

## ***Starlit Wonder***

*The POV character, Wren, learns about the wonder surrounding her as she collects starlight with Lucinda, a witch. She finds wonder in both the world around her and in Lucinda.*

“Isn’t the sky stunning tonight, Wren?” Lucinda asked, resting her head on my shoulder. I looked up at the starry sky, still in awe of its breathtaking beauty. Unlike the plain black skies of Evorna, the skies of Ilvane sparkled in shifting shades of blue and pink and violet.

“It is. When does the meteor shower begin?”

“Not for another hour. Which reminds me.” Lucinda began to dig around in her bag. “I need to start preparing. Hold this.” She set an ornate spyglass in my hands. And then another.

“Why do you have an extra spyglass?”

“That one’s for you. I thought I could teach you how to capture starlight. It’s a valuable skill for witches.”

“You really think I can be a witch?” Lucinda gave me a gentle smile.

“Of course. You have the mark.” She ran her hand over the pink flower mark on my palm. “Don’t give me the whole ‘I’m Evornian, I can’t be a witch’ thing again.”

“I wasn’t going to. I have proven myself wrong enough times.”

“That’s the spirit! Okay, how much do you remember me telling you?”

“These spy glasses work by connecting to astral energy, and transforming that energy into a physical form. Whenever I spot a shooting star, I’ll adjust the lens and...focus.”

“Basically. You’ll know what to do once the shower begins, I promise. Witches’ instinct.”

“How much stardust do you plan to collect?”

“Um...I have twelve jars, so...twelve jars worth.”

“Will that be enough?”

“Oh definitely. I don’t specialize in astral magic, so hopefully I can sell anything extra we collect.” Lucinda set her spyglass aside and pulled her knees into

her chest. “We can rest for now. When the shower starts, we’ll know.” I stared back up at the sky, wondering why I was taught to hate a place that was so beautiful.

“Do you think I’ll ever find out my connection to Ilvane? To witchcraft?”

“I hope so. After tonight we can try to find the mage who sent you here. I don’t think she intended to send you to my woods, but...I think that was the best option.” Lucinda clutched my hand.

“What would have happened to me otherwise?”

“You probably would have been trained to serve in the queen’s army. It’s not the saving grace the queen says it is.”

“Let me guess, it’s like King Helven’s army, but ‘better’.” Lucinda nodded, frowning. “Do we want to find this mage?”

“I’m not so sure anymore. We can try to find your roots without running into the queen’s army. Hopefully. Wait! Do you hear that?” We both went silent, and I heard a faint twinkling sound. “It’s starting! Here!” Lucinda shoved my spyglass into my hands. “Remember what I taught you, Wren. Focus on the stars.”

“Right. Focus on the stars.” I held up my spyglass, beginning to feel something pulse throughout my body. I quickly locked onto a slowly falling star, and I began to slowly twist the lens. The star sparkled, and my mind went blank. After a second, I shuddered and came back to myself. Lucinda was grinning wide.

“You did it! That was a large star for your first one.” I held up my spyglass, seeing the jar nearly filled with an iridescent powder.

“Does it always feel so weird?”

“It does at first, but you’ll get used to it. Did you feel like your soul was leaving your body and then violently got shoved back in?”

“Kind of. How am I supposed to get used to this?”

“Oh, you will. Switch out your jar and have another go at it.” I screwed off the jar, and Lucinda handed me a new one. She turned her spyglass to the sky, and I did the same. We soon fell into a steady rhythm. One of us connected with a shooting star, and the other would help switch out the jar of stardust. All of our jars were filled within half an hour. I fell back onto the hard stone of Lucinda’s observation deck.

“Wow. That was amazing. How much longer will the shower last?”

“A couple more hours. This is my favorite part. Just laying back and watching the stars.” Lucinda laid back, grabbing my hand. “They’re so beautiful.”

“I know.” We laid in silence for a while, just watching the glittering stars streak across the sky. I squeezed Lucinda’s hand, still in disbelief of how wondrous this realm was. A cool breeze was blowing over us, and a few leaves floated down onto my chest. They were a soft green, with golden veins.

“Autumn is coming,” Lucinda said. “You’re going to love it. The leaves turn pink, can you imagine that?”

“No. But it sounds wonderful. Do you have any autumn festivals? In Evorna we would always have a feast on the autumnal equinox.”

“I’ll meet with my fellow witches to bless the woods for the coming season. Our feast always comes on the winter solstice, when we reap the fall’s bounty.” Lucinda smiled softly. “You should come to the blessing. I don’t think you’re experienced enough to take part, but it’s a beautiful thing to witness.”

“I would be honored to attend.” We fell back into silence, and I felt myself begin to tear up.

“You okay, Wren?”

“Yeah, yeah, I just...I still can’t believe I’m here. With you. Collecting starlight from the night sky. How could this realm have been kept from me? From everyone in Evorna?”

“Greed. It always comes down to greed. The queen believes Ilvane is the only kingdom that deserves magic. But she’s wrong. Magic is what brings wonder to our world. Its presence is neither good nor bad. How people wield it determines that. But magic’s absence only leads to emptiness. Evorna is a horrific example of that.” Lucinda sighed, turning onto her side. “Let’s not discuss this anymore.”

“Good idea. Tonight’s about the stars. What happens to the stars after we capture the starlight?”

“I don’t exactly know. They don’t die, I know that. You’d have to ask a witch who specializes in astral magic.” I yawned, curling up into a ball. “Wren, are you falling asleep on me?”

“It’s the middle of the night. I’ll stay out here if that makes you happy.”

“Astral witches do say sleeping under the stars is rejuvenating. I think I’ll join you.” Lucinda curled up against me, and I felt my cheeks heat up. “Sleep well.”

“You too.” I drifted off, feeling a sense of contentment in my heart. I couldn’t have asked for anything more wonderful.