that that was why I was scared to lose you?”

“Well, no. I-” I cut him off with a kiss, that was all it took. I was his, and he was mine.