

# Chapter 7: Increasing Understanding

Something warm and furry flopped onto my chest, and I squirmed beneath it.

“No, Beau,” I mumbled. “Need more sleep.”

Shouldn't I be... concerned about something? A half-buried memory tickled the back of my mind, refusing to let oblivion claim me once more. Something... something to do with how I'd fallen asleep in the first place.

When I snapped my eyes open, ceiling tiles with plasma between them offered me a morning greeting. Forcing myself to breathe as if I was still dreaming, I glanced at what was lying on me. A coat, black ribbed thermal protection ringed with brown fur, was piled on top of me with gel lining its insides.

In my limited field of view, I saw no people. I was in an empty room, one quite different from where I'd first woken up, but I'd consider its oddities later, once I'd escaped from the woman who'd drugged me.

Slowly, I sat up, looking for anything I could use to my advantage, and the coat slipped to the floor, drawing a gasp.

I twisted toward the noise. The girl from before, the one who'd left so soon after I'd woke up, sat cross-legged on the floor with her hands half-raised in the air. She lowered them as her pale, blue eyes widened and a rash spread over her waxy skin. As her pink lips parted, she took a breath.

“No, no! Wait!”

“*Ellair!*” she bellowed.

Slumping, I glared at her.

“Great.”

Bending to retrieve the jacket, I pulled it on, hoping it would ward off the room's chill. Then, I turned to examine the girl.

This one had a slightly different appearance from her compatriots. No freckles were splashed across her pasty face, and the vibrant colors found in the others' hair and eyes were leached from hers. Her eyes more resembled a California sky, and her hair, falling to her chin, was more russet

than orange, a dying flame rather than one in the midst of its meal.

With its white fabric accented by black strips, her knee-length dress wrapped around itself while the skirt's top layer rose in a diagonal to a belt at her waist. The dress's strapless corset formed a sweetheart neckline that a bolero partially covered. Black boots with buckles jutting from them rose to mid-calf on her, and unlike the distinctly cloth-like material her companions had worn, her outfit looked shinier, as if made from latex, if that substance could also be forced into suppleness.

"Ellair!" she shouted again, and I blinked.

*Yes, that's it, Brennan. Distract yourself from possible danger by analyzing this girl's clothing. Don't choke her out before escaping.*

Could I do that, though? Was I capable of violence?

Fortunately, that decision wasn't thrust upon me. As I tensed to spring forward, the boy from before, Ellair, sailed into the room, fiddling with something. He stopped in front of me, never lifting his eyes from what he was holding, and before his failure to speak could irritate me, the girl sighed, joining us.

"Duilich mu dheidhinn," she said, pointing at Ellair with a grimace. "Faedaidh e a bhith na asal."

"Cànan," Ellair muttered.

They weren't acting like they meant to drug me again, which was good. Right? Honestly, I couldn't tell what these people wanted from me when all we could spew at one another was nonsense. Establishing usable communication lines should be a top priority for me.

"Good luck with that, oh socially awkward butterfly," I said under my breath, drawing my legs up under me.

"Chrìochnaichte!"

Grinning, Ellair held what he'd been playing with toward me. A delicate, silver chain was draped across his palm with clasps on either end of it. A necklace? I didn't much care for jewelry, but when one was at the mercy of one's host, one didn't refuse their gifts.

Plucking the chain from Ellair's hand, I held it at eye level while tangling it in my fingers.

"Thank you?"

"Cuir air e," Ellair said.

He mimed wrapping the necklace around his neck, and with my lips thinning, I obliged him. It was tight against my skin, like a choker—hooray, my favorite—but it fit. As I clasped it together, however, vibration purred against my skin, and coughing, I fumbled for the catch.

“No, no, no,” I growled. “I’m not getting decapitated by some choking... choker. I’ve read about that too many-”

Tinkling giggles froze my fingers before I could remove the necklace.

“You’re funny.”

I glanced up at the teenagers in front of me. The girl was holding a hand to her mouth with her dancing eyes glittering above it while the boy watched me, or rather my forehead, with a gaze that was trying to drill through my skull and burrow into my brain.

“Hush,” Ellair hissed. “Testing’s not complete.”

“Testing? What testing?” I snapped. “Also, why do I understand you now? Wait. Is it the necklace?”

Frowning, Ellair crossed his arms.

“It’s a translation charm not a... ‘necklace’,” he said. “I’m testing if it works while looking for potential-”

The girl elbowed his side.

“*Ellair!*”

“What?” he growled, rounding on her.

At her expectant expression, he screwed up his face.

“Oh. Um. It functions as expected. So, that’s... good?”

“Aaaand?” the girl said, waving her hand toward me.

Releasing a long sigh, Ellair faced me once more.

“I’m sorry about before,” he said. “Mother shouldn’t have put you under because of me, but to be fair, you were making a lot of noise after I told you not to. I... don’t like noise.”

I could relate to that. In so many ways.

“How long was I sedated?” I asked.

“Only long enough for me to finish the charm,” Ellair said, “which took...”

Again, he scrunched up his face—*oh, God, don’t say days*—and the girl stepped in.

“A few hours.”

Thank all that was holy.

Wait.

“You made *this* in a few hours?” I squeaked, touching my neck. “Did you have a blueprint prepared for it already? Or- or is this a prototype of your own design? Or-?”

Wincing, Ellair flicked one hand as if ridding it of unwanted filth.

“The charm’s my creation,” he said. “Please, stop screaming at me. I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“No, no!” I said. “I’m not angry. I’m-”

A little intimidated, actually.

“Look. The getting drugged thing? Forgiven,” I said, chopping at the air in front of me. “Let’s focus on more important things. Like where I am.”

“Colavar. The last citadel,” Ellair said. “Didn’t you get that from when we met?”

“I did,” I said. “I meant more where are we sitting right now. When I first woke up, it was in an... infirmary of some kind? This place looks different.”

For one thing, it had actual walls, not holographic curtains. Three of them looked like they were made of plaster with silver and gold stripes painted on them. The fourth was curved into open air with a thin layer of ice making a window. I assumed from the shimmer covering it that a force field or something like that kept heat inside. Deep blue rugs dotted the floor, but besides a small, bare desk in the corner and the bed I was sitting on, no other decorations filled the place.

“It’s my room,” the girl said. “Do you like it?”

“It’s very...”

Was there a word that combined Spartan and luxurious into one? Would she even understand the implications of the description ‘Spartan’?

“-nice,” I settled on. “And who are you?”

“Oh! I should introduce myself, huh? I’m Seònaid Baran, Ellair’s sister. Pleased to make your acquaintance.”

Bowing to me, she lowered her head, sweeping her hair aside to unveil the back of her neck. Umm... what-? Was I supposed to touch her, or had I missed some context, or-? Agh! What did she want from me? I didn’t like it when I couldn’t meet someone’s expectations.

“I don’t think Brennan has an overlay, Seò,” Ellair said.

“Oh. Of course not,” Seònaid said, springing upright. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s ok.”

No, it isn't.

"I'm--"

My fingers twitched. Too much had happened, too quickly, and that was- I needed-

"Where are my things?" I brusquely asked.

"I suppose you *would* want something familiar, wouldn't you?" Seònaid said. "I'll grab your bag."

"Get mother while you're at it," Ellair said.

With a laugh, Seònaid waved over her head before disappearing around a corner, but I couldn't keep still while waiting for her. Leaping from bed, I paced around the room, flexing and relaxing my hands.

"Calm down," I whispered. "No panic attacks. Not here, you worthless bitch."

I forced myself to stop, and when my screaming brain took note of my surroundings again, I found myself standing in front of the window. As high off the ground as I was, I could see a retaining wall far below me, but of this supposed city, Colavar, I saw nothing. All that lay before me was a snowy expanse that was soon strangled by craggy mountains, stone fingers reaching for the shattered moon overhead. They stretched further toward the sky than any mountains back home could, only broken by a narrow pass in the distance.

The saddest looking forest I'd ever seen dotted the mountains' base, dwindling the higher up their slopes it climbed. How was plant life surviving in this frozen wasteland? I mean, it did the same back home at times, but from what I could tell, this place perpetually persisted in winter. Or so I thought. So, how did a forest grow from such deep snow?

Was it a forest?

"I have questions for you," Ellair said, stopping beside me.

I kept my eyes fixed on the view while my lips twitch.

"No, shit. I could say the same to you," I said, "but you're already answered some of mine. It's your turn."

"How gracious."

Snapping my head Ellair's way, I was smacked by his cheeky grin.

"Oh, I'll *really* like you, won't I?" I said.

"That would make a nice change. Most people don't," Ellair said, "but let's focus on my questions. Where did you come from? You're obviously not Brúid. Not even one of them would be stupid

enough to get caught in a *doineann*. So, maybe you've come from outside the Dalliesh boundary. What else could it- it-?"

He made a moaning sound before cutting off with a headshake, and when I opened my mouth to answer him, that head shake became almost violent. So, I waited. Only when he was breathing easier did I speak.

"I'm from Earth. Have you heard of it?"

I was fairly certain he hadn't, what with the pinprick of a star and the two moons I'd found here, but I'd had to ask.

"What's an Earth?" Ellair asked.

"A planet. Also, another name for dirt."

Ellair looked like he was trying to figure out if I was making fun of him.

"What's dirt?" he asked.

"What's-?"

Speechless, I gaped at Ellair while searching for my floundering words.

"You don't have dirt here?" I asked. "How do you grow crops?"

"What are-?"

I raised my hand before he could finish.

"Let's not continue down this rabbit hole," I said.

"Oo! I know rabbits!" Ellair said. "Furry, little hopping animals!"

...They had rabbits here but not dirt. God, where had I landed?

"Suffice it to say that I'm not from Brighde," I said. "I'm from somewhere out there-"

I pointed toward the sky.

"-or possibly a parallel universe. I'm not sure yet."

Biting his lip, Ellair said, "That'll be a difficult story to sell to the Conclave. How did you get here?"

"I can show you once your sister comes back. It was in my belongings-"

"Ah! The Tòimhseachan!" Ellair interrupted. "I'm afraid it's quite broken now. I had to pick it apart to give your charm a proper language base."

Taking a deep breath, I turned to Ellair and deliberately did *not* grab his collar to shake him.

“You did *what?*”

Ellair winced, giving me something besides my fountain pen that I wanted to squeeze.

“Don’t you dare agitate my son again, *coigreach.*”

With her heels clicking on the stone, the woman from earlier, the one with the ridiculous outfit, strode toward us, and stiffening, Ellair hurried to get between us.

“Mother. She wasn’t bothering me. Where’s Seò?”

“Here.”

The girl stepped out from behind their mother with my purse in her hand, and that bag became my world. The next thing I knew, I was kneeling over my purse’s upended contents with Seònaid gone and the demon box clutched to my chest.

“You said you broke it!” I snapped over my shoulder.

“*That’s* what brought you here?” Ellair asked.

As he sank opposite me, he pointed toward the electronic bits scattered amongst my first aid supplies.

“I thought you meant that,” he said. “The strange reading device. It’s how I found you in the *doineann.*”

“My *e-reader?!?*” I nearly shrieked. “You broke my goddamn e-reader?”

“I thought you’d rather talk with us than read from it,” Ellair said with his hands rising toward his ears.

God, so many stories vanished from my life but...

I dragged cool air through my teeth, forcing my heart to calm down.

“You’re right. I’m sorry,” I said. “Thank you for rescuing me and for the charm. It’s genius work.”

“Of course it is, *coigreach.* Someone as savage as you couldn’t understand my son’s brilliance.”

Rolling my head in a circle, I pasted a pleasant smile on my face before addressing the bitch who’d talked down to me.

“I understand plenty, ma’am,” I said, “and who might you be?”

“Deirdre Baran, but you may call me Ceannard.” the woman said. “My son tells me you’re named Brennan Adams.”

"I am," I said while rising to my feet. "I'm sorry for upsetting Ellair earlier. It wasn't my intention. I'm a bit out of my depths here, so I hope you can forgive my rude behavior. Can we please start fresh, Ceannard?"

At our feet, Ellair was organizing my purse's junk, neatly placing it back in my bag once he'd prepared it. Deirdre watched him with a smile tugging on her lips, and after a moment, she pulled me aside.

"So far, aside from the one incident with my son, you've followed Colavar's laws, even if your very personage violates them," she said. "Continue following them like a proper Saoranach, tolerate my son and his... eccentricities, and I'll overlook your presence here. My family's everything to me, and Ellair is... special. His mind's both a wonder and a curse, and *he* isn't strong. I'll do *whatever* I must to keep him safe and happy. Make friends with him, and I'll help you find your home, wherever that may be. Cause another incident, and we'll be having a different conversation."

Ok. So, she was definitely the leader of this family, which meant I should make every effort to please her.

"We have an understanding," I said. "I'll do my best with Ellair. He seems like..."

*A quirkier version of me.*

"-a sweet kid."

"Brennan, what's this?" Ellair asked.

He held my journal and fountain pen above his head, and with my legs going watery, I almost fell to the ground at the sight of them.

"What I've needed since waking up," I said. "Give me a second?"

Turning to Deirdre, I lifted an eyebrow.

"Anything else?"

I couldn't imagine there was, not yet. Soon enough, we'd need to have a longer conversation about logistics and where the hell I was, but for now, we both had things to handle.

With a shake of her head, Deirdre started for the door while I sat with Ellair. He craned his neck at his mother as she passed him.

"What do you think?" he asked. "Could she-?"

"We shouldn't involve the Conclave yet. Not until we learn more."

Deirdre never stopped, and once she'd gone, Ellair was left pouting beside me. I didn't like that, considering my very recent promise to keep the boy happy, so I hefted the demon box.

“Hey, how’d you like to mess with something that teleports people through time and space?” I asked.

Ellair never stopped scowling, but he accepted my offer. While he started pressing the cube’s buttons, I put pen to paper and dove into the worlds that had been threatening to crack my skull throughout this long morning.

---

Revision #1

Created 27 July 2025 20:34:25 by FatalisticFable

Updated 14 August 2025 13:52:26 by FatalisticFable