Quiver & Quill

by infernalpoppy

Summary

After using her powers to heal the sick in her village, Ella was branded a witch and fled to the countryside with a warrant out for her arrest. Huddled in a candlelit Inn by the edge of the forest, she thinks she's evaded capture. That is, until an intimidating (and only *slightly* intriguing) woman named Alys uses Ella's "crimes" against her to blackmail her into becoming her personal healer.

As the pair travel from town to town, Alys always keeping her dealings secret, Ella begins to wonder who it is she's dealing with. There's something different about Alys and Ella won't stop until she unravels the other woman's secrets, even if it means the exposure of her own.

Notes

Okay so, this is a lesbian work if that wasn't clear from the tags. So if you're not into that then its probably best to go now. This is a medieval AU where homosexuality is accepted entirely throughout the universe. I don't write homophobia, there's enough of it in the real world, I don't need it in my writing too.

This is very much an enemies to lovers crack fic!! there will be sexual tension! there will be angst!! there will be Covert!!! Pining!!!!

Also!!! "Alys" is basically like the medieval version of Alice, in case anyone is confused about the pronunciation.
See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter One

Ch. One

The Bleeding Druid Inn was alight with song and dance, and had been for the past hour. Drunken patrons corralled by the bar, sloshing luke-warm ale over one another, belting shanty's at the tops of their lungs. Everyone seemed to be completely sloshed (or half way to it) except for a solitary, shadowy figure huddled over a table in the furthest corner of the inn.

Alys smirked over the brim of her tankard. So this was the little healer that'd gotten the neighboring village in a tizzy. "Witchcraft" they'd called it. Alys scoffed and looked down at the wanted poster crumpled in her palm. A petite peasant girl stared up at her from the page, large eyes almost pleading with her to walk out and leave her in peace. Alys had no use for the meager reward being offered up for the fugitive girl's return; but she did have some use for her healing abilities.

Taking one last, long swig of her ale, she stood from her perch and made her way across the Inn's crowded tavern. The music grew louder as she neared her target. Perfect. This way their conversation wouldn't be overheard. As she reached the table, the small woman drew her hood down farther over her face and hunched her shoulders, making herself as small as possible.

The sound of Alys dragging a chair from under the table was jarring, even with the music ringing throughout the tavern. Placing her hands on the table, she unfurled the wanted poster, being careful that only her quarry could see it. The woman's eyes widened comically and she made to bolt from her chair, before Alys's voice halted her.

"Sit down," she commanded. The woman hovered warily, eyes flitting between the door and her potential captor. Alys watched the woman's demeanor shift as the glint from her knife caught her target's eye. She sat quietly then, muscles tensed.

"Tell me your name," Alys said. It was not a question. The hooded figure balked at this and waved haphazardly at the poster.

"I'm suspect you know it already, or you wouldn't be here threatening me. Unless you're too dull to read, in which case, I'll be leaving." She made to stand, but was stopped yet again as the woman across from her barked out a harsh laugh.

"I wouldn't have pictured a peasant girl to hold such a sharp tongue. But then, you're no normal peasant girl, are you Eleanore?" Alys smiled then, teeth gleaming in the candlelight.

"No one calls me that," Eleanore snapped. "It's Ella. And who are you?" Her voice had taken on a sharp edge now, clearly bored of this cat and mouse game.

"Alys."

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Ella waited for a title. A family name. Anything that might clue her in on who exactly she was dealing with and what this woman might want. They stared at each other in silence, Alys still wearing that infuriating smirk. Ella scoffed.

"What exactly do you want, Alys?" She spat her name with such disgust she was surprised her ale didn't spoil. Alys smiled fully then and leaned forward, her weight rested on her forearms. Ella could nearly see down the loose tunic she wore tucked into her breeches.
"I want you to listen closely. You're going to pay for that ale, quietly, don't even think of making a scene," she flashed the knife again, "and then you're going to walk out of this inn, get on the back of my horse and keep your mouth shut until we reach my camp."

Ella gaped, rage coloring her delicate features.

"I'll do no such thing!" she hissed.

"You will. Because if you don't, I'll be sure to notify the proper authorities of the witch hiding in Lady Muriel's inn. What is it they do with witches again? The thought escapes me." She pulled a faux quizzical face and leaned back in her chair, arms crossed coolly over her stomach, a sly smirk spreading once again over her lips.

"It's your choice. I won't drag you out of here like an animal. But I'll be departing soon, so I suggest you decide quickly." And just like that, Alys rose from her chair and strolled out of the inn as if nothing had happened.

A few moments passed as Ella stared at the doorway in shock. Realization hit her then. She had to go. A gut feeling was telling her that this Alys woman was sure to keep her word, and panic bubbled sickly in her stomach at the thought of being surrendered to the authorities. She rose from her chair, sweat pricking the nape of her neck. She could take her, she told herself; poison her if she tried anything funny. Alys may be miles bigger than her but Ella knew she was clever and quick on her feet in a chase.

Walking out the door of the inn felt like walking to her death, but Ella showed no fear as she approached her blackmailer. Alys leaned against a tree by the forest's edge, lazily examining her fingernails for dirt. Ella struggled not to roll her eyes at the sight. A truly massive black horse stood obediently by Alys's side, dark eyes locking onto Ella, then shifting away.

"Good choice," Alys snipped as Ella drew near, her eyes roving slowly up and down Ella's petite frame.

"Keep your eyes to yourself," Ella snapped. Alys lifted an eyebrow, a small smile twitching at the edge of her lips.

"Get on," she instructed, flicking her hand in the direction of the horse. A hot breath flew out of Ella's nose, rage building at being ordered around so callously. She approached the horse cautiously, gently running her hands along its back so it wouldn't spook and trample her. Ella had never ridden a horse, much less owned one, and the prospect of climbing on top of such a large creature frightened her. She remembered watching a nobleman mount a horse once, he'd pulled his leg up and swung it over like it was nothing. Trying to emulate him, she put her foot in the stirrup and tried to swing her other leg over the back of the horse, failing miserably.

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Alys stood back, enjoying herself immensely as she watched her new healer attempt to clamber onto her horse. Her tiny legs were flailing around, too short to reach up and over the horse's back. Eventually, though, the game grew tiring; even with the occasional teasing view of Ella's stockings as her skirts rode up her calves. Alys pushed off from her tree and strolled over to Ella, wasting no time in gripping her waist and roughly hoisting the woman onto her horse.

"Aries doesn't like it when you dally," she said smoothly as she untied the horse from its post. Coming around, she swung herself up and into the saddle with practiced skill.
"Put your arms around me," she said, looking over her shoulder to see Ella attempting to hide a scarlet blush behind her dark hair.

"I'm fine as I am." Ella lifted her chin in defiance, daring her to say anything. Alys simply shrugged, squeezing her thighs into Aries' side, and urged her horse forward. Aries trotted forward smoothly and Ella held her hands steadfastly at her side, refusing to so much as touch the woman in front of her.

They continued in this fashion: Alys quiet as a stone, Ella absorbed in her own self-satisfaction, until they reached the outskirts of the village. The fields neared and without warning, Alys suddenly let out a loud, barked cry and Aries broke into a gallop, nearly flinging Ella to the ground. Her arms traitorously wrapped themselves around Alys's waist, a blush rising to her cheeks again as she felt the strong muscles flexing beneath the other woman's tunic.

She pretended not to hear Alys's smug laugh as it whipped by her in the wind.
As the hours wore on, sun dipping low in the sky like a golden egg, Alys directed Aries toward the dark thicket of trees looming overhead. They'd long ago reduced speed to a trot and, if the pleasant weight at her back was anything to go by, the gentle cadence of their journey had lulled her new companion to sleep. Ella's hands rested in loose fists across Alys's thighs, arms barely circling her waist.

Enjoyable though it was to have Ella's persistent heat warming her back, Alys steered her horse quickly toward the most unsteady expanses of their trail. She would need to wake up now; she'd need to be fully alert and holding on tightly once they entered the forest. Rough bumps from dips and rocks in the trail slowly stirred the other woman, who shot up, back stiff as a board, and clenched her arms painfully around Alys's middle.

"Be careful!" she wheezed, "Are you trying to kill me?"

"A girl can dream," quipped the smaller woman.

Alys rolled her eyes, but a smile twitched at the corners of her mouth. She loved a spirited woman, so much so that it had become a running joke within her family; "Alys likes her women like she likes her horses: head strong and impossible to tame!" She could practically hear her brothers' booming roars of laughter.

"You wound me," she drawled, urging Aries forward into the forest with her thighs. All sounds stopped then and Ella stilled behind her, hands digging into Alys's buckle. Even the sound of Aries' hooves seemed to disappear.

"The Whispering Wood," she said lowly, turning her head so Ella could hear her, "it's best to stay quiet here. Do you see that tree? The black one, with the knotted trunk?"

Ella's head moved up and down on her back, nodding silently.

"When we reach it, close your eyes and don't open them until I tell you to. Do you understand?"

Ella's head gave a short nod again and Alys heard a small whimper behind her. Thin arms clutched tighter around her middle. A shrieking caw rang through the forest around them as they neared the blackened tree.

"Close your eyes now, and hold on tight, we're going to pick up pace. Don't worry, I'll protect you, princess." Alys couldn't help the smile that bloomed across her lips as Ella let out an annoyed scoff, delicate fingers roughly pinching her stomach in irritation.

Aries grew more agitated with every step past the tree. The air around them seemed to thicken, closing in, nearly suffocating them. Alys pulled a tiny sigil from her trouser pocket, rubbing her thumb over the carving, and hung it loosely in Aries' mane. She calmed then, sigil visibly soothing the young mare, and Alys whipped the reins, throwing them into a gallop.
They seemed to ride forever. Ella came close to opening her eyes a fair few times, wondering if Alys was just trying to prevent her from seeing where they were going, but a voice in the back of her head stopped her every time. Strange sounds enveloped her and a heavy, humid air pressed thickly against her lungs. Thin fingers seemed to grasp and scratch at her cloak and legs. She shuddered. As loathe as she was to admit it, the sturdy presence before her made her feel much safer- even if only for the fact that Alys clearly knew these woods well.

Eventually, mercifully, the horse began to slow and the body in front of her pressed backward, nudging Ella's head.

"You can open your eyes."

Blue light swam before her, strange and glowing. The heavy air had dissipated, replaced with the cool, fresh air of twilight. A trickling stream bubbled nearby. How had she not heard that before? Finally, the horse stopped and a small campsite came into view, tucked away under the woolly ledge of overhanging foliage and tree roots. Alys dismounted with ease and led Ella and her horse off the path, tying the mare to a large fallen tree. And just like that, she marched off, leaving Ella still astride her steed.

"Get me down," Ella demanded. Her pride hurt from needing the help, but the soreness in her thighs was worse and she knew she wasn't getting off this beast on her own anytime soon. Even in the dark, she didn't miss the cocky smirk on the other woman's lips.

"I didn't think you needed my help," Alys teased, hands busy unrolling parcels and collecting firewood. She stood up, heaving a large bundle of wood onto her shoulder and leaned against a tree, smirking. A wave of exhaustion flew over Ella, and she sighed.

"I'll do it myself then."

Leaning forward to lay flat over the saddle, she gripped Aries' mane and attempted to slide her leg over the horse's back. She was well aware of the eyes staring intently at her behind and chose to ignore them. Thankfully, dismounting a horse seemed to be much easier than mounting one and soon enough Ella's legs rested snugly together, feet hooked in the stirrups as she prepared to lower herself to the ground. The ache in her thighs intensified painfully and her muscles clenched as she dropped roughly to the forest floor.

"I'm not getting back on that horse!"

Alys rolled her eyes; if she'd known the woman would be such a drama queen she might have left her in that inn. But rather than start a fight, she spun quickly on her feet and dropped her bundle to the earth with a thud.

"Get me some dry leaves. Twigs. Anything we can use for kindling," she ordered, mind focused on arranging her sticks in a perfect tepee.

"I'm not your servant."

"Aren't you?" Alys challenged, eyebrows raised. The wanted poster's edge peeked out from the back pocket of her trousers, and Alys watched Ella's eyes slide over to it before meeting hers again.

Ella let out a low breath and marched away, careful not to stray too far from Alys's watchful gaze.
Half an hour later, a small fire was blazing in their makeshift campsite. They'd dined on whatever nuts and berries they'd scavenged while searching for kindling, and a bit of bread from Alys's pack. Ella had refused her offer of sharing body heat for extra warmth and chose instead to sleep on the bare forest floor. Her loss.

In the light of the fire, the feisty woman looked unbearably small. Her personality gave her the air of being bigger than she truly was, Alys supposed. Shadows danced across Ella's face as Alys took this opportunity to really take in her new healer. Honey blonde waves cascaded down Ella's back and over her face; she'd let it down before settling in for bed and Alys was shocked to see that much hair fall from beneath her hood. Her moss green eyes were shielded behind her closed eyelids now, dark lashes dancing in the firelight.

She'd seen earlier, when Ella was trying to mount Aries, that the skin behind her knees bore a gorgeous golden tan, but she didn't realize how golden Ella's skin really was until now. Not that she got much of a chance to look considering the fact that the small woman had ridden behind her all day. But now, in the light of the fire, she saw smooth, tanned skin everywhere; freckles fanned across a fine, straight nose; red, curling lips pouting against the forest floor. She was beautiful—and all hers.

She smiled, leaning back against a nearby stump, hands sharpening the hidden blade she'd produced from her boot. Sounds of the nocturnal woodland creatures filled the air, and Alys kept her post, eyes scanning the trees. She stayed like that for hours, even after the fire died down to nothing. Even after the sun peaked above the horizon. And longer still, until Ella began to stir, waking from her slumber at last.

Chapter End Notes

hope you enjoyed! I'm sorry if it was a bit slow, I'm trying to be a bit more descriptive when it comes to the world around my characters rather than just focusing on the two alone. Let me know what you think!!
Chapter Three

Chapter Notes

Hi guys, I made a moodboard for this story if anyone is interested. Here's a link to it: https://pin.it/7a6d5hgkl43aps

If the link doesn't work, you can find on my profile on pinterest. My username there is infernal_poppy, same as here. It's called Quiver & Quill moodboard (obviously lol). Hope you like it!

Also, "banfri" is what I'm calling the currency in this world. I just made it up because I have no idea how real medieval currency works.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. Three

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Sunlight filtered through Ella's eyelashes as slowly blinked her eyes open. The forest floor beneath her was warm from the heat of her body, and she could hear little creatures skittering about in the underbrush. Lifting her head, she scanned the campsite, seeing no trace of Alys.

"Morning, princess."

Ella nearly leapt out of her skin. Alys was standing behind her, tucked between two trees, carving an apple with a small knife.

"Don't call me that," she snapped. She didn't know why the nickname bothered her so much but it did; though judging by the pleased look on Alys's face, she probably shouldn't told her so.

"Clearly someone's not a morning person."

"Actually, someone's not a 'merrily chat with her kidnapper' type of person," Ella said, rising slowly to her feet. Alys tipped the knife at her gently, talking around a mouthful of apple, "Blackmailer. I didn't kidnap anyone; you came of your own free will." Ella scoffed.

"We're leaving within the hour," Alys said, wiping her knife on the thighs of her trousers. She slid it back into her boot.

"You should probably eat something. I'd hate to see what you're like on an empty stomach. I'll ready Aries."

Ella brushed off the sly jab, dread settling in her stomach at the thought of another full day of riding. Her legs and back still ached smartly from the day before.

"Can't we walk??"

"Sure! We'll even hold hands. Maybe a lovely woodland creature will come along and sing us a happy song," Alys deadpanned.
Embarassment flooded Ella's cheeks and she busied herself with finding something to eat, hiding her face behind her hair. Within a few minutes, she had a small assortment of berries and nuts and was sat quietly against a large tree enjoying her breakfast. From her position, she could observe Alys without much detection as she packed up the camp, kiding dirt over the embers of their fire.

She'd taken off her heavy, dark cloak from the night before and was flitting around the campsite in a loose tunic and trousers. Ella watched as she rolled her baggy sleeves up to her elbows, hefting bag upon bag onto Aries' saddle. Her dark hair was in a bun near her nape, tendrils escaping to hang unkempt around her face. She had dark eyes, Ella noted, so brown they were almost black, framed by equally midnight lashes. Her face was equal parts soft and harsh, with her sharp cheek bones and jaw, but gentle slope of her lips and nose.

Ella cocked her head to the side and glanced quickly up and down Alys's body. She definitely couldn't take her in a fight, she thought, but she'd already figured as much since the moment she laid eyes on her. She was graceful, limbs long and lithe, but strong. She could see the muscles of her thighs from her spot 30 paces away and she knew from the day before - when Alys had lifted her effortlessly onto her horse - that her arms were just as strong.

"Would you like me to pose for you? At least then you could say your staring was for the sake of art."

Ella's eyes snapped up, meeting Alys's. She hadn't realized she'd seen her.

"I wasn't staring," she squeaked, blush tinting her cheeks. Alys snorted and turned back to Aries who, by now, was packed and ready to go. She abandoned the rest of her breakfast, scattering it gently for birds to find, and walked toward Aries. She waited to be lifted onto the horse, pride thrown to the wind, knowing she couldn't get up on her own.

Alys seemed to sense this and approached with a gleam in her eye. She gripped Ella's waist for the second time, throwing her heart into an unsteady rhythm, and hauled her onto Aries with a small grunt. Ella closed her eyes, praying for the strength to endure another long day of riding as her hands slipped automatically around Alys's waist. With a quick click of her tongue Alys urged them on, further into the wood.

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Two hours into the journey, Aly felt Ella's thighs jump and tighten behind her. The saddle shifted as the smaller woman attempted to readjust her body, a pained cry brushing the back of Alys's neck.

"It won't be much longer," she said, feeling guilty. In truth, she'd forgotten what it was like to ride a horse for the first time; to have that steady, dull ache in your legs and back. Ella stopped squirming, letting out a quiet breath.

"Do we have to ride again soon?" The question was nearly a whisper.

"Yes." Alys hated the feeling of Ella's shoulders slumping, exhausted, against her back but she wouldn't lie to her.

They rode on in silence for an hour, listening to the wind whisper through the tress around them. Rabbits and deer peered out at them from the trees as they passed. Finally, the trees began to thin and a village came into view as they reached the edge of the forest. There was a small market near the edge of town and Alys made a mental note to stop by and stock up on food for their journey. In the meantime, they'd be stopping at an inn for the night. She wasn't sure Ella could handle another
night on the horse, or in the forest for that matter.

Steering Aries toward the village stables, Alys flicked a silver coin to the stable boy for Aries’ care and dismounted. She turned swiftly and pulled Ella from the horse, not in the mood to wait for her to get down herself.

"There's an inn around the corner, come on." She grabbed Ella by the wrist to lead her in the direction of the inn, but Ella pulled her wrist from Alys's grasp.

"I can walk well enough on my own, thank you. I don't need to be led."

Alys shrugged and continued on, peeking behind her intermittently to make sure her healer hadn't fled. As the inn came into view, a delicious smell wafted into the square, filling her lungs; was it time for supper already? Ella's stomach growled and Alys looked over her shoulder, eyebrow arched.

"Didn't I tell you to eat?"

"I did!" Ella's protest was weak and Alys was sure even she could hear the lie in her voice.

"I realize you don't often get women as ravishing as me in your village, but really Ella, you can't neglect your health just so you can-"

"I wasn't staring at you!!" Ella yelled loudly. Heads turned in their direction and Alys watched a slow blush creep up Ella's neck. She smiled.

"Don't be embarrassed, princess. I'd stare too if I were you." She threw the other girl a wink and watched as Ella rolled her eyes, still blushing.

The door to the inn creaked loudly when Alys pushed it open, making a show of holding it open for the woman trailing behind her. The old woman manning the front desk looked at them, unamused.

"Five coppers a night," the woman eyed them wearily, "no couples discounts."

"We are NO-" Ella started.

"One night, then. We only need the one room." Alys said, cutting off Ella to drop seven copper banfri on the counter, "and supper in our room, if you would."

The woman tossed her a key, gave a quick nod toward the stairs and turned back to her guest book, ignoring them now. Alys took the stairs two at a time with Ella scampering behind her, trying to keep up. Their room was small with only a tiny windowpane providing any light. A small bed was pushed into a corner, blankets folded neatly over the mattress. There was a screen in the opposite corner, behind which a small wooden bath sat, ready to be filled with heated water from the hearth in the middle of the room.

Alys stepped in, waiting for Ella to cross the threshold before closing the door behind them.

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Ella watched nervously as Alys unbuckled the many knives and purses from her belt, dropping them onto the floor before flopping into a nearby chair and raising her dirty booted feet to rest on a lone table. She raised her arms into the air, bending them to lace her long fingers behind her head.

"You look terrified," she laughed.
"I won't be sharing your bed, if that's what you had in mind when you purchased only one room."
Ella glared at her, refusing to budge from her safe space by the door. Alys barked out a sharp
laugh, eyes scrunching as she smiled.

"I won't be staying here, princess. I have business in town," she lifted a finger as Ella's mind raced,
thinking of an opportunity to escape,"and I know you'll be here when I return because if you aren't,
well..." Her hand flitted to the poster in her back pocket, waving it in Ella's face.

"Yes, you're very scary. Will ruin my life and send me to the stake. I get it."

"Just as long as we understand each other," Alys replied, face smug.

Ella could feel her face screwing up in disdain. She itched to smack that smirk off her captor's face,
but pushed the thought away. She could never stomach violence; even as a child, when all the
other kids in her village were playing knights and bandits, she kept to her room, healing injured
beetles and forest mice.

"When will you be leaving?"

Alys pretending to mull the question over, making Ella sigh impatiently.

"After supper, I suppose...unless you'd like to give me a bath," she said, wiggling her eyebrows.

A knock sounded at the door, and the smell of food filtered into the room, distracting Ella from
being indignant for only a moment. The old woman entered, tray in hand, and left quickly after
admonishing Alys for "putting her grubby feet on the new furniture."

The soup was delicious, and something Ella had never tasted before. It was spicy and warm, filling
her throat and chest with a pleasant heat, and the bread that accompanied it was steaming and
lavishly buttered. She regretted eating so quickly once it was gone.

"It's Hotroot stew, in case you were wandering."

Alys had finished her food lightning quick, nearly inhaling it, and spent the rest of her time watch
Ella enjoy her meal.

"It's delicious," Ella breathed, "can you make it?"

"I can," Alys smiled. She leaned forward, "But it'll cost you. Admit you were staring and I'll make
it for you anytime you want." A blinding smile stretched across her lips.

Ella rolled her eyes so hard it hurt. She wanted to put Alys in her place, but she also desperately
wanted more soup and she was nothing if not a slave to her appetite.

"Fine. I was staring, are you happy now? Get me more food." She carefully avoided Alys's
eyes.

"I knew it."

Ella didn't have to look at the other woman to feel the waves of satisfaction rolling off of her. She
heard her stand up with a grunt and begin piling her knives and purses back onto her belt.

"The innkeeper will bring you more soup-"

"And bread!" Ella corrected quickly; she intended to get her bargain's worth.
"-and bread," Alys smiled, "I'll be back soon. Try not to miss me."

She swept out of the room, throwing her heavy cloak over her shoulders as she went, and Ella was finally alone.

The innkeeper returned shortly thereafter with another (larger) bowl of soup and more bread. She seemed much kinder now that Alys was gone, smiling warmly at Ella as she gave her the food. "Maybe she doesn't care for Alys's infuriating arrogance either," Ella thought as the woman left her to eat in peace.

An hour later, warm and blissfully full, Ella decided to soothe her sore muscles with a hot bath while she had the room to herself. She walked quietly down to the desk and inquired about where to find water to warm for her bath. The woman, who Ella now knows as Istrid, handed her a large pail and directed her toward well water pump near the back of the inn.

It was tedious work, and her thighs ached terribly from carrying so much water up the stairs so many times (not to mention hauling the heated water out of the hearth) but eventually, she had enough water for a hot bathe. Istrid had given her a small soap, saying she'd charge Alys for it later, that smelled strongly of cream and honey.

The water was bliss. Ella leaned back against the tub, head lolling over the side as her muscles finally relaxed. She took her time washing her body and hair, making sure she scrubbed every bit of dirt from her skin. By the time she emerged from the water, her skin was pink and hot - if a little sore - from her diligent scrubbing. Her hair and skin were heavily perfumed by the soap and she stopped to smell herself more than once, eyes drifting closed.

After spending so much time getting clean, she was loathe to put on her dirty dress again. But she knew it was better than having Alys appear in the morning to see her naked and tucked away in bed. So she compromised and dressed herself in her chemise, the cleanest item of all her clothes, and sat on the bed to brush her hair.

It was pitch dark outside; even the torches on the outskirts of town had been put out. As Ella sat in bed brushing her hair, she began to wonder what exactly Alys's business in town was. And for that matter, what exactly she did in general that required her to so desperately need a private healer that she would resort to blackmail. She seemed to have a decent amount of money, why couldn't she just hire a healer?

Her mind swam with images of Alys creeping around in the darkness, wondering yet again who it was that she was bound to. Snug and warm in her bed, Ella's eyes began to feel increasingly heavy and soon she was drifting off to sleep.

-----hours later-----

Ella didn't know how long she'd been asleep when the door to her room burst open, banging loudly against the wall. She bolted awake, eyes wide as a large figure stumbled into the room, cursing.

"Fuck!"

The intruder bent forward, kicking the door closed, and began fumbling around the room. Finding her voice, Ella finally managed to let out a loud yell.

"I'm armed!!" she screamed, picking up a stray candlestick and cursing herself silently when her voice shook. "I demand that you leave at once!!"

The figure snickered and suddenly the room was illuminated by soft glow of candlelight. Alys was
leaning against the hearth, arm clutching her abdomen in pain, as she pushed the candle forward to rest on the mantle. Ella saw blood staining her once white shirt. She ran forward without thinking and grabbed Alys's arm, gently pulling it away.

"What happened?? What were you doing? Who did this to you??"

"Heal first, talk later," Alys croaked as she made her way tenderly to the bed and collapsed onto her back.

It took a few moments of effort, but Alys was finally able to lean forward into a semi-upright position. Her side ached and she dared not look at the damage that lay beneath her shirt.Fuck it all, it was her favorite shirt too.

She watched Ella flit around the room in a panic, lighting candles and digging through bag after bag cursing about the "astounding lack of ingredients." If it were any other time, Alys knew she wouldn't be sitting motionless on a bed with a beautiful woman flying around her in nothing but a chemise. But she was in too much pain to do anything other than commit the sight of Ella to memory for her enjoyment later.

Dainty hands filled with bottles, Ella dashed over. Alys couldn't help the clenching of her thighs at the smell of her; she smelled delicious and sweet, like honey. She willed the though away. Looking down, she saw Ella's eyes were wide and focused as she pushed Alys's arm away and kneeled by her side, gently untucking her shirt to get better access to the wound. She sucked in a deep breath and Alys watched her eyebrows furrow.

"Man or beast?"

"Beast," Alys said, eyes finding the ceiling.

She heard Ella let out a shaky breath and then the sound of tinkling glass drew her attention back to the bed. Ella was blending herbs and liquids from various vials into one of their empty soup bowls. She bent forward and smelled the concoction, closing her eyes.

"Drink this," she said, shoving the bowl into Alys's face.

"You first."

Ella's face twisted, her mouth forming a small 'o' as she stomped her feet impatiently.

"You're the one who asked for my help!! You're the one who BLACKMAILED me into being your healer-" she began.

"Exactly," Alys interrupted. "I blackmailed you. And what better way for you to be rid of me than to poison me under the guise of aid. Drink it." She glared at Ella, dark expression telling her that she was not to be trifled with. Not right now.

Ella huffed and drank a mouthful of the elixir, raising her eyebrows afterward as if to say, "See??"

Satisfied that she wasn't about to be poisoned, Alys reached for the bowl and drank deeply. It was sweet, with a warm but bitter after taste, but it did nothing for her wound. She was prepared to question the legitimacy of Ella's abilities when suddenly the smaller woman raised her shirt and placed both hands directly onto her skin, closing her eyes.
An unbearable heat began to spread through her torso, swelling and then shrinking to concentrate around her wound. She gasped in pain and watched as her skin begin to knit itself back together, pulling taut. Her vision began to tunnel and she felt she may pass out when suddenly the pain was gone. She looked down at her stomach. A faint, pink scar was the only proof there'd been a wound at all.

Eyes wide, she looked at Ella - who was resting on her knees, sweating and trembling- and then glanced back down at herself.

"No wonder they thought you were a witch," she breathed. What Ella had just done was impossible. If she hadn't seen it with her own eyes, she'd never have believed it. She wasn't even sure if she believed it despite seeing it with her own eyes.

The room filled with tension as Ella rose shakily to her feet. Alys couldn't look at her. She was uncomfortable having shown so much vulnerability this early into knowing the girl. Her eyes shifted around the room before catching on the filled bath and her heart lifted. Her mask of arrogance slid back into place and she smirked.

"I see you've changed your mind about my bath," she winked.

Ella looked like she might explode from rage. Good, she thought. That was just the way she liked it.

Chapter End Notes

Oof, this was a long one. I hope you guys enjoyed. I'll post another soon!
Chapter Four

Ch. 4

Ella stretched languidly in the bright morning sun. There was quiet music filtering in from the town square, the sound of people laughing below making her smile. She'd slept well, but was still exhausted. Healing took a lot out of her on even the best of days. She threw aside the blanket, body protesting fiercely, and stood from the bed.

Alys was dead asleep in a chair by the hearth, head resting heavily on her hand. She was still wearing the bloodied shirt from last night and clearly hadn't bathed after Ella had gone to bed. Ella wrinkled her nose. No way was she riding behind Alys all day if she was this grungy and filthy. She may be stuck with her, but she had standards dammit.

Stepping quietly, she made her way over to the table, picking up a hard, stale piece of bread. She closed one eye, tongue poking out in concentration, before launching it at Alys, striking her square between the eyes.

The other woman bolted upright with a snort and looked around the room, confused. Ella lifted her hands in triumph, grinning proudly.

"What the fuck!" Alys said, clearly annoyed.

"You smell bad," Ella deadpanned, pinching her nose dramatically.

Alys slid down in her chair, head tilting back, and grinned.

"It's not my fault you chickened out of giving me my bath."

Another stray bit of bread flew across the room, but was (unfortunately) deflected by Alys's hand.

"I never offered to bathe you!! Don't be so crude!"

Ella groaned, pressing her lips into a thin line. She dressed quickly, ignoring Alys's gaze at her back, and grabbed the coins.

"You'd better not-"
"I know," Ella said impatiently. Alys narrowed her eyes and watched her silently for a few moments.

"Be back in an hour."

Ella nodded and scurried from the room quickly, excited to see the market and be far away from Alys at last.

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It took a long time to empty the tub of water, and Alys was bored with the task by the time it was fully emptied. She wondered if Ella would notice if she simply wiped herself down with a rag. Probably. She sighed.

After a full twenty minutes of heaving and heating water, Alys was finally submerged in the hot bath. Her muscles relaxed gratefully against the heated water and she allowed her eyes to drift closed. She'd forgotten how good this felt. Normally she bathed in streams and rivers, moving the process along as quickly as possible to get out of the freezing water.

Now, she sank as low into the tub as her long body would allow and looked around the room. She was gonna have to pay quite a bit extra for housekeeping after last night's debacle. The room was an absolute wreck. She grabbed the small bar of soap from the table and worked it into a lather, mind drifting to the memories of Ella in her chemise.

Her body had looked so soft; rounded hips meeting curvy thighs, the slight swell of her breasts teasing Alys's memory. Her waist dipped deliciously under her ribs, the perfect size for Alys to get her arms around. She'd never enjoyed corsets herself, refused to wear them at all, but she thanked her lucky stars for them when she remembered how Ella's had accentuated her curves beautifully.

She'd daydreamed for so long that the suds from her lather had disappeared, dissolving into the water. The water which, by this point, was beginning to cool. With a loud sigh, Alys pulled herself into a sitting position and finally began to wash her body and hair. She was just closing her eyes to rinse the bubbles from her scalp when the door opened and Ella skipped in, smiling.

A shriek pierced through the room and Alys had to hold back a laugh as Ella dropped her parcels to the floor to cover her eyes.

"You dropped the food! Now the fruit will be bruised!"

"You're naked!!" Ella screeched, a terrific blush forming over the skin beneath her hands.

"Yes, well, I can't very well bathe in my clothes can I? What's on your head??" Alys titled her head to the side, taking in the small blue flower crown sitting atop Ella's blonde waves.

"NAKED!!" Ella screamed again, refusing to remove her hands from her eyes.

"God," Alys groaned, turning her head toward the ceiling before moving out of the bath.

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Ella heard Alys leave the tub roughly, water cascading over the side to pummel the floor. Her heart was flitting around in her rib cage like a scared bird. Alys was naked - and very muscular, a voice in her head whispered - only a few feet away. Ella squeezed her eyes shut, trying not to think about what she'd just seen.
She could hear the sound of cloth rustling and peeked between her fingers to see Alys covered by a long loose shirt as she bent down to retrieve a pair of trousers from the floor. Ella cautiously removed her hands and watched as Alys jerked her pants on, roughly tucking her shirt in as she went.

She spun around and gestured to herself as if to ask if this was better.

"What is that?" she asked, voice failing to hide a laugh as she pointed to Ella's head.

"It's a flower crown," Ella huffed, strangely embarrassed. "A man gave it to me at the market, he said it would match my eyes."

"Your eyes are green," Alys pointed out.

Ella huffed and tapped her foot quickly against the ground.

"Don't be rude to me just because you're jealous that no one is giving you flowers," Ella snapped. Alys looked at her in shock before keeling over in a fit of giggles.

"Stop it!!"

"I'm sorry, princess, really, I am," Alys said, wiping tears from her eyes. "But the last thing I'd ever want is for some man to give me a flower crown, thinking that'll get him into my pants."

Ella looked at her dumbfounded. Her mouth opened and closed like a fish as she searched for a retort.

"--that's not what happened!!" she squeaked at last.

"Of course not, princess."

"It's not!! He was being nice!"

"I see. And he didn't happen to mention to you how beautiful he found you?" Ella's eyes turned away, refusing to meet Alys's gaze. "Thought so," Alys quipped, face entirely too smug for Ella's liking.

"People can just be nice, you know!!"

Ella wasn't sure why she was being so adamant about this. In terms of hills to die on, she certainly had quite a few more pressing matters she could choose instead. But she just couldn't handle the look on Alys's face when she thought she was winning an argument.

"Oh sure," Alys said, voice positively dripping sarcasm, "you have gorgeous breasts by the way. Oh, don't give me that look! I'm just being nice."

Ella glared at her, self consciously folding her arms over her chest.

"I'm going to the stables. Aries is much better company than you anyway. You can pack up on your own," she snapped.

Whirling on her feet, she practically bolted down the stairs, unwilling to wait for Alys's reply.

Chapter End Notes
Sorry this chapter is so short! It's working basically as a filler chapter while i work on bigger plot points coming in the future! Hope you enjoyed! -p
Chapter Five

Chapter Notes

Please read!!!

Trigger warning: spiders, mild gore, scary situations.

This chapter gets a bit scary, or at least unnerving (if I've written it well) so please keep that in mind as you read on!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 5

It was an hour into their journey before Ella spoke to Alys.

"Are you going to tell me what you were doing last night to sustain injuries like that?"

"No."

Alys urged Aries onward, ignoring Ella's petulant huff. They were riding through yet another forest path, though this one was decidedly more pleasant than the last. Sunlight filtered through the canopy above, dappling across the forest floor, and the air was filled with pleasant birdsong. It would be a few hours still before they reached their next destination: another small village, hidden in a tiny valley between a thicket of trees.

Ella turned her head to look out into the wood, smiling as tiny purple birds swam through the air, weaving effortlessly around each other, as if in a dance. She was just beginning to turn her head to look over to the other side when movement caught her eye.

Just beyond the forest line, barely visible among the foliage, was a small man lying in a pool of his own blood. Ella's heart stuttered and she jerked against Alys's back, making the other woman grunt.

"Alys, stop!!!"

She heard Alys sigh in annoyance.

"We still have hours left before we reach town, we can't stop just because you saw a pretty bird."

Ella shoved against Alys's back, pulling her hands backward to grip the edges of the saddle.

"What are you doing??" Alys demanded. "Stop wiggling before you fall off-"

Ignoring her completely, Ella took a deep breath, closed her eyes, and swung her leg behind her and across the horse's back. She hit the ground with a horrible thud, pain blossoming around her right ankle. Hobbling her way to the overgrown bushes, she heard Alys cursing loudly behind her. Ella ignored the other woman's yelling and pushed on toward the injured man.

A quiet groan sounded up ahead - was he this far away before? - and Ella pressed forward,
disregarding the flames licking painfully up her ankle. She had only just reached the man, hand outstretched in front of her to find the source of his bleeding, when she realized the birds had stopped singing. The forest was silent.

Ella leaned forward, voice a whisper, and touched her hand to the man's forehead, "Sir? Are you alright? What happened??"

From a distance she heard branches cracking as Alys ripped through the trees toward her, screaming something she couldn't quite make out. The man peered up at her, eyes blue as the sea, and touched her hand gently.

"You should have listened to your friend."

A horrible grin split his face, baring filthy pointed teeth. His head whipped back with a deafening crack, so hard it should have killed him. Ella watched in horror as his body began to contort, bones shooting out at odd angles, growing and pulsing. A sickening stench filled the air and Ella gagged, retching onto the forest floor. His human form began to waver, the body of a terrible black spider replacing it.

She couldn't look away. The creature towered over her, blue venom seeping thickly from its enormous fangs. Its many legs tapered into sharpened points, as if it were walking on twisted, broken daggers.

The sound of a sword being unsheathed barely registered through her terror. Alys flew into her field of vision, sword raised, and dashed around the creature. Ella watched as she ran full force at a large tree, jumping up and kicking off the trunk before swinging her sword down over one of the monster's legs. She grimaced as the severed limb hit the ground with a disgusting, wet thump; the creature screeching so loud it pulsed in her ear drums.

It swung its front leg forward, jaws snapping, and connected savagely with Alys's abdomen. She flew backward, head knocking the ground viciously. Ella watched with bated breath as the creature advanced. Alys wasn't getting up.

Panic seized her chest and she flew forward, wrapping herself around the creature's back leg, and bit down. She fought bile at the taste, trying to push her disgust as far back into her mind as possible. Her nails clawed into the creature and it wailed, whipping around and flinging her off with a quick flick.

It turned it's attention toward her and sprinted in her direction, black tar leaking from its wound, its thousand eyes focused only on her. Ella kicked furiously, punching and flailing, as it pulled her off the ground, dangling her precariously over its open maw. Rows upon rows of sharp black teeth undulated beneath her, shifting in an elaborate dance. She closed her eyes, hoping that death would be quick.

A thunderous roar sounded below her. Ella squinted her eyes. A flash of blinding silver light flickered between her eyelashes and the beast let out another pained howl - followed by the wet sound of something slapping heavily against the forest floor - and suddenly Ella was plummeting toward the ground. Her breath left her and a hot liquid was spreading along her back as she laid in the dirt, staring at the canopy of trees above her.

"Ella?!!"

Alys was rushing toward her, covered from head to toe in black tar, eyes wild with fear. She reached forward, grasping Ella's wrists, and dragged her far away from the dead creature.
Calloused hands grasped the sides of her face, pulling her attention away from the bloody scene before her and toward warm, brown eyes. Worried eyes.

"What were you thinking??" Alys shouted, "I told you to stay back! I told you it wasn't safe!!"

"I couldn't hear you..."

Ella blinked slowly as shock took over.

"What was that thing?"

"It was an Ozine. A shape shifter. They wait in forests, or along deserted roads, presenting themselves as injured people or animals, and then they devour anyone who stops to help them. That," she pointed at the mangled spider, "is its true form."

Ella nodded, numb. Alys sighed, gently pulling Ella to her feet before leading her slowly back to the path where Aries waited.

"We'll ride fast; get to town as soon as possible so we can get this ichor off before it makes us sick," she paused to place Ella gently into the saddle, "but it normally takes more than a few hours to start seeing the symptoms so we should be fine."

Ella leaned back slightly, making room for Alys to swing onto the saddle. Her stomach turned when she placed her arms around Alys's waist, feeling the sticky wetness transfer onto her forearms.

"How did you kill it?" she whispered. Alys stilled, hands gripping the reigns.

"I ripped its fucking heart out."

Aries broke into run and they fell silent.

The purple birds returned then, chirping happily, but Ella couldn't bring herself to smile.

Chapter End Notes

I wanted to add some cool (read: really freaking creepy) creatures and give you guys a glimpse of what Alys actually does. Hope you all enjoyed! The next chapter will be much kinder to poor little Ella. I feel so bad for traumatizing her.
Chapter Six

Chapter Notes

Just a quick definition: Braies are linen shorts that men (and Alys lol) wore during this time period as underwear. Get ready for some tropey goodness.

Ch. 6

The monster's blood had hardened and dried on Alys's clothes before they reached the next village. Dark, turbulent clouds had begun to form as they reached the clearing beyond the trees and Alys felt Ella shiver behind her as the air cooled.

By the time they found a stable for Aries, the sky was so inky black it looked like night had already fallen. Ella held her arms out to Alys as she dismounted, clearly exhausted and no longer in the mood for attempting to dismount on her own. And this time, when Alys took her gently by the wrist to lead her to an inn, Ella put up no fight.

There was only one inn in Alnwick - The Soaring Sparrow - and it was a large, formidable stone building. Soft orange light danced behind the paned windows and, as they drew near, the soft lilt of a band drifted through the air.

Inside was a large tavern, packed to the brim with jovial townsfolk. A stocky, elderly man sat at the counter cleaning glasses and collecting coins. Alys felt eyes boring into her, whispers flitting through the air like sharp knives as the music lulled to stop. All eyes had turned to take them in.

"The fuck are you staring at? Haven't you ever seen two women covered in blood before?"

Alys stared, unblinking, into the crowd and within moments the band had begun to play again as the towns people shifted their attention away from the pair uncomfortably. The man at the counter looked Ella up and down before turning his gaze to Alys. Alys's fists balled at her side, but made no remark. They just needed to get up to their room and starting a fight with the innkeeper was a surefire way to throw that plan awry.

"What can I do for you two...fine ladies?"

Alys pulled out a small leather coin purse and sat it on the counter.

"We'll need your most private room, as far away from this noise as possible. Have dinner and a bath sent up as quickly as you can. We could use it."

The man laughed and emptied the purse, pocketing the coins inside. He withdrew a large cast iron skeleton key from the wall and directed them toward their room. Alys pulled Ella forward toward the stairs, her clothes crunching audibly as they climbed.

They were on the topmost floor, all the way at the end of a winding hallway, their door resting out of sight behind a little nook in the wall.

This room was much larger than the last; there was a massive four-poster bed taking up nearly an entire wall at the end of the room, and a plush couch sat in front of a large hearth. A few feet from
the bed sat a great brass tub, rounded around the edges like an enormous, overgrown bowl. It was surrounded by a thin cotton screen, meant to protect one's modesty should someone barge in, but it was entirely see through and could really only be used for decoration.

Alys led Ella into the room quietly, resting her hand across the small of her back. She was beginning to grow worried about her traveling companion; she hadn't said a word since they'd set off from the forest.

"Are you alright, princess?"

She watched Ella's back closely, dropping their supplies gently to the floor. Ella kept her back turned as she moved gingerly across the room toward the large paned window by the bed. She waited patiently for an answer, but none came, until Ella began to sniffle, shoulders shaking softly.

Fuck. She'd always hated it when girls cried..

She moved slowly across the room toward Ella, being as quiet as possible so she wouldn't frighten her. Ella leaned into her as Alys slowly turned her around, wrapping her arms around her in the process.

"It's alright," she cooed, "it's all over now."

Ella pushed in her face into Alys's filthy shirt, before hugging her tightly. Alys wrapped her arms around Ella's tiny frame, not sure how to handle this situation, and lightly patted Ella's back.

"You smell really bad," came the soft voice below her, and Alys snorted.

"You don't exactly smell daisy fresh either, princess."

Ella laughed, making Alys's heart soar.

"I hate it when you call me that."

"I know. That's why I do it." She felt Ella scoff against her, breath fanning out over her chest.

Ella slowly released her arms and pulled away, averting her gaze to hide the pink blush rapidly spreading over her cheekbones. A loud knock sounded at the door, startling them both, and they jumped apart.

A plethora of maids entered the room, one carrying food, many others carrying steaming buckets of water and soaps. Yet another came later with a washing board and a small tub. They worked quickly, filling the tub with perfumed oils and hot water, before leaving as swiftly and silently as they came.

They rain had begun to pour down outside now, battering against the window violently. Booming claps of thunder seemed to shake the ceiling above them and Alys looked outside, hoping that poor Aries was okay in the stables. She hated storms.

"I'll bathe while you eat," she said suddenly, turning to face Ella, "I can't put anything near my mouth with this stench coming off me."

Ella's eyes widened, "What??"

Alys rolled her eyes and began the arduous process of removing her clothes. Flakes of dried blood crunched and fell off her trousers as she tossed them to the floor. It took a while to get her shirt off
without smearing even more goo into her hair or across her face. She was just beginning to unravel the fabric binding her breasts when Ella stopped her.

"Wait!! This isn't right!"

Alys groaned, impatient to get into the hot water already.

"Look, as adorable as your concern for my modesty is, I'm really not in the mood. I'd like to bathe today at some point."

Ella crossed her arms over her chest and huffed.

"I don't give a rat's ass about your modesty! It's not right because you're absolutely filthy. If you bathe first, all the water will be putrid by the time I get in."

"I never said you couldn't get in with me," Alys quipped with a smirk.

"I most certainly will not!!"

Ella looked like her eyeballs were about to pop right out of her head. Alys shrugged.

"Suit yourself. But I'm not waiting; I can't stand this filth any longer."

And with that, she spun around, unraveling the cloth at her chest as she went, and walked toward the tub.

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Ella turned around just in time to miss Alys dropping her shorts to the ground. She heard a gentle splash of water and a quiet groan behind her.

"You're missing out..

Ella stood firm, her back obstinately facing the bath, as she went over her options. She could either get in with Alys and risk embarrassment...or she could wait and bathe in Alys's filthy water and risk feeling the latent effects of residual Ozine blood. She shifted on her feet nervously.

"I'm not gonna look, Ella. Just get in already. You're making me anxious and it's ruining my relaxing bath."

"Fine..but close your eyes. I mean it!"

She looked over her shoulder to see Alys closing eyes, hands reaching up to cover them for good measure. She still had that infuriating smirk on her face.

Ella undressed as quickly and quietly as possible, feet padding faintly over the wood floor as she made her way to the tub.

"Face the other direction and don't turn around," she commanded.

Alys laughed softly and brought one hand up, eyes still closed, to give her a sarcastic salute before turning around. Ella lowered herself carefully into the hot water, making sure her back was to Alys's before letting out a breathy sigh.

"I'm opening my eyes now."
Ella hummed, too absorbed in how wonderful the hot water felt to think up a proper response. They sat in relative silence, each facing the opposite wall, as they relaxed into the water. Ella was just starting to build the willpower to find a bar of soap when soft skin rubbed gently across her back. Goosebumps erupted across her body as she fought the temptation to turn around and look at the woman behind her.

The water began to pull and push around her, rocking against the side of the tub, and small suds made their way into Ella's field of vision. Aly's must have the soap then. Ella's heart rate slowed as she realized the brief moment of contact was only a result of Aly shifting to scrub at her skin.

"So...are you gonna get my back for me?"

Ella whipped around, then remembering they were both indecent, turned quickly away again.

"Shut up, Aly's."

She knew the other woman had heard the tremble in her voice, but was relieved when she made no comment.

"Maybe I should do yours then."

Ella valiantly fought the blush rising up her neck. She splashed water over her shoulder, smiling when it hit the back of Aly's head with a harsh smack.

"As if I'd let you near me with those hands. You'd rub the skin straight off my back with those callouses."

The water danced around them as Aly moved, leaning her back against Ella's.

"I can be gentle," she whispered, tuning her head so that her breath brushed against the nape of Ella's neck.

Ella let out a shuddering breath, heat blooming in her chest and descending quickly down past her stomach, settling low between her thighs. She reached a hand behind her and cautiously rubbed her fingertips against Aly's arm.

"Just give me the soap."

Aly laughed, tipped her head forward to quickly scrub her scalp clean before passing the soap behind her to Ella.

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By the time they got out the bath, the water was nearly black and cold. Aly had gone first, feeling no sheepishness about wandering the room naked. In truth, she was just trying to make Ella feel less nervous; she knew the smaller woman was much more reserved and likely wouldn't leave the tub until Aly had.

Throwing on a pair of braies and a clean, loose shirt, she beckoned Ella from the tub, promising not to look. Ella had taken much longer to clean herself; Aly hadn't failed to notice how gently she'd detangled her hair with her fingers before washing it. Or how she'd rubbed the soap between her hands, coating them in lather, before cleaning her body. Aly hadn't meant to look but that screen really was useless, and Ella's dark silhouette, shifting and moving in the water, had been too tempting.
By the time Ella emerged, Alys had already laid a second pair of braies and a shirt on the bed for her.

"Uh, Alys...what are these?"

Alys knew she was motioning toward the shorts without having to turn around.

"They're undergarments, princess. I'm not in the habit of carrying slips around with me, so it's those or nothing."

A small 'hmph' floated across the room. There were a few moments of light rustling as Ella dressed, followed by the sound of footsteps as Ella drew near.

"I look ridiculous," she pouted.

Alys turned to comment on Ella's ungracious snip over her wardrobe, but found no words would form on her tongue. Ella's small frame was drowning in Alys's shirt; her long blonde hair pushed back and out of her face, dripping water down the front of her blouse. The dirt smearing her features earlier that day was gone and replaced by supple pink skin. She tilted her head to the side, cocking her hip out unconsciously, and looked at Alys.

"Alys? Are you alright?"

Alys watched as Ella's eyebrows furrowed, standing frozen as Ella made her way over, placing her delicate hand on Alys's arm.

"That thing hit you pretty hard. Are you sure you're alright?"

Soft fingertips grazed the inside of Alys's forearm, moving up. She closed her eyes.

"I don't see any injuries or bruising...did you hit your head when you fell?"

Ella's hands reached up to cup the back of her head. Suddenly Alys remembered where they were and how they came to be there; she'd blackmailed Ella. She had no right to feel this way, and especially not to want to act on it, after what she did. She turned her head to the side, shaking Ella's hand away.

"If I need your healing, I'll ask for it," she said, refusing to meet Ella's eyes, "don't waste your energy. Come on, the food is getting cold."

She turned away quickly and all but ran to the table.

She never saw the look of hurt that danced over Ella's face, or the way her fingers twitched, as if missing her, after she'd gone.
Chapter Summary

TW: suicide attempt i guess, but not really..

Chapter 7 AKA the one where Alys freaking stabs herself to prove a point and then acts like a cheeky bastard about it

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ch. 7

By the time they'd gotten around to eating, their food was cold. It hadn't been as good as Istrid's soup, but it was filling and the bread was nice enough. Alys had, of course, scarfed the entire thing down in two seconds flat (Ella wondered if she'd even tasted her meals at all) and had watched Ella as she picked at her plate.

"You don't like it?"

Ella looked up. Alys was leaning back in her chair - one leg in front of her, the other splayed haphazardly over the armrest - with her chin rested comfortably in her right hand.

"How did you know how to kill that spider creature?"

"Ozine," Alys corrected.

Ella rolled her eyes and gave her a withering look.

"How did you know how to kill the Ozine, then?"

Alys merely shrugged.

"You can kill just about anything if you go for its heart."

"Is this where you tell me a long and tragic story about how a woman broke your heart?" Ella quipped, arching her eyebrow.

Alys roared with laughter, head tipping back toward the ceiling. Ella felt weirdly proud to have made the other woman laugh, but quickly squashed the feeling. No way did she care about anything Alys said or did.

The two looked at each other, sizing one another up, as Alys's laughter died down.

"Why won't you tell me what you do? How you got hurt that night, or how you knew to rip that Ozine's heart out?"

Alys tensed and began to unravel herself from her chair.

"Because it's none of your business."
Ella jerked back as if she'd been struck.

"Don't you fucking dare!" she shouted, suddenly overcome with anger. "You force me to come along with you, spend all your time eyeing me like a piece of meat and making your little comments, barge into my room in the middle of the night COVERED IN BLOOD and you want to tell me that it's NONE OF MY BUSINESS?"

Alys stood, straightening out her shirt, before heading over to the bed.

"Don't ignore me, Alys!"

Alys continued to fret with the blankets on the bed, but Ella could tell by the set of her shoulders that she was tense. Even more furious at being ignored, Ella stomped across the room and began tearing the bags off the floor. She ripped open the first one, dumping out all its contents, and then not seeing what she was looking for, reached for the second. Alys finally took notice and turned around to glare at her.

"What do you think you're doing?"

"That's none of your business," Ella mocked, hands tearing through the second bag before starting on the third, and last. It was the smallest of the three and Ella knew that Alys kept it closest to her both when riding and in town. She was hopeful that she'd find was she was looking for there.

"Ella! Stop ripping through my stuff! I'm not in the mood to deal with one of your tantrums."

Ella continued to search the bag, but visibly deflated when she didn't find what she needed.

"Ah," came Alys's voice behind her, "you're looking for this then."

Ella turned to see Alys holding her folded wanted poster between her first and middle fingers. Scrambling to her feet, she darted over to Alys, aiming to snatch the poster out of her hand. Alys, of course, was expecting this and held the paper high over her head, out of reach.

"Give it to me now, Alys!!"

A filthy gleam flashed across Alys's eyes, and she smirked, her eyes roving over Ella's body.

"I had no idea you'd be so desperate for it after only a few days together. Normally, women wait at least a week before begging me for se-"

Alys's breath left her lungs in a rush of air as Ella punched her right in the gut. As the other woman doubled over, Ella used the opportunity to shove Alys onto the bed, successfully bringing the paper down to her reach. She reached out and snatched it quickly, heart hammering.

She was scrambling to put on a pair of trousers when a small laugh sounded behind her.

"Do you honestly think...that I'm incapable of reporting you to the authorities...without...that?" Alys wheezed, hands clutching her stomach.

Ella stood frozen by the fireplace, as Alys caught her breath and stood. At her full height, she towered over Ella.

"I hate you," Ella spat.

"Do you?" Alys asked, stepping dangerously close.
"Yes."

Alys turned her head to the side, looking at Ella closely.

"So if I were injured, right now, you wouldn't help me? You wouldn't heal my wound and send me on my merry way?"

Ella's eye twitched in aggravation.

"No, I wouldn't!"

She knew it was a lie. She'd help even her most mortal enemy if came to it, but she wasn't about to tell Alys that. Alys hummed softly, looking Ella up and down.

"Maybe we should test it then," she said evenly.

Ella's heart plummeted to her feet.

"...what?"

Alys didn't respond, but instead floated over to her filthy clothes and pulled her dagger from the pile.

"I'm going to stab myself with this dagger-"

"You will NOT!" Ella interrupted fiercely.

"I will," Alys continued, "and if I die, Aries is yours. You'll be free." She leaned forward so that her face was only inches from Ella's, "But if you heal me, I don't EVER want to hear you say that you hate me again."

Ella opened her mouth to protest, but never got the chance, as Alys swiftly plunged the dagger into her side, wincing in pain as she dropped to the floor at the foot of the bed.

Ella screamed, hands darting out to cover the wound.

"ALYS, YOU F***ING IDIOT!" she screeched. Her vision began to tunnel as she panicked, hands still pressing over the wound.

She closed her eyes, willing her body to calm down long enough for her to figure out what to do. She may have healed plenty of people and animals in her life, but never once had she had someone injure themselves right in front of her.

Slowly, images began to appear in her mind. A cloudy wisp of loveweed, two crushed swallow-worts, a single ruby red drop of blood. Hers, she realized. A sense of purpose filled her chest, temporarily pushing away the panic, and she grabbed the nearest cloth she could find before jamming it up against the wound. She hastily tucked Alys's hand over the make-shift bandage.

Running across the room, she began shifting through the bottles strewn across the floor - she was really regretting tearing apart those bags now- crawling across the room quickly on her hands and knees as she searched. A hasty look behind her showed Alys, pale as a ghost, with her head lolling back on the bed. Ella clenched her teeth. If she survived this, Ella was going to fucking kill her.

Finally, finding the last swallow-wort, Ella piled her ingredients in her shirt and rushed back to Alys. She didn't have time to crush them with a mortar and pestle like she normally would have, so instead opted to take everything in her hands and squeeze it into a gooey pulp. Once the concoction
reached the consistency of a proper poultice, Ella snatched Alys's dagger from the floor and used it to cut along the tip of her ring finger, dripping her blood into the medicine.

Alys was beginning to go limp by the time Ella pulled up her shirt to reach the wound. Ella smacked her twice across the face, yelling "DON'T GO TO SLEEP," while she packed the wound with her poultice.

Closing her eyes and drawing as much energy as she had left, she placed her hands over the gash in Alys's side and concentrated. A familair blue heat began to spread down her neck. As it neared her heart, Ella watched from her mind's eye as the color began to change from deep blue to a sunny green and then to a sparkling gold. She cocked her head silently, furrowing her brow. She'd never experienced her powers changing colors before. It was always blue.

When the light reached her fingertips, it burned with such an intensity that she nearly snatched her hands away, afraid she might burn Alys. She sat like that, hands hot and aching, for what felt like forever, when finally Alys began to stir and moan, causing Ella to open her eyes.

The blood had stopped, and the heat was finally (thankfully) beginning to dissipate. Ella shivered as she felt a cold sheen of sweat cool on her body. She looked down to see Alys, covered in blood and sweat, shivering from blood loss, and smirking at her with a knowing look.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Ella snapped, shoving herself away.

"You don't hate me," Alys replied, eyes glittering, voice rough and hoarse.

"You almost died, nearly killed by your own hand, and all you can think about is that fact that I don't hate you??"

"Yep," Alys said, smiling up at the ceiling.

Ella stood abruptly from Alys's side. Her legs quivered at the abrupt movement, body exhausted.

"I'm going to bed."

She watched as Alys turned to face her before clambering up off the floor to slide into bed alongside her.

"Sooo...did you still want to fu-"

"Shut UP, Alys," Ella screeched, covering her ears.

"Next time then," Alys quipped before blowing out the bedside candle, sending their room into darkness.

Ella had finally closed her eyes, lulled closer and closer to sleep by the storm, when she suddenly remembered that Alys was covered in blood and probably ruining the sheets. She shot up, hair wild as a rats nest, and shoved Alys out of bed.

"What the FUCK, Ella. Shit! It was just a joke!"

"You're getting blood everywhere!!"

Alys scoffed from the floor.

"Well pardon me, your highness."
Ella was glad the light was gone, because she wasn't sure if she would have been able to hide the blush -or lust- that was drifting over her features as she watched Alys's silhouette rip off her shirt and toss it to the floor. Her heart pounded in her chest as she felt a warm, and nearly naked, body slide into place behind her.

"Uhm..is that really appropriate?"

Her voice came out as a shaky whisper. Alys hummed and stretched out, one muscular arm resting above Ella's head.

"Absolutely," she said, voice closer to her ear than Ella remembered, "we don't want to ruin the sheets do we, princess?"

A beat passed between them before Alys spoke up again, "You know you're covered in my blood. Maybe you should take your tunic off too, just to be safe."

Ella drove her elbow sharply behind her, needling Alys's ribs. Alys wheezed faintly behind her and Ella smiled to herself, shoving her face in the pillow.

She closed her eyes, listening to the rain once more, and when she finally drifted away, Ella dreamed of strong arms, dark hair and wicked, filthy grin.

Chapter End Notes

Alys is such a slut, i'm sorry lol. she just has a lot of feelings about Ella. I hope this chapter wasn't too weird for you guys, what with Alys being a dramatic ass bitch through most of it. i'll try to show more of the world and creatures soon! and I promise you guys will find out what alys does (if you haven't already figured it out) soon.

End Notes

Hope you guys liked it!! If you're coming here from my other fics, I know I've been gone for a while. I've had some personal issues, but I'm back now and hoping to update more often. Please let me know what you think, what you do or don't like, comments etc. Constructive criticism is welcome but don't be brutal please.

- Poppy

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!