

2

Noblinson, Gaelen

Noblinson

I hated having these conversations. The first one was bad enough: sitting a parent down to let them know that our lords and masters had taken issue with their kid, but the second one?

Who liked telling a parent that their child was on the brink of death?

It didn't help that tonight's parents were two of my community's shining pillars. Mycella was one of the sweetest women someone could come across, ever hopeful and willing to help even the lowliest of strangers, and everyone knew that Quincy was the best swordsmen the Esela had produced in years. If he joined an expedition into the forests around our city, most of the people in it were guaranteed to come home that day.

It doubly didn't help that the subject of tonight's conversation was my favorite pupil in this current creche crop.

"So, what did Gaelen do this time?" Quincy asked with a smile on his lips.

How did he do that? We were here so I could tell them that Gaelen had one more chance to please the masters, and both he and Mycella looked so at ease! As if they didn't have a care in the world.

It was a good act. Damn our masters for making it necessary.

"Something we all should have expected," I made myself say. "Ever, Gaelen has insisted on maintaining his sense of pride, and unfortunately, that backfired on him today."

Sighing, Mycella shook her head with a fond expression in place while Quincy merely snorted. As they absorbed this small piece of news, I reached into a drawer I didn't often open, one that our masters could never know about, and retrieved a bottle of home-distilled alcohol from it. When I set it on the desk in front of me, my friends' faces went still, but they seemed grateful as I handed them poured glasses.

We Esela weren't supposed to indulge in this sort of thing. In all things, we were to suffer in silence and without distraction, but as my people's sole representative in creche, I not only had the influence needed to get away with this sort of infraction, but I also knew when it was necessary.

I carefully watched as Quincy and Mycella gulped down a first taste of their drinks, sipping at my own, and when Quincy rested his cup in his lap, he grimaced.

“All right, ‘blin, I think we’re prepared,” he said. “Tell us the story.”

Gaelen

History. Of all the world’s fields of study, I’d decided that history was the worst.

Every other class, I could half-attend, only paying enough attention to add anecdotes to the items where my current education was lacking, but unfortunately, history required my full concentration, if I was to have any hope of also ignoring it.

A human woman was teaching the six-year-olds today, which I found hilarious on a number of levels. Even after this long spent living in a world where the two races’ roles had been swapped, I still hadn’t wrapped my head around the concept of humanity as the ones in control.

This human in front of me—droning on about... something important, I guessed—was an Eselan sympathizer, someone who refused to see those of my race as mere dogs on a long leash. Such sympathizers visited creche every so often, all part of their efforts to further civilize the ‘poor Esela’.

It was infuriating.

Evidence of this human’s dedication to the cause was leaning against the door frame with his arms crossed: a half-Eselan, most likely a ward. A mistake made by some lust-filled human, given into the care of a home willing to feed and support him.

Lucky bastard.

Seated beside today’s teacher was her own kid, a pretty, blonde-haired and blue-eyed girl child. When she caught me staring at her, she blushed, ducking her chin to her chest. Given how intensely she’d decided to stare at her fingers, they must be truly fascinating.

Before I could get too annoyed by her behavior, something the teacher said briefly caught my attention—

“-Ele and Daevetch. Although it’s faded in recent years, belief in these age-old gods made a brief resurgence after the rise of Doldi-”

—before she lost it once more.

Gods. Really?

If I’d learned anything from my curse, it was that the gods, if they’d ever existed, were dead. Sure, Alouin might be a powerful being, but unlike a god, he was fallible. If he hadn’t been, Arivor and I

wouldn't exist. Alouin would have ended us after our first deaths, but instead, he'd been helpless to stop the primal forces from rebirthing us.

Given that, I could see how someone might consider Ele and Daevetch as gods, but I didn't. The one time I'd even been tempted to think such a thing, asking Creation about it as a result, that nuisance had only laughed, making several choicely scathing comments in response.

On some level, that answer had made me a little sad. After all, if Ele and Daevetch could be considered gods, that would mean I'd become fairly godlike in my own right.

Bored, I chased a speck of Ele across my rickety desk's surface. It was the smallest amount of the primal force that I'd managed to tease from my source, but even still, I wouldn't normally risk doing something like this. If I didn't practice with Ele, though, Creation would never let me hear the end of it.

For years, that splinter had been hounding my every waking hour, always just out of sight. Long were the nights that I'd spent scheming of ways to get rid of it, but nothing I'd tried had worked. Not yet at least.

Eh...maybe I shouldn't try to destroy Creation. Maybe I should just ask it for space.

At that thought, I snorted. A simple request like that would never work. Creation was too stubborn-

A hand slammed onto my desk, startling me from my thoughts, and jerking back, I lost control of my speck of Ele. It zoomed, unseen, across the room until it smacked into the human child, and rocking in her chair, she jerked her eyes across the room, stopping her search when her gaze landed on me.

Above me, the human woman snapped, "What's your name?"

Somehow, I kept from rolling my eyes, opening my mouth to answer. At the last minute, the word I meant to speak switched from Eriadren to-

"Gaelen."

Frowning, today's teacher said, "Was something about my lesson funny, young Gaelen? So far as I'm aware, no one should find the story of Doldimar's rise amusing."

Oh, shit... I'd forgotten that she'd been talking about that today. Well. If I wasn't very careful, the next few minutes could end horribly for me.

"I'm sorry," I said as contritely as I could. "Of course I don't find the story funny."

And almost, I let it go, but as if to frustrate my efforts, my tongue decided that now was just *the most ideal time* to run away from me.

"Kind of thought your interpretation of Doldimar's rise to power was strange, though."

Immediately, I winced. That had been extraordinarily stupid.

With her expression flattening, today's teacher straightened off of my desk.

"Really?" she said. "Why don't you share *your* interpretation with us then, Gaelen?"

The ice in her tone turned me into my own frozen sculpture. For several silent seconds, I merely stared at her. There was no way this woman could know what she'd asked of me. *No way* but even still, the wrench of hurt inside almost had me breathing fire at her.

Instead, I leaned back in my chair, crossing my legs with my hands folded on my knee.

"All right," I said. "Simply put, I believe the rise of Doldimar was a natural progression for the man he used to be. After what his uncle did to his son, what else was Arivor supposed to become? Reive may have been a cruel bastard, but of all his atrocities, burning a beloved family member alive had to be..."

And my breath caught with my thoughts starting to slip on themselves.

Shit. I shouldn't have-

The human woman's laughter brought me back from a fall into myself.

"It sounds like you *sympathize* with Doldimar, young Gaelen," she said, "but that can't be right. Everyone knows of the many travesties Doldimar spread across our world, and it's only through Reive's heroic actions that we're able to sit-"

My chair toppled behind me, so quickly did I shoot from it, and that noise snapped the woman's mouth shut. Somehow, I kept my fingers lightly pressed into my desk's surface, rather than reaching for her stupid neck.

"Let me ask you a question," I said, breathing ice. "If I tied your little girl to a stake, lit the pyre under her, and held you back from saving her..."

For a split second, I could only sip at the air, but I rushed forward so the woman couldn't fill the gap I'd left open.

"If I made you watch those flames consume her... forced you to listen as she cried out in agony, wouldn't you go a little mad?" I snapped. "That is what your manipulative, conniving, son of a bitch Reive did to his nephew. And your hero, the one you humans laud? He did nothing to topple Doldimar. Absolutely *nothing!*"

I was shouting. Oh, this was bad.

Still, I couldn't help but continue.

"Maybe, *just maybe*, you lot should check your facts before telling a story like this."

The woman lashed out, leaving a burning imprint of her hand on my cheek, but really, I should have expected that. I should have expected her red face and the fury in your eyes.

“How dare you!” she growled. “You are Esela, Gaelen. Not human. *You* do not tell our history, and you will not breathe a word of Eriadren or any other Esela lies here.”

...Esela lies?

Oh, I'd truly made a mess of this, but no matter that I should be bowing and scraping at this woman's feet, I couldn't bring myself to lower my head.

“I will tell *my* story however I damn well please,” I hissed, “and in the end, you will do the same.”

Spinning away from the woman, I stormed out of the classroom, and after making it a few feet outside, one of creche's monitors called after me. I was too wrapped in fury to hear what they said.

“I don't feel good!” I shouted at them. “Going to lay down!”

Fortunately, they didn't stop me.

I didn't know how I kept it in check for as long as I did, but somehow, I made it to my cot before my body started shaking. Clenching my eyes against the tears in them, I pulled the sheets over my head, screaming deep into my own mind.

Look! I'm not thinking about the past anymore! I'm not remembering them or seeing their faces! Not Arivor or Lirilith or Sepiala or Rafe or any of my victims from the war...

After who knew how long, someone plopped onto my cot, dropping so heavily that it jerked the sheets down, but before they could settle, I yanked them back into place, restoring my hiding place.

Whoever had decided to join me was silent for a long while, but eventually, she spoke up.

“That was quite the speech you gave. Mother plans to report you for it.”

Of course she did. What else was a human like her supposed to do with my spat of insolence?

“I don't care,” I muttered. “Go away.”

Rather than doing as I'd asked, the girl shifted in place, making my cot creak.

“You should care,” she said. “If she reports you, creche's headmaster might declare you defective. Doesn't that worry you?”

Barely retaining a laugh, I shrugged. Why should I be worried about that and the death it implied? If the humans ever decided to put me down...

Well. Let's just say I'd wish them luck.

“What were you playing with before my mother talked to you?” the girl asked. “I’ve never seen Esela magic like that before, and don’t you dare deny that it was magic! You used it to push me from across the room!”

Rolling my eyes, I said, “It’s not Esela magic.”

“What was it, then?” the girl asked.

Good gods.

With a growl, I exploded from beneath the sheets, ready to do whatever I must to get this girl to go away.

“Leave me alo-!”

Something cold rested against my neck, stopping me short. A blade.

It, however, wasn’t coming from the human girl, perching on the foot of my cot and staring with curious eyes. At her side, the half-Eselan from before was standing stock still, carefully holding a sword to my skin.

“So, are you full-bloods really as feral as mother always says?” he asked.

Closing my eyes, I hissed out a long, annoyed breath. Guess I’d have to put up with these curious children.

Maybe if I was polite, they’d leave me alone.

“My apologies, mistress. Master,” I said. “I don’t know what’s come over me today. My base nature must have assumed control, if only for a short time. I shall strive ever harder to become more like my masters so passion doesn’t gain another hold on me.”

With an inelegant snort, the human girl lifted a hand, laughing into it.

“What a pretty lie!” she said.

Well, obviously that hadn’t worked.

Making a face, I said, “I may have lied, yes, but I promise. I won’t attack you now. I was just... upset before. It’s under control.”

Shifting in place, the half-Eselan glanced at the girl, maybe hoping she’d know what to do, and when she nodded, he lowered his sword. With a grimace, I rubbed my neck. He’d left a nick there.

“Does your mother know you’re here?” I absently asked.

“Doubtful,” the girl said. “She was kind of exploding after you left, and we both know it’s a bad idea to stick around when she’s like that. So, we slipped out. I doubt she’ll come looking for us

anytime soon.”

She shrugged, all while the half-Eselan stared at me. Gods, if that look had been any more pointed, it'd probably stab me.

“You're really not worried about them declaring you defective?” he asked.

Yeah... that probably hadn't been a wise thing to reveal.

With a sigh, I shook my head.

“It's a constantly hovering threat, yes?” I said. “If I let myself worry about it, I'd be a nervous wreck, which wouldn't help with staying alive here.”

“Huh,” the boy said with a frown.

Rolling my eyes, I said, “Speaking of survival, I'm due at the sparring grounds in a quarter-hour. I'd rather not be late, especially if your mother's reporting me. So, what do you two want?”

If they were merely curious, surely they'd have left by now.

“I want to know what you did to me back there,” the girl said.

On her words' heels, the boy said, “And I want you to tell me what else you know about Arivor.”

Rapidly blinking, the girl snapped her gaze to the half-Eselan, but he avoided looking at her, instead staring at me with his jaw set.

Pointing at the girl, I said, “I can't answer your question.”

Technically true. I was fairly certain that if I tried talking about Ele, Creation would shut me up pretty quickly.

So, I turned to the boy.

“What do you want to know?” I asked.

“Everything,” he said through gritted teeth.

Wow, that had been intense. Why was he so interested in Arivor?

Because out of everything these two's mother had said, she'd been right about one thing. Everyone despised my old friend.

With a huff, the girl slapped at the sheets.

“Hey! Don't ignore me, you mo-”

In a flash, I was on top of the girl, pinning her neck to the cot with my glowing hand.

“Do *not* call me mongrel, human,” I snarled.

I swear. If I had to hear that insult *one more time...*

Clapping drew me out of my anger, coming from the being who’d appeared at my side.

“Well done, Eriadren! You’ve figured out how to use Ele to speed up your movement,” Creation said. “Of course, you did that in front of two children, who could be enemies, so I don’t know if we should consider this progress or not.”

All of my focus got transferred from a girl to *that nuisance*. Shooting a finger up to point at it, I tried—poorly—to contain the white-hot fury in me.

“SHUT UP!” I hissed. “I’ve had it up to here with your constant monitoring and nagging. I can’t take it anymore. Leave me THE HELL alone!”

Having pulled back, Creation morphed its face into an expression I’d never seen on it before—fear? incredulity? indignation?—before it popped out of existence.

And I was alone.

Alone! No one was here to judge my every move! No one-!

Again, steel was pressed against my throat, interrupting my brief burst of glee.

“Get off my sister,” the half-Eselan snapped.

Carefully, I raised my hands over my head and pulled away from the girl. As soon as I could, I settled as far away from her as possible.

With my gaze locked on the boy, I said, “I wasn’t actually going to hurt her. That’s impossible-”

“Alouin above, that was awesome!” the girl shouted, interrupting me. “What was that? Can I do it? And who were you speaking to? Ooooo!”

Popping to her hands and knees, she lowered her voice to a whisper.

“Does it have anything to do with Ele and Daevetch?”

Shit. After that spiel, I already had a headache. How was I supposed to answer all of her questions?

As I considered that conundrum, I rubbed my temples, glancing at the boy.

“Come on, kid. Put the sword away,” I said. “If I wanted to hurt you or your sister, I seriously doubt you could stop me.”

And at that, I knew what to say. I was Eriadren, a demon with a blade who couldn't be killed. Why should I hide my magic from two, insignificant kids?

Drawing himself up, the boy said, "Oh, yeah? I've done it twice already. What makes you think I couldn't do it again?"

Sighing, I ran my eyes over his body.

"For starters, your grip on your sword is too weak, your stance is off, and your reaction times are abysmal, even without Ele to speed me up," I said.

With bright eyes, the girl breathed, "I knew it!"

The boy refused to stop eyeing me, but he did get his sword back into its scabbard. With them sorted, I folded my hands in my lap.

"Wonderful! Let's try this again," I said. "I'm Gaelen. Who are you?"

Noblinson

"-will do the same!' And he stomped out of the classroom in a rage!"

With a flourish, I finished telling the story of Gaelen's most recent misadventure, all while Mycella and Quincy doubled over on themselves with laughter. As they enjoyed this rare moment of joy, I poured them each a glass of water, something to even out the alcohol we'd all consumed.

Accepting his glass, Quincy wiped happy tears away.

"That's our Gaelen!" he said.

On his words' heels, Mycella whispered, "What are we going to do with that boy?"

And the smiles dropped off of their faces. Before the couple could fall too deeply into despair, I hurried to share the one good piece of news I had for them.

"Also. In an impossible turn of events, Gaelen has managed to make a pair of friends," I said. "They might help mitigate the damage he's done to himself."

Lifting an eyebrow, Quincy drawled, "Friends...? You're talking about our Gaelen, right?"

Mycella had a more pertinent question.

"Who are they?"

With a nod, I acknowledged the hope she was blazing at me.

“Their names are Sarai and Corsivis,” I say. “They’re the children of the teacher who visited on the day in question.”

Mycella and Quincy absorbed this news fairly well. The only indication of their discomfort could be found in how still they were holding themselves.

“So, they’re human?” Quincy eventually said.

“One human and one half,” I confirmed.

As Mycella dropped her head into her hands, Quincy touched her knee, swallowing hard, but given what I’d said, I found these reactions appropriate.

“You’re right. These friends could be dangerous,” I said, “but even still, the two of you should encourage the relationships. The next time Gaelen gets into trouble, having a pair of the masters’ children closely tied to him could keep them from declaring him defective.”

“You’re right,” Mycella said before grimacing. “Only... humans? Gaelen finally makes friends, and they’re *humans*?”

Wincing, Quincy downed the rest of his water.

“Thank you for letting us know, my friend,” he said. “We’ll do our best to stay optimistic, but let’s be honest.”

Resting his cup on my desk, he pulled away with a pained expression in place, taking his wife’s hand once he was comfortable.

“Knowing our son and knowing our masters’ dispositions, Gaelen will almost certainly be dead within the year.”

They were right, but looking at my favorite student’s parents, I had to hold onto hope. I had to believe that Gaelen would find some way to survive.

Revision #1

Created 29 August 2024 18:16:43 by FatalisticFable

Updated 29 August 2025 18:29:44 by FatalisticFable