

## CHAPTER 2

# A Hot Moment

“Who are you?” The hooded girl’s soft voice comfortably broke through his reverie. She tilted her head, and Kase thought he could see the beginnings of a smile.

Before Kase could answer, he heard the door of the room fly open. The hooded girl spun around and sat up straight at the table. Kase didn’t move. A spider ran across the floor next to him. Beyond the spider, the small shoes of a professor were pacing at the front of the room.

“Girls,” said the professor. He cleared his throat. He was breathing quickly. “I don’t have time to supervise your detainment. As punishment for your crimes, you will stay here during the assembly and do some extra homework.”

The professor’s voice grew softer. “Talen, I want you to write a ten page essay on why you should not trespass in restricted areas of the castle. Lenia ...”

The professor stopped talking, and sighed instead. “Yes, Talen,” he said regretfully.

“Thank you, Professor Dowie,” replied the girl from the front row. “Do you want me to write about the school policy, or divulge into the laws of the realm in regards to trespassing? If I just have to write about the school policy, then my report will be about ...” Talen paused for a second. “Twelve pages long. But if I have to write about the laws of the realm, then my report will be ...” she paused again. “Thirty-four and a half pages long.”

“Just write about the school policy,” replied Professor Dowie with a frustrated sigh. “If you finish before I come back, then keep going on the laws of the realm.” Kase saw Talen’s hand reach down into her sac and take out a quill.

“Lenia, I want you to get out a notebook and write the following sentence down one hundred times.” Professor Dowie raised his voice to drive the message home. “I will not light anything on fire!”

“Lines?” Lenia quipped. “You want me to write lines? Isn’t that a little juvenile?”

“Two hundred,” said Professor Dowie with a stern voice.

Lenia sighed and shook her head.

“Don’t roll your eyes at me, young lady,” the Professor said angrily. “Three hundred!”

Lenia pulled her hood down to cover her face and went silent. The professor seemed satisfied with that response, and walked back towards the door. “I will return after the assembly. I expect you both to still be here,” he added, and rushed out of the room.

As soon as the door closed, Lenia turned again to look at the overlooked inmate. Kase was still on the floor, but he was rubbing his face in angst. He pushed his hair back, and their eyes met for a second time.

“You’re not going to light me on fire, are you?” he asked.

Lenia giggled. “That depends.” Her green eyes darted to the right in a playful sort of way. “How come you’re in here?”

“I don’t really know, to be honest,” Kase replied as he stood up. He picked up his chair, put it back in its spot, and sat down. Lenia grabbed her chair and turned it around so that she could sit down and face him. She put one elbow on the table and cupped her chin in her hand. Her green eyes glowed with anticipation.

“I guess I was in the wrong place at the wrong time,” Kase looked down and twirled his thumbs. As he explained his story, he felt like he

was in serious trouble. But when he finished, Lenia just laughed. He was confused, but her laugh relieved him.

“I can’t believe you got sent here on your first day!” Lenia said in awe. “That’s got to be some sort of record, even for a warrior. You haven’t even been to your dorm yet!” She shook her head in disbelief. “I got sent here for the first time in my third month here, and I thought that was good!”

“I don’t really think it’s a good thing that I’m here,” Kase replied with a shocked look.

Lenia laughed again. “I was being a little sarcastic,” she said with a wink. “I’ve been known to be sarcastic from time to time. Seriously though, it doesn’t sound like you really did anything wrong, and I’m sure this Niveous will get caught up in his lies eventually.”

“Sorry,” Kase replied nervously. His dimples accompanied his confused grin. “I just ...”

Lenia reached across the table and tapped him softly on the shoulder. “Relax,” she said. “I have just the thing to take your mind off the mess you got yourself into today. It will be fun!” She turned around in her seat and reached into her sac. She pulled out a quill and a notebook and put it on the table in front of Kase. “See, you can help me with my assignment,” she said casually.

Kase’s smile disappeared. “That doesn’t sound like fun,” he said.

“Trust me,” she said, and their eyes met again. She opened the notebook up to the first page and held the quill, pointing the tail end in Kase’s direction with a playful grin. He accepted it with a cautious hand.

“Now write ‘I will not light anything on fire’ on the first line of the page,” she said, pointing to the notebook. Kase held the quill firmly, concentrating on the letters. He wrote the line as Lenia instructed, and then leaned back in his chair once he was finished.

“I’m not writing that three hundred times,” he said as she reviewed his entry.

“You have really nice writing for a warrior,” said Lenia, ignoring Kase’s comment. “Actually, I didn’t think a lot of warriors even knew how to write, or read, for that matter.” She reached over and took the quill back, and turned the book towards her. “Now watch this,” she said as she stood up.

Lenia moved the quill to the second line of the notebook and held it steady. She moved her free hand over the top of the quill and slowly started to wave it around. She closed her eyes. “Oh magic quill, do not be still; copy this line, three hundred times.”

She opened her eyes and let go of the quill, but it didn’t fall. It was hanging in the air, as if her hand were still holding it. Kase watched as it began to move on its own, copying the line that he had written just moments ago. Once the quill finished on the second line, it moved to the third and started again. Kase’s face lit up with excitement and wonder.

“Cool, huh,” Lenia said proudly.

“That’s brilliant!” Kase said with a smile. “Do you just leave it now while it does your assignment for you?”

“That’s it. Just let it do its thing, and soon the work will be done,” Lenia replied happily.

“That’s cheating,” Talen finally spoke up. She had turned in her seat, and must have watched the whole thing unfold.

Lenia looked over her shoulder, and as soon as their eyes met, Talen quickly turned around and huddled over her book. “What are you going to do about it?” snickered Lenia as she glared at Talen. “Are you going to tell on me? I dare you.” She turned back towards Kase and sat down in disgust.

“Come on now,” Kase tried to keep the peace. “We’re all in this together, aren’t we? We’re all ‘troublemakers’ here, but that doesn’t mean we have to cause trouble for each other.” He pointed to the quill, writing away in Lenia’s notebook. “Isn’t there a way we can use the

same magic on Talen's assignment, so that she doesn't have to worry about hers either?"

"It doesn't really work like that," said Talen from the front of the room. Her back was still turned to Kase and Lenia. She appeared to be working on her own assignment, but her focus was obviously on them instead.

"She's right, it doesn't really work like that," chimed in Lenia. She was a little calmer, but there was still tension in the room.

"What do you mean?" Kase asked curiously.

"The magic involved in making the quill write out lines doesn't really come from the words of the spell, it comes from me," Lenia responded. She pulled out her fire starter and held it tight. "The power that comes from a wizard is not the same as the power that comes from the muscles of a warrior, or the visualization and thoughts of the scholars."

She flicked the fire starter on and stared at the flame. "The power that comes from a wizard comes from the very core of their being: their emotions, their soul, and their connection to everything in the world. The key is not only being able to access that power, but to control it: to focus it on whatever the wizard desires."

She took a deep breath, and looked back at the notebook. The flame went out as she gestured to the quill. "Some wizards use wands or staffs as tools to focus the power that comes from within. In the same way, the words I used in the spell are a focus. They don't really mean anything; they're just a tool." Her eyes brightened. "Hopefully, once I get stronger as a wizard, I won't have to use words, or a wand, or a staff, or even my hands in order to channel it."

"So, the quill ..." Kase moved closer to examine it.

"Think of it as an extension of my being." Lenia leaned forward, too. "What keeps that quill writing is me: my power, my soul, my heart, and everything I believe in. Think of it like a part of me is actually writing the lines, even though I'm just sitting here."

“So you don’t have enough energy left over to use your power on a second one?” Kase’s brow furrowed as he tried to understand Lenia’s words.

She scoffed, and then shook her head, an amused look on her face. “It’s not about the amount of power; it’s about the focus of the power. The problem with helping out Talen comes from the nature of her assignment. It requires a knowledge base and facts to report.”

She leaned back, and put her fire starter back in her pocket. “A knowledge that I don’t have within my being. The magic for my assignment is easy, because the quill is just copying something that already exists, and the power within me relates to the first line that you wrote down. Talen’s assignment doesn’t exist yet, and it needs to be created from the knowledge in her own mind, and organizing those thoughts into a proper report.”

Kase’s face relaxed as he understood Lenia’s words this time. “I’m going to go talk to her,” he whispered.

“What are you going to say?” Lenia whispered back.

“Trust me,” Kase smiled and gave Lenia a wink. He got a skeptical look in return, but he could tell that she was at least intrigued by his positivity. He didn’t know what he was going to do, but he felt confident nonetheless.

He got up from his chair and walked over to the first row. Talen had her head buried in her notebook, and was busy scribbling down all of her thoughts into her report. He made his way in front of her, and knelt down. He crossed his arms on the table and laid his head on top of them, so that he was at the same level as her. Talen stopped writing, but seemed too shy to look up.

“Hi, I’m Kase,” he said in a friendly voice. A few seconds went by as he waited for a response, but she said nothing.

He tried again. “I heard the professor call you Talen. That’s a nice name.” She still didn’t move, and a couple more seconds went by. “Is it

all right if I call you Tal instead?" he asked. The awkwardness felt like it was starting to drive a wedge between them, and the silence of the room was getting heavy. He glanced over at Lenia for some help, but all he got in response was a confused grin and a shoulder shrug. He felt like she was enjoying herself, but it was at his expense.

He turned his attention back to Talen. "Alright Tal, I have a secret. Do you want to hear it?" he asked. A few more seconds passed. "I practiced for weeks just so that I could do a pretty good duck call." Still nothing.

Kase puffed up his right cheek and tightened the muscles around his upper lip. He forced the air through the small gap between his lip and his gums, and a duck sound escaped from his mouth.

Talen turned her head away from Kase's. Her lips curled up in a smile.

Kase jumped up in victory and laughed. "I did it!" he exclaimed. "I got through to you, Tal!"

"My name isn't Tal," she said as she looked down. "It's Talen. Talen Sparwood."

"Aw, come on, Tal," replied Kase. "We're friends now, aren't we? I can call you Tal for short."

Talen finally looked up at Kase. "You ..." she started, then paused. "You want to be friends ... with me?"

"Yeah, why not?" Kase asked. He looked at Lenia, who shook her head in disbelief.

"You're a warrior. I'm a scholar. We don't have anything in common," replied Talen factually. "Warriors are friends with warriors. Scholars are usually friends with other scholars. Except for me, I guess." She looked down in shame. "I don't have any friends," she added.

"Well, I don't have any friends here yet, either," Kase admitted. He put his hand over his heart. "I would be honoured if you would be my friend. Who cares if I'm a warrior and you're a scholar. We're all in here together, and that has to count for something, right?"

Talen looked back up at Kase and couldn't hide her smile any longer.

"Would you like to come with me back to my seat and talk with us?" Kase asked as he gestured over to Lenia.

Talen gathered her notebook, quill, and her sac and walked to the back of the room. Kase followed behind with a cocky strut and a stupid grin. They both sat down in the fourth row, and Talen looked at the magic quill, which was still writing lines for Lenia.

"That is actually a pretty good trick," Talen admitted. "It looks like you're already thirty-three percent done."

"Threes!" Kase said in support.

Lenia didn't respond. She seemed awestruck at the turn of events.

"What are you in for anyway? The professor said he caught you trespassing somewhere?"

Talen excitedly got out her notebook and opened it up to a page that looked like a large map. The drawing was labelled 'F2: Peach Tree'.

"This is a diagram of the second floor of the main castle," said Talen. "I've been doing some research on the floor plans of all the castles. I've looked at all the maps that are on record in the scholar library, but I've noticed that there are some areas in each one that don't match the actual floor plans of each castle. For example, there is a staircase on the map here"—Talen pointed to a section that was labelled 'Staircase 3'—"but when I went looking around, I couldn't find a staircase at all."

Talen flipped to another page that was labelled 'B1: Unicorn'. She pointed to a section with a long hallway, but her finger stopped halfway down. "This is a map of the basement of the wizard castle. I was walking down the hallway here, but ran into a wall that doesn't appear on the map."

Lenia frowned in puzzlement. It was all new to Kase, and he followed along with Talen's explanation with interest.



Talen flipped to a third page, labelled 'F1: Midnight Owl'. "This is the first floor of the scholar castle. I found a door at the end of the hallway here." Talen pointed to a line on the map that showed the end of a hallway, but a door wasn't there. "It was locked when I tried to open it. There was no one around, so I decided to pick the lock. I thought I was successful, but as soon as I tried to open the door, Professor Dowie came around the corner and caught me. As such, I am now in detention."

Kase was glad that she had shared her criminal past, and was intrigued by her story. "It sounds like you're becoming a professional sleuth," he said with a smile.

Talen smiled sheepishly back. "When I started this research," she said, a little less rigidly, "I thought it would be good practice for mapping out my surroundings. Once I'm done my four years of scholar training, I want to travel the realm and help discover new things about the world. But now that I've started this search, I think it's quite peculiar that there are hidden things even within these castle walls. It's kind of exhilarating to try and figure out this puzzle, even if it has gotten me into a little trouble."

She looked over again at Lenia's assignment. "Forty-two percent done," she said. It seemed like her attention was always on many things at once.

"Only one left," Kase said as he looked at the wizard. "Why are you here, Lenia?"

She puffed up her chest proudly, sat straight, and cleared her throat. "Have you ever lit a dandelion on fire?" she asked Kase and Talen. Her green eyes lit up.

They both shook their heads. Lenia's excitement was contagious. Kase couldn't wait to hear more.

"There comes a time in a dandelion's life when the yellow flower petals turn to seeds, and they look like a little white cloud hovering above the ground."

Lenia reached into her pocket again. “If you take a fire starter like this one and light the edge of the white dandelion, the whole thing lights up like a tiny fireball!” Lenia sparked a flame, and then waved her other hand across it. The flame grew larger, and then disappeared. Both Kase and Talen were impressed with the show.

“Lighting one dandelion can be beautiful, but imagine lighting a whole garden full of white dandelions!” Lenia looked over at Talen’s book. It was still open to the page that showed the first floor of the scholar castle. Lenia pointed at an area beyond the walls of the castle. “This morning, I found a large patch of white-topped dandelions here, and I just couldn’t help myself. It was like nature was giving me an early birthday present! I took my fire starter, lit the very edge of the patch, and watched as the entire thing burst into one beautiful, magnificent, raging firestorm.” Lenia sat down. She seemed exhausted from re-living her own experience.

“Unfortunately, Professor Dowie saw the fire and caught me, but it was worth it.” She smiled.

“So we have a burglar and a pyromaniac,” Kase said after listening to the stories of his fellow criminals.

“And an idiot,” said Lenia as she winked at Kase.

Kase laughed. “You’re being sarcastic again, aren’t you?” he said.

“No,” Lenia replied. She tried to keep a straight face, but then Talen chuckled, and they all broke out into laughter together.

“Let’s play a game,” Lenia said as she reached into her sac. She grabbed a small jar filled with raisins and a purple, ceramic bowl. The inside of the bowl was charred and rough. “Have you two ever heard of Flapdragon?”

Kase and Talen looked at each other, and then shook their heads in unison.

Lenia was oozing with excitement. “I’m going to put a handful of raisins in this bowl, and then light it on fire. The name of the game is to quickly grab a raisin out of the blaze and eat it.”

Lenia took the jar of raisins, and placed a few of them in the centre of the bowl. Kase and Talen looked on as Lenia sparked her fire starter. “Fire light, fire bright; stay ablaze, til time is right.” The outside rim of the bowl was instantly lined with a small fire; the flame flickered just beyond the top edge.

“I’ll go first,” Lenia said as she looked slyly at her audience. Kase was a little nervous, but eager to play. He studied Lenia’s technique as her hand darted in quickly and snatched a raisin out of the centre of the bowl, like a falcon snapping its prey from above. She showed the raisin to Kase and Talen, and then popped it in her mouth proudly. “See, it’s that easy. Who’s next?”

“Kase will go,” Talen said as she looked at the bowl of raisins. She couldn’t take her eyes off the creeping flame.

Kase gave Talen a quizzical look, and then moved his hand over to the bowl without hesitation. He concentrated as hard as he could, and tried to mimic Lenia’s technique.

Unfortunately, his movement was not nearly as elegant as Lenia’s, and when he swiped his hand down, he hit the edge of the bowl. It wobbled from the impact. He brought his hand up, and proved that his clumsiness wasn’t indicative of failure. He proudly showed off his raisin.

“That was easy,” Kase said. He popped the raisin in his mouth and grinned. Lenia and Talen both laughed, since his form was clearly graceless.

“You’re starting to get this whole sarcasm thing, aren’t you,” said Lenia.

He smiled and looked away shyly. He *was* enjoying himself.

“Talen, you’re up,” Lenia said as she turned her attention to the third player.

Talen looked a little nervous still. “That’s okay, I’ll just watch, thank you,” she replied politely, but skeptically. “If that’s fine with everyone?”

“That’s fine, Talen,” Lenia said with a smile. She turned her attention to Kase, and squinted a little, as if studying him. “Let’s take this up a notch.” She put her hands under the rim of the bowl and closed her eyes. The fire in the bowl rose higher, stopping when it had tripled in size. Kase had to move his seat back a little bit; the heat was more intense.

Lenia stood up and took a step back. She moved her right arm high and behind her head in order to get some extra momentum for her attack. She drove her arm down into the bowl. She brought it back out, shook her hand for effect, and then revealed her raisin. “That was close,” she said as she popped it into her mouth.

Kase could tell that she was trying to sound cocky so that he would attempt the much more challenging level of Flapdragon. Fortunately for her, he was ready for the challenge.

Kase stood and steadied himself. He tried to move a little closer to the bowl, but the heat was a little uncomfortable. Nevertheless, he reached his arm behind his head like Lenia did, and then drove his hand at the bowl.

His hand was swift, but it struck the edge of the bowl instead of the centre. There was a loud bang as the edge dipped down and hit the tabletop with great force. The bowl then skipped back up, tumbled around, and danced down the length of the table. It crashed into the magic quill. Raisins flew everywhere, and both Lenia and Talen ducked for cover. It landed at the end of the table face-down. The fire was out.

Lenia and Talen both looked back up and started to laugh. Kase tried to remain confident, even though his effort had ended in failure. “That means I win, right?” he said confidently, but he couldn’t help but laugh at his own mistake.

“Almost,” joked Lenia, as she started to gather the scattered raisins. Kase and Talen joined in, and they all worked together to help clean up his mess.

Talen picked up the quill and returned it to Lenia. “Looks like it’s still in good shape, and you’re already done seventy-nine percent of your assignment,” she said reassuringly.

“Thanks, Talen,” Lenia replied as she set the quill on top of her book. “I’ll just have to re-do that spell to finish it off.”

When they were done cleaning up the mess, Kase turned to Lenia. “What’s it like to control fire like that?” he asked curiously.

“I feel both nervous and exhilarated,” Lenia responded with a wicked smile. “It’s nexhilarating.” She sat back down in her chair. She set the bowl back in front of her, and started the fire again. “Fire is my favourite element to play with, because it’s warm, and bright, and alive; but then, it can also be dangerous, chaotic, and unpredictable. When I feel it with everything I have, it’s the closest thing to being free that I’ve ever experienced.”

Lenia looked at the fire with hypnotic eyes, making the flames dance up and down effortlessly in the bowl. “I’ll try and show you. Just put your hands under the bowl like I did.”

Kase put his arms on the table, and cradled the bowl in his hands. He didn’t feel nervous, exhilarated or nexhilarated, but he did feel calm and happy.

At the safe end of the table, Talen sat down and watched the experiment.

“Now close your eyes,” Lenia said soothingly. “Try and clear your mind of everything around you.” Kase followed Lenia’s direction precisely. His face relaxed, and he tried to keep his mind open. Unfortunately, he couldn’t stop thinking about the beautiful wizard in front of him.

“Good,” said Lenia as she continued. “Now, when I do this, I try and feel the fire from within. Don’t think about it; just feel it. Feel the warmth of the fingertips of the fire. Feel the strength in the arms of the fire. Feel the deepness within the heart of the fire.” Lenia took

her hands and put them over Kase's. Her touch was soft. Kase felt his heart start to beat faster.

The fire jumped up with an ambitious roar. The tips of the flame almost reached the roof. Kase and Lenia could feel the heat rush out at them in the instant blaze, and they both leaned back and withdrew their hands from the bottom of the bowl. As quickly as the fire shot up, it went back down, and extinguished into nothingness.

"What happened?" asked a surprised Talen.

Lenia just stared at the bowl in disbelief and awe. "That's impossible," she muttered.

Kase moved his hand over his heart, and could feel it trying to escape his chest. He felt excited, alive, and dangerous, all at the same time. He didn't want to let go of that feeling

Lenia tilted her head, looked at him, at her own hands, and then back at the bowl. It was as if she tried to study what had happened from a better angle. "What was that?" Lenia asked in a slow, soft voice.

Before any of them could respond, the door of the room flew open again. This time, a burly man entered. Lenia was still fixated on her bowl, but Kase and Talen turned their attention to the man, who had to duck in order to enter the room.

"Kase Garrick," the man said, in a low, powerful voice. "Come with me."

Kase nodded at the monstrous man, and then looked back at Lenia, smiled, and shrugged his shoulders. He stood up from his chair and grabbed his sac. As he passed by Talen, he gave her a pat on the shoulder. "See ya, Tal."

"Goodbye, Kase Garrick," Talen responded.

Kase stopped and looked back at Lenia one last time. "Goodbye, Lenia..."

"Rie," Lenia responded quickly. She smiled, a playful expression that crinkled up her cheeks. "My name is Lenia Rie."