

## Chapter 265 - Missing

“Kea’s in danger?” Kai stepped closer to the floating mirror. He hadn’t seen his sister since he got trapped in the Hidden Sanctuary. Spirits! She might not even know he was alive. “Where is she? Can you contact her?”

*She’s always been so reckless.*

Valela raised a hand to calm him down—or point out he was about to headbutt the mirror. “I received some worrying information about her latest venture, but I know nothing for sure.”

“So, she’s not in danger...?” He let a sliver of hope slip into his tone.

“I... can’t really say. Your sister doesn’t talk to me. She thought I was involved in your presumed death and refused any attempts to contact her.”

“I see.” Kai furrowed his brow. “But how do you know all this if she doesn’t talk to you?”

Valela averted her gaze, looking at the silver borders of her coat. “There is another member of her group who keeps me updated. I was surprised when the House of Mirrors contacted me since she also stopped by Varsea a few weeks ago, and I thought it might be them.”

*And I imagine Kea doesn’t know... It’s probably better this way.*

Alana had told him that his sister was traveling with other young adults from the islands. It was good to know one of them had some common sense. “Thank you for keeping an eye on her.” Kai held her gaze. “I really appreciate it.”

“It’s nothing.” Valela combed a lock of hair behind her ear. “I try to keep a lookout for any native who leaves the archipelago in case they need help. Luckily, your sister’s not traveling alone.”

“Uhm,” Flynn cleared his throat. “Your love for the people of the archipelago is truly commendable.” He moved closer to the mirror with a small grin. “What trouble did his sister get into?”

“Please, tell us everything you know.” Kai bobbed his head.

“I can only tell you what was written in the missive.” Valela shifted her attention between them. “You know, she has taken up adventuring to earn a living.”

*Was that what Kien meant when he said she fought monsters?*

In any letter his mom had shown him, his sister was pretty vague on the details of her activities. Mostly focusing on the city or town they were visiting, and the new people she met.

“She wanted to hone her skills.” Flynn didn’t look surprised. “I’ve heard adventuring is a common job for travelers and outsiders.”

“Indeed.” The princess nodded. “Beast populations need to be kept in check around smaller settlements, so there is never a lack of work. Keandra’s group mostly accepts hunting and gathering contracts. They’re relatively safe as long as you’re careful. Only this time they decided to take on something more challenging...”

*Of course they did... young, brash and eager to prove themselves.*

“What is it?”

“Some people have gone missing,” Valela sighed. “The last statement I could find reported half a dozen cases. Though there could be more by now. Her companion contacted me a week ago, saying one of their own had gone missing too.”

*Shit.*

“You think they’re dead?” Flynn voiced everyone’s thoughts. “And the same could happen to Kea?”

“I really can’t say.” She fiddled with the buttons of her red coat. “The friends I asked at the academy said missing people aren’t *too* unusual. Sometimes beasts stalk close to the settlements, but they get caught eventually. If adventurers can’t solve it, the Republic will intervene.”

*That doesn’t help the people who’re already dead.*

“Where is this place?” Kai paced within the small room without realizing it. “You said her party stopped by Varsea not long ago. They can’t have gone too far.”

*I doubt they can afford an airship.*

Valela hesitated a moment before speaking. “They’re in Limgrell. It’s a small town on the Lake of Myst, east of Varsea. I don’t know much about it, but I’ll look for more information.”

“Thank you,” Kai lacked the words to express his gratitude. “I’m sorry I won’t be able to brew potions for a while.” All the plans they made for the mainland would have to be scrapped.

*Humans plan and Fate laughs.*

“Your family comes first.” Valela didn’t look upset, though there was a shadow in her gaze. “You should also know the person who contacted me wanted to leave Limgrell. Your sister might have already left when you get there. Or the authorities could solve the case.”

*Hmm... Kea never knew when to quit, especially if someone in her group has disappeared.*

"I have to check on her. Hopefully, you're right, and we worried for nothing."

Valela bit her lip. "I'll let you know if I learn more. But Kai, you should also be cautious if you follow her there. You've just arrived, the mainland isn't like the archipelago. Traveling outside cities without an escort can be very dangerous."

"I'll be careful."

"And I'll keep an eye on him when he's not." Flynn ruffled his hair. "You and Kea aren't siblings by chance."

*What's that supposed to mean?*

Kai threw him a dirty look. "How could I have predicted those crazy pirates or the storm?"

"Speaking of which." Valela watched them intently. "You must tell me what happened to the *Intrepid*. A ship of that size should be unsinkable. And how did you manage to survive?"

*Well, where do I start? That involved an ancient artifact, fanatical pirates and a runaway siren...*

Kai and Flynn took turns explaining exactly how things had gone wrong: the initial storm that pushed them off course, the black ship, what they overheard from the marauders, and the second tempest that split the vessel. They also mentioned meeting Rain on the *Melenia*, but didn't disclose his identity. It wasn't their secret to tell.

Valela sat on one of the chairs on the other side of the mirror, scribbling in a notebook. "I've never heard of cloaked raiders that used Darkness skills. Any green pirate captain has a famous name. I'll look if anyone matches the description, but I think they probably weren't pirates like you said... Have you informed the Republic?"

Kai shrugged his shoulders, sharing a look with Flynn. "I'm sure someone on the ship did."

"Yeah, Karin must prove we were shipwrecked to validate her contracts. The authorities will have their pick of witnesses."

"But you've got more information than most." Valela pointed out. "How many of the survivors engaged with the marauders?"

"There were many people present in the initial assault," Kai said. "We just overheard a couple of crazy raiders below deck. I can't exactly explain how Matthew the alchemist fought them off, can I?"

The longer he could avoid dealing with the Republic, the better. Those cultish pirates also seemed to care about their secrecy, so he'd rather avoid advertising what he heard. Spirits only knew the arcane ways criminals used to gather information here—just like the House of Echoes. The existence of magic and skills created nigh infinite ways to screw him over. Until he knew more, Kai'd rather not poke any beehives.

*Kea will already be a handful. She was always so stubborn.*

“Mhmm... You're right.” Valela relented, flickering the pen in her fingers. “There should also be a way to get a temporary ID for your friend. The Republic offers asylum to talented individuals if they're willing to swear under oath they're no spies of criminals.”

Flynn beamed. “That's great!”

“Is it that easy?” Kai couldn't believe it after all the hoops he had to jump through.

“If this boy is as talented as you say, then yes.” Valela gave them a crash course in the immigration policy of the Republic—of course, she knew that too. Taking out her pocket watch, her eyes widened at the hour. “I need to go. I'll let you know if I find anything about your sister and the pirates.”

They quickly agreed on how to keep in touch and reestablish the connections Flynn had lost in the shipwreck.

“Stay safe.” She lightly tapped on the mirror twice. Her delicate features and bright emerald eyes faded till Kai could only see his own reflection. He stood from his chair, stifling a yawn. The call had taken longer than expected.

“Uh... She was really kind to help us.” He understood her guilt about the Sanctuary affair, but that should have dried up when he got his new identity. This time she went out of her way for him and Kea.

*I should have asked how she was doing. Whatever posh academy she enrolled in must be stressful. Who would ever want to go back to school?*

“Yeah, I wonder what could make her so eager to help *us*.” Flynn chuckled.

“Not everyone needs a reason to be nice all the time.” Kai scratched his head at his antics. Once he made sure Kea was safe and sound, he would find a way to repay Valela. “We should go back. Rain has been waiting for a while.”

“You're right.” Flynn opened the door, breaking the enchantment that sealed the room.

There was no trace of the old clerk, but a younger man soon came to accompany them to the reception hall. “I hope you had a pleasant talk,” the raven-haired woman at the front desk said.

Kai gestured for Flynn to go ahead. “How much do I owe the House?”

“Nothing, sir. Your contact has already covered the entire fee.”

He pursed his lips. “I didn’t agree to that.” It should be him to cover the tab when Valela was already helping him. “Is there no way to reimburse her? I’ll cover for the connection.”

“I’m sorry, sir. That’s not among the services we offer.” The receptionist smiled apologetically. “Though you can deposit a sum in her account for future transactions if you wish.”

Kai struggled not to roll his eyes—*of course, they can do that*. “How much did she pay?”

The onyx slab behind the counter lit with a myriad string of numbers and runes. “For an hour, eleven minutes and nine seconds... And taking into consideration the distance to Raelion... The fee is twenty-nine silvers and sixteen coppers, which makes fifty-eight silvers and thirty-two coppers for both sides.” The woman showed her ivory teeth. “How much do you wish me to transfer, sir?”

*Damn, swindlers. I’ll keep an eye on the clock next time.*

Their only expense was activating the artifact for an hour. While the mirror’s magic was impressive, the price was ludicrous. Kai’d take days of brewing to earn the same if he factored in the cost of the herbs.

“Here.” He schooled his expression and placed a gold mesar on the table. Once the transaction was completed, the receptionist gave him a membership card for the House of Mirrors that offered a 5% discount—on connections longer than ten minutes.

Kai left the desk, hands in his pockets. He’d need to watch his spending if he wanted to maintain the fortune in his ring. Perhaps Reishi would have some advice. Even with Valela to establish connections, it would be some time before they could meet; the merman traded by sea and rarely went inland.

*One issue at a time.*

Flynn was talking to Rain in the lounge, and both were laughing. “...is quite oblivious.” The wards hid the first part of the conversation.

“What are you two talking about?” Kai scanned their grins for answers.

“Nothing.” Flynn looked at the siren. “I was just telling him of a funny guy I met in Sylspring.”

“Hmm.” Kai was too exhausted to wring the truth out of him. “Sorry for making you wait, Rain.”

“It’s okay. I enjoyed trying new human foods.” He waved to the trays of appetizers.  
“Everything tastes quite different out of the sea.”

“You can join us next time. Valela was eager to meet you. She also told us how you can get a temporary ID.” Kai did his best to report all the necessary passages.

“An ID?” From the look Rain gave him, the siren had no idea what he was talking about.

*Welcome to the wonderful world of human bureaucracy! I won’t hold it against you if you flee back to the sea.*

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As the sun rose over Varsea, the crispness of the air was tainted by tens of thousands of inhabitants. Kai was glad to stand on firm ground. He adjusted the dark green coat embroidered with a leaf pattern, waiting for his companions in the street.

Madame Le Garde’s clothes were the most comfortable he had ever worn, bending with every movement while keeping their shape. The tailor would need two more days to finish their entire order for the journey.

Kai exhaled a sharp breath. Every moment he spent in Varsea, his sister could face mortal danger. Part of him screamed to run ahead, uncaring of the consequences and his better judgment.

*I’m not a child anymore.*

The Sanctuary had carved the consequences of a rash action in his flesh, though patience was easier when he only had to worry about himself.

*I can’t call Kea reckless and then do the same.* She has survived more than a year alone, she’ll be fine—she has to.

He knew nothing about the surrounding territory, how to reach Limgrell, or the mainland in general. While it might not be the land of monsters that some islanders depicted, the dangers were all too real. Without proper preparations, he’d get himself killed and be no help to anyone.

“Sorry, we’re late.” Flynn waved from across the street. “The clerk at the embassy was a stickler for protocol. We’d have taken the whole day if Rain hadn’t convinced them to speed things along.”

“Uh, she was a nice lady. Though I don’t really understand the point of recording my information thirteen times.” The siren held a shiny piece of paper as if it were a strange novelty. “Some of the documents I signed seemed quite self-perpetuating.”

“Don’t try to look too deep into it,” Kai said. “Are you sure you want to come with us to Limgrell?”

“Anything is new for me around here. I don’t care where we go first as long as it’s away from the sea.” Rain made the paper disappear into his spatial artifact. “And I want to help your sister.”

“Well then,” Flynn grinned, throwing an arm around each of their shoulders. “Shall we go to the Hall of Seekers?”