

## No One Knows Riva

The girl looked out at the humble town. How simple it was. Food being sold at stalls, people choosing elegant fabric to be made into their new garments, farmers bringing their harvest to trade. It looked like there was a festival on today. A fantastic parade of performers, animals and food. Sweet buns, meat skewers and candies were displayed on trays and carts that rolled down the street, while bright, cheery music sung over every building and every house. Riva had seen a festival back on earth, but nothing compared to this. There were acrobats and fire eaters, dancers and jugglers that littered the streets with jokes and tricks. The colour spread through the city like fire engulfing anything that would burn. She wanted to get closer, but she felt safer at the forest's edge, so she pulled up her hood and watched.

A magician caught her eye, dressed not in bright colours like everyone else, but in dark clothes draped in endless belts of trinkets and materials. The crowd watched, amazed at his many talents. Riva leaned out as far as she dared, to see his final act. He plucked something off his hip and closed his eyes as he rubbed his hands together, crushing whatever it was. Everyone gasped as his hands began to smoke, the black fog streaming out in ribbons. Then he clapped his hands out in front of his chest and the ribbons caught fire, dancing and flowing out into the crowd. The townspeople stepped back to watch them in wonder. Riva leaned out even further, taking an extra step from the cover of the trees. He pulled his hands apart and pushed the air in front of him, forcing the fire to flow back and spin like a pinwheel. There were many gasps at the spectacular display, then the magician smirked as he let the rest of his act commence. The flames started to spiral faster and faster until they became spinning fireworks. He lifted his hands one more time with all his might. The dozens of ribbons started to rise up in the sky and crash together one after another until they formed a magnificent roaring beast. A griffin emerged from the spectacle with bright embers and sparks splattering off its paws. There was an uproar of excitement as the creature stretched out its enormous wings which spanned the entire street. Its glowing, feathered head flicked back as it toyed with the townspeople below, dangling its tail near the children for them to try and catch.

In the middle of the crowd the royal guard began to emerge. Riva didn't see from where, but they didn't seem to be there for the entertainment. They pushed through the crowd until they reached the platform in the street. The magician was practically knocked off his feet as the guards restrained his arms and shoved him down to his knees. More soldiers pushed people back to make way for a royal carriage. Unlike any usual carriage, this one had no wheels. It was supported by thick wooden beams held up by men on either side. It was beautiful, draped in deep blue curtains and

trimmed with gold. It was furnished with an ornate tapestry on the back wall and fine silk pillows and quilts. The four posters were also encrusted with gold embellishments and wooden carvings. It was certainly out of place in the plain streets of his subjects. The King looked perfectly fit to walk or ride his horse with the advisors, but no one even noticed as his gaze burned through the kneeling man that was presented on the platform. The music of the festival had been loud enough to be heard from the forest's edge, but Riva knew she was much too far to hear whatever was going to happen next. She hadn't been here very long so she wanted to know everything about this place. She needed to know.

"Well!" He boomed. She couldn't believe it, how could she hear him from the forest when he was all the way in the town? "And here I thought I would treat my people with a visit by their gracious king. *And* of all days, when the great festival begins!" The people had begun cowering away, some backing into the shadows, others bowing to no end as though they had insulted the royal family. "All to be ruined by YOU! A man who insults this kingdom with treason. Our laws are known throughout these lands and have been for years. They protect you people!" The king hissed at the poor man with such comfort and ease he seemed to enjoy it. The magician spluttered out hasty apologies and explanations, but was cut off before he could continue. "Elden trade is an evil that cannot be controlled by weak minds." The King glared at his prey. Now with a look of horror on his face, he couldn't have been more than thirty years old, but looked suddenly frail, as though his life were about to end. The king himself, looked closer to fifty. His clothing was not quite as elaborate as the carriage but was still adorned with a gold band for his crown, and the crest of the royal family on his shoulder. He nodded to the soldiers holding the traitor and they dragged him towards the castle. Then the King continued. "This man will be tried in the royal court for acts of treason through the Elden trade! If found guilty, he will be executed as a traitor!" And with that, the King gestured to the soldiers for him to be taken back to the castle. The street felt as though it was silent for hours as his chilling words rung in the peoples ears.

The final light of the griffin burst into a million sparks over the city, some even reaching the forest. Riva caught the falling light in her hand. She felt like she owed the accused traitor at least one final piece of light. It sat in her hand for a moment and she wished that she could hold it forever. Her heart throbbed in pain for the poor man. She wasn't sure why it hurt so much, she didn't even know his name, but none the less her eyes welled with tears. Perhaps she was just afraid of what might happen to her here. She felt the speck's warmth in her hand and watched the ember fade. Only it didn't. It grew bigger and brighter, then burst into violent flames that latched on to her hand. She screamed then shook her arm, frantically trying to put it out, all the while not noticing the guard patrol heading towards her along the forest.

She smothered the last flames with her hand in time to see four guards rushing towards her. "YOU!...ELDEN!...GRAB HER!" were the only words she heard. She didn't wait to see what they said next and before she knew it, Riva was running as fast as her legs allowed.

She had never panicked more in her life, her mind started to race. "What the hell am I even doing here!? I'm sixteen, I shouldn't be running for my life through a forest getting chased by soldiers! Oh God, what if they catch me? Will they take me to the same place as that magician? How was I able to see it all so clearly? I hope this is the right direction." They were getting closer, and it sounded like there was more than just one patrol now, at least a dozen men.

She wanted to stop, but she knew she couldn't. They were getting even closer now. How far would they chase her? Tree branches whipped past her as she raced through the forest. She could hear them shouting behind her but she was almost there. The thick of the trees didn't thin, but she knew the edge was close. The horizon started to appear through the trees and the smell of salt air became stronger. Her mind sharpened and focused as the familiar valley of tree roots filled her eyes. One of the men tripped on a stray root and tumbled to the ground with a clank. Another two men behind him didn't have time to move aside and landed on the ground as well. Even though she was scared Riva had always been sure-footed, but she was getting tired, her throat went dry and her chest started to tighten. The edge was closer now, just a few meters. She sucked one final breath into her lungs, and leapt....