

In all of Ivory Island, everyone knew the Brinstone mountain healer. Twins Bria and Kira grew up hearing tales and rumors about a healer with unimaginable powers residing at the mountain's peak near their homestead, Rirnah. Each time noblemen or women came shrouded in thick cloaks, the twins watched in awe as they left ill only to return wholly healed. Some nobles rewarded their parents handsomely for aiding the process, others expected to be treated as their titles held them to be.

One evening, a noblewoman approached the tavern, screeching complaints that overwhelmed the bard's song before she even passed the threshold. She clearly sought the healer as she scratched red blisters on her arms and wrists when she hiked up her cloak sleeve. Bria met eyes with Kira and nodded. The twins' mother was in the kitchen tonight, so now was the perfect time to pull off their usual stunt.

Kira kept to the wooden walls of the tavern, massive weapons and other trinkets easily hiding the small frame of the 11-year-old girl. Bria walked to check on a table, listening for any coins jingling as the woman stormed by. She signaled to Kira that the coin purse was on the left hip before disappearing amongst the tavern guests.

"Hi, I'm Bria!" she said, appearing next to the woman who whipped her head around in shock. "People always come to see the medicine woman, so I show them cool stuff whenever my dad's busy." The woman looked back at the charismatic man tending the bar and screeched for his attention. "He's my dad and owns the tavern," Bria stated. "He never forgets a face, so he knows your place in line." She smiled knowingly, and the woman turned around, bewildered.

"Line? My *place*? Do you know who I am, peasant?" She chastised.

"I *know* you need a distraction from the itching," Bria stated, glancing at the woman's bare, blistered wrist. "I can play a song for you," Bria offered, gesturing to the platform stage. The noblewoman muttered something about a bar maiden finally doing her job before naming a tune. Bria made her way to the raised platform where the bard had sung earlier and looked for an instrument when she saw a strangely shaped apparatus. Bria never saw the bard play this, so her eyes lit up when she brushed her fingers across the strings. The instrument had a heavenly chime, as if beckoning Bria to play it on stage, so she picked it up delicately and hopped onto the platform. But, before she tried to play, there was an ear-piercing screech.

"Thief!" The woman shouted, but no one flinched to stop Kira from running with the woman's coin purse. The woman screamed for someone to do something as she stood there like a damsel in distress before booming laughter from the bar drew everyone's attention to her father. To accompany the noise, the kitchen doors swung open, and the twins' mother burst out

Bria

with a large wooden spoon. "Girls! Whatever it is, give it back *now!*" Bria saw Kira's face pale before her sister ran up the stairs against the far wall. Their father yelled for mother-hen to calm down, drawing her attention away from the stage. Bria clutched the instrument and ducked behind the platform, holding her breath. She'd meet up with her sister later because right now, she had to evade her mother and hope the bard wouldn't deeply miss their stringed contraption.

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