

998 BONUS CHAPTER: AFTER A LONG JOURNEY

"Mama! Mama! Mama!" Zaya ran in the corridor hastily, her curly, long, au burn hair was tied into a high ponytail. Her cloak fluttered around her ankle, as out there the sky was so bleak, though it was afternoon. Winter was here and Zander and Zenith's sixteen birthday would come in a few months.

Iris turned her body around when she heard Zaya's urgent voice, she sounded like she was going to cry.

Currently, Iris was with Aliana, talking about the problem with the foodstuff. There was nothing major, this was annual matter, since the winter was here.

"Mama! You need to see Lil Thing!" Zaya cried by the time she reached her mother, she tugged her hand to follow her.

"What happened?" Iris frowned.

"I think Lil Thing is sick," Zale said, he was Zaya's personal warrior now. He grew up into a fine man and even though he still used to run his mouth as he pleased, he had toned it down now and looked calmer. "The bear is making weird sound."

Iris immediately rushed with Zaya and Zale, while Aliana came with them as well.

"Mama... what happened with Lil Thing?" Zaya cried, she hugged Aliana, while Iris checked on the bear. It had been a while, since the bear was too lazy to move, but then Lil Thing was always like that, thus they didn't notice anything strange with it.

"Don't worry, honey," Iris said in her reassuring tone. "Lil Thing only sick, it will be fine." $w\check{W}.n\acute{V}\textcircled{L}w\acute{r}M.\check{c}m$

Zaya let go of Aliana and approached Lil Thing, she hugged the white bear and cried. Lil Thing stopped making that weird noise after Iris checked on it, but the bear still looked lethargic.

"I will ask Penny to make a concoction, okay? It will help Lil Thing to feel better." Iris wiped Zaya's tears, as she nodded and hugged Lil Thing.

Iris caressed Lil Thing's head, scratched his single ear and the bear opened its eyes to look at her. there was this complicated feeling that reflected in the queen's eyes. After that, she went out with Aliana, while Zale comforted her little girl.

"How is Lil Thing?" Aliana asked, because she could see the word that Iris couldn't say in front of Zaya.

"Lil Thing is already so old. The aftermath of the war caught up to it."

"The children will be devastated." Aliana knew how much the three of them loved the bear, Lil Thing was practically their protector when they were little and were there in every milestone.

Iris felt so bad. No matter how powerful she was, there were still things that she couldn't prevent.

When Zander and Zenith learned about Lil Thing, the two of them came to Zaya's bedroom and spent the whole night to console her. The two of them were very sad as well.

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After that, Zaya practically didn't go out of her room for days, she tried to nurse Lil Thing with the concoction that Penny made, she read for the bear.

Iris would come to check on her and Lil Thing too, but there was nothing much she could do aside to alleviate the pain from the poor bear. $w\check{W}.N\textcircled{V}E\textcircled{)}w\textcircled{R}m.com$

She could heal illness, but she couldn't prevent death.

Iris talked about this with Zaya, but she would end up crying and this broke her heart to see her baby girl was being so upset.

While Cane would come to visit her every night, Zander and Zenith would come every now and then every time they had free time, so did Lou.

"Uncle, can't you do something for Lil Thing?" Zaya clung onto Lou's neck, she hugged the merchant and started crying again.

"I am sorry, Zaya." Lou caressed her back. "Lil Thing is very old now. He is tired and needs to rest."

"But Lil Thing always sleeps. It barely moved. Lil Thing even lazier than me, why it needs to rest?"

"Well. You got the point." Lou furrowed his brows. "But, Lil Thing is old already, if Lil Thing were human, it will be as old as Grilla."

"But, Grilla is still alive."

The merchant was lost for word. This was why he didn't like children, they were very noisy, but then if there was time when he had to lay his life for these children, he would do it without hesitation.

After a month, Lil Thing's health deteriorated fast and the winter came. From the window, you would be able to see the snowflake and Zaya was reading a story for Lil Thing, she snuggled against it.

Later that night, Cane came to Zaya's bedroom after he finished with the matter for the day, just like her brother, she also moved from her childhood bedroom to the room that she chose.

"Daddy..." Zaya hugged her father, as she cried because Lil Thing didn't want to eat. Her face turned red and her hair was messy. She didn't like anyone to touch her hair, only a few people that she allowed to do it.

And it was obvious that Cane was among them. Zaya found her father's hand was comforting, as he patted her back.

"Daddy, Lil Thing keeps sleeping," Zaya sobbed. "I have given it the concoction that Penny made, but it still looks tired." Zaya lifted her head and tears streamed down her face, it hurt the king to see his daughter's heartbreak. "Can you do something?"

"Zaya..." Cane called her name gently, he sat down on his lap and kissed her forehead. "Lil Thing is already old, it needs to rest."

Iris and the other people had brought this topic to her gently, so she wouldn't be too shocked.

Zaya shook her head. "No..." Yet, the concept of death was still foreign for her.

She had never experienced anyone close to her leave forever, thus it was hard for her to discern it. "Daddy, why people have to die? Why Lil Thing has to die? Can't it live forever?"

Cane combed his fingers against her hair and tied up her hair into a simple bun. He stared at her daughter's sad face and it reminded that little girl that he saw years ago in one of his illusions. That little girl was also crying like her.

"It's okay to feel sad, sweetie." Cane kissed her cheek. "We can't keep Lil Thing forever, but it doesn't mean you are going to lose it." $w\check{W}.n.\check{v}e\textcircled{V}w\textcircled{R}m.com$

Zaya hiccuped. She stared at her father, but her tears still fell on her cheeks. "I can't be with Lil Thing again if it died."

"Yes," Cane replied and he could see his answer broke her heart, but then he continued. "You and your brother have taken care of Lil Thing for so long. Lil Thing has been your friends all this time, maybe it's time for your big sister to play with the bear?"

"Big sister Rora and Chrystal?" Zaya blinked her eyes. She knew that she had two big sisters, who had gone to heaven.

"Yes." Cane smiled. "I think it's their turn to take care of Lil Thing."

Zaya hugged Cane tightly. "But, they didn't know Lil Thing like I do... I don't want Lil Thing to go."

"I know, my love. I don't want it to go too." Cane hugged her back tightly. He caressed her back gently.

On the second months of winter, Lil Thing's body shrunk, it was the size of puppy. Zaya was shocked to see it and immediately rushed to find her mother.

Thankfully, Lou was also there and he explained to her.

"It's okay. Lil Thing is very tired, so it doesn't have the energy to preserve its chubby size."

Lou, Iris and Cane came to Zaya's bedroom to see Lil Thing. It happened once in the past when they were in the middle of the battle and Lil Thing exhausted itself to fight the enemy.

Lou took off his red cloak and covered Lil Thing's small body with it. He cradled the bear in his arms. It was like years ago when he found this bear for the first time.

"That's why I named it Lil Thing," Lou said, he handed Lil Thing to Zaya, who hugged the bear closely and kissed its muzzle.

Lil Thing opened its eyes and let out small noises before it closed them and fell asleep again.

Out there, it started to snow and the wind became colder, as if time was passing slowly.

Zenith and Zander's birthday came, but they didn't celebrate it lavishly like usual. The three of them were not in the right mood for a celebration and wanted to spend their time with Lil Thing.

It was a bright day, at the end of winter, where the snow was starting to melt and the air was not too cold and the sprouts were starting to grow when Lil Thing breathed its last breath in Iris' arms.

Iris tried to preserve the bear's life, but it had reached its end.

"Say goodbye to Lil Thing, okay..." Iris said softly to her crying daughter.

Zander and Zenith came closer, while Cane and Lou stood by the side. There were Ethan, Jace and a few more people inside Zaya's room. $w\check{W}.m\textcircled{V}e\textcircled{)}w\textcircled{R}m.c\textcircled{M}$

"I love you, Lil Thing... my big sisters will take care of you, okay?" Zaya kissed Lil Thing and the bear licked her cheek for the last time.

The bear was warm and surrounded by the people it loved too. The lazy bear finally rested after a long journey.

"It's okay, Za. Rora and Chrystal take care of Lil Thing," Zenith said in his deep voice, as he hugged Zaya tightly and his sister cried against his chest.