

THE DAGGER

“Are you glad you finally let me drag you out here?” Diana’s sister Alek asked banteringly from her muscular black stallion. Alek was a Knight Commander, going everywhere with Diana, but normally accompanied by a dozen more soldiers. Today, though, Diana had convinced the soldiers she would be safe with Alek by her side.

“It’s the best decision I’ve ever made!” Diana declared, sitting up straighter on her bay mare. She looked ahead and saw some blossoming flowers. “Look, someone planted black dahlia here. They aren’t native and extremely rare, so we’re seeing how they respond to the environment.”

Alek looked down at the somber blooms as they passed them. They had no scent, unlike most flowers. “I heard that they symbolize betrayal,” she informed Diana gravely.

Diana laughed at her suggestion. “That’s just a legend. It’s a flower and nothing more.”

Alek shrugged and grinned. “You’re right.” She shifted her sword to a more comfortable position on her back. Abruptly, she held up her hand for Diana to stop. She was still as a statue.

Diana halted her horse. “What?” she questioned in a whisper.

Alek pointed farther up the dirt trail. Standing with its ears perked up and nose quivering as it smelled the fresh air, was a young deer. It stood staring at the two for a few minutes, its big dark eyes never looking away from them.

Diana smiled wide as she watched the creature. Once she lost sight of it she looked over at Alek, but she had dismounted her horse and was looking into the woods in the opposite direction. Her sword was drawn, the spotless metal glinting in the rays of sunlight coming through the leaves. The next moment, Diana heard a whizzing and screamed as an arrow embedded itself in a tree next to her.

She heard a sudden outburst of noise as she hurriedly dismounted. As soon as the horse knew it was free it ran the way they had come in. Diana scrambled low to the ground up against

a large tree, her panting breath heavy and ragged. She saw Alek fighting several people in dark hoods with bows and arrows trying to make their way past. Diana was disoriented; she only comprehended the sound of metal singing through the air. Alek was continuously being forced back in her direction. A few aggressors had already fallen, but the last two strongest were still standing and fighting. Alek hit one on the head with the hilt of her sword, knocking him out instantly. Then she brought her sword down diagonally on the last attacker and he fell with a thud to the ground. But where Alek's motion should have stopped, it didn't, and the blade swung around until it was aimed at Diana.

Diana looked at the discolored sword pointed at her, then at Alek. Her face was impassive except for the teasing grin that played on her lips.

"Alek, what are you...?" Diana faltered.

"I tried to warn you," Alek snickered, stepping towards Diana. She swiftly raised her sword. Before she could bring a killing blow down on Diana, she felt a searing pain through a chink in her armor. Warm blood ran down her side as she looked aghast at Diana, whose hand was still on the dagger. Alek's sword clattered to the ground as she crumpled to her knees. She fell to the ground in a heap.

Diana stood up and dusted herself off. Turning away, she muttered, "A little more than a legend, I suppose. You weren't made for power, Alek. I was."