

Chapter 10: When We Met

Raimie

The patter of distant water droplets in a deep quiet was the first thing I registered when I woke up. For a moment, I simply breathed into this hush, wrapped in the pleasant disbelief that I'd survived. Questions were held at bay until I'd finished with this marvel of life that I'd been given.

This took me quite a while as intermingled with my wonder was dread. I remembered everything that had happened, which meant I remembered every consequence spawned from a disastrous afternoon spent in a lovely village, now forever gone.

Alouin, the pain of that would haunt me forever, wouldn't it?

Lifting my hands above my face, I pried my eyes open, squinting until they'd adjusted to the bright light. How badly mangled was I?

When my vision cleared, I frowned.

Bandages coated my hands, blocking my view of the blackened skin surely lying beneath. Someone must have treated my wounds, which made sense. When I'd woken up, debilitating pain hadn't been clawing at me. Instead, there was only an annoying discomfort and a few spots of numbness.

I badly wanted to unwrap those cloth strips so I could see exactly how damaged my hands were in the light of day, but not only was I unsure if I could do that with such limited mobility but it seemed like a bad idea without the permission of the healer who'd placed them. If a healer had done it.

The question of my burns would have to wait, which was fine. I had other matters to address.

Lowering my arms, I blinked, not once tensing, at the two figures that my limbs had been blocking. They were leaning over me from opposite sides, and I could swear concern was radiating from their non-existent faces. Slits split across those faces, letting their typical buzzing pour forth, but I placidly listened to the noise this time, not once motioning for them to stop.

Why wasn't I afraid of them anymore? They'd helped me escape Fissid, sure, but that didn't explain this new trust or the ease I felt in their presences. Rather than monsters, they seemed like long-absent friends. Why such a drastic change?

"You're allies, not enemies," I rasped. "You never meant to hurt me."

I hadn't planned for those statements to be questions, and to most people's ears, they wouldn't sound like that, but the figures huffed as if insulted. One even crossed its arms while the other jiggled as if it were tapping its foot.

They knew me well enough to pick up on my slightest subtleties. How?

"I'm guessing you two plan on sticking around for the foreseeable future," I said.

Again, not truly a question, but from their shaking shoulders and rhythmic buzzing, so like laughter, I got my answer anyway.

"Then, I need to stop calling you 'the figures' in my head. You need names," I said. "I'm sure you already have those, and I'd love to hear them when I can but in the meantime..."

Chewing on my lip, I bounced my gaze between the two before sighing through my nose.

"When in doubt, go simple," I murmured.

Pointing as best I could at the figure of light, I said, "Bright."

And to the shadowed figure, "Dim."

Squealing—their version of chatter—erupted between the two, and wincing, I blocked my ears with cloth-wrapped skin. I opened my mouth to ask for relief from this when their discord cut off unprompted, and the figures... Bright and Dim stiffened.

Struggling to my elbows, I looked for what might have caused the change, half-expecting to see the monster from before bearing down on me, but besides my two anomalies, nothing out of the ordinary surrounded me.

I was lounging on a cot in a rectangle of a cave, one that had been converted into a clinic of some sort. More cots formed a neat line to my right with shelves hanging on the opposite wall, full of supplies. A few items I didn't recognize rested there as well, namely glass tubes with needles jutting out of them.

In addition to that strangeness, the makings of a domicile occupied one corner of the cave. Above this, chunks had been gouged out of the stone, burrowing through it until they reached the outside air. Thin strips of sunlight aided candles and lamps in illuminating the clinic, and on the other side of this rock, water dripped in a steady trickle, the noise that had first woken me up.

This place.... something about it echoed in my head like a shout in a cavern while a sense of familiarity, one that was quickly becoming normal, settled over me.

Much like every time I'd encountered the name Auden. Why-?

My ribs chose this moment to remind me of the harm done to them, and hissing, I collapsed, clutching at their sharp ache. Through watering eyes, I watched Bright loosen from the statue it

had become before zipping out of my field of view. Meanwhile, Dim flung itself over me with its buzzing becoming a protective hiss. What the hell were they-?

"Who were you talking to?"

Gasping, I forgot about everything that was wrong with me, leaping from the cot in a spin toward the voice. I reached for the sword at me...

There was no sword at my side. I'd *never* worn a sword.

Frozen, I could only blink until my mind acknowledged the other person in the clinic. Leaning against a door-sized hole in the wall, a man was watching me with his arms crossed and eyebrows raised.

"You shouldn't be on your feet," he said.

I, however, was much too preoccupied with this stranger's appearance to hear what he'd said. Abnormally tall, he tried to diminish this by hunching his body on itself. A stern expression was carved into his pleasant features, although their current state wasn't helped by how tightly his hair had been pulled back. I noted plain clothes hanging from a limber frame and the fact that Bright had plastered itself to this man, but what sent my thoughts screeching to a stop were the stranger's eyes.

They were gray. Which was impossible.

Clicking his tongue, the man pushed off of the wall, heading toward me, and I scrambled backward, repressing every subdued scream that my body tried to pull out of me.

"Stay back," I said with my voice shaking. "Just stay... Who are you? Where am I? Where's-?"

A cloak billows behind the monster as he lunges into his kick.

Licking my lips, I whispered, "Where's my dad?"

Was he alive? Had that awful monster killed...?

On seeing the expression on my face, the impossible man raised his hands calmly.

"Aramar is staying with a few friends at the moment," he said. "From what I understand, they had some catching up to do, so I left them to it."

He took a cautious step toward me, but I copied him backward, nearly tumbling over a cot. Straightening from his hunch, the stranger held a hand to his lips with pinched eyes.

"I thought you'd be..." he said. "Huh."

Shaking now, I screwed my eyes shut, fighting to stay on my feet.

"Stop, stop stop! I can't take any more strangeness!" I shouted. "I need something to make sense. Please. Just... tell me what's going on. Who are you?"

My body had nothing more to give, so my knees buckled, but something caught me, taking my elbows to keep me upright. I snapped my eyes open to a view of gray: impossible, couldn't-be-real gray.

"My name is Rhylix, although my friends call me Rhy," the stranger said, "and you are safe, Raimie of the line of Audish kings."

Alouin, I wanted to believe that safety was mine, but Dim's continued hiss at my back and that gray...

That gray I could swear I'd seen before, even though that was imposs-

Why did this place and those eyes seem so familiar, like something from a nightmare?

And I remembered.

The fever started four days after the accident. Right now, it's still addling me, but I'm cognizant enough to understand what the gray-eyed woman is telling my father.

"The malaise has turnssssssssHas to have been induced by soemonesssssssl don't believe she has much of a chancessssssssShould perform the ritual soon if youssssssssMy magic only holdssssssss."

The blob that is my father may have shaken with a sob once she was finished speaking, but it also nods. the world blurs into dreams, and when I wake up again, I climb out of my cot. The cave's stone floor is cool on my bare feet. I stumble through an open doorway.

Empty corridors pass in a haze, but somehow, I find my mother's room. Staring at her sweat-soaked face, I watch the rise and fall of her chest, listening to the mumble of fevered words on her lips.

I must have blacked out again because the next thing I know, someone's hauling me away from the bed, gripping my arms in a vice. My mother's bucking and thrashing on the bed behind me, and several people have surrounded her, holding her in place.

Hands spin me away from this view.

"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?" my father roars.

I burst into tears.

"I'm sorry! I didn't mean to knock mama off the rope. I didn't want to die!"

My father's gaze softens, and he pulls me into a hug. In this cave of safety, I sob into his chest.

"There, there, Raimie. It's not your fault."

"Dad?"

I pull free so I can see my father's face.

"Is mama going to die?"

A grim expression tells me everything I need to know. My blubbing resumes while shudders wrack my body. Fever hooks its claws into my mind, and everything fuzzes over.

TTS Chapter Ten

Revision #3

Created 19 August 2024 01:51:56 by FatalisticFable

Updated 18 March 2026 21:46:07 by FatalisticFable