

Chapter 13: Last Minute Errands

Rhylix

And others, in their hate, took advantage of our weakness.

Visiting Salna was always a trial and a pleasure. On the one hand, the smith was one of the only people in Allanovian who treated me as if I weren't a pariah, letting me use her forge when I liked. On the other, she was a stubborn woman, and it was impossible to change her mind once she'd made it up.

Which was why I approached her shop with trepidation. She was sure to know why I'd come as soon as she saw me, so would my first steps into this place herald an argument or an animated discussion?

No one was in the front end of her shop. Through an opening in the wall, I heard the clang of a hammer on metal and smiled. Salna was always in a better mood after she'd been working.

I rang a bell on the counter as loudly as I could, waiting while the clashes in the back fell silent. After a moment, the smith ambled into view, wiping sweat from the back of her neck. On noticing me, she spread her arms wide.

"Rhylix! It's good to see you!" she boomed. "Are you here about the sword?"

See? She'd already guessed what I wanted.

"You know me well, Salna," I said. "Will you take the job?"

Grinning, Salna jerked her thumb over her shoulder.

"I already have," she said. "Thought you'd want a hand and a half blade to match Shadowsteal. Was I right?"

Why was I not surprised that she'd already gotten a look at that legendary blade?

Shrugging, I said, "I'd like it as close to Shadowsteal as you can get it. Raimie won't always be able to use the sword, and when he has to fight with another blade, I'd rather if he wasn't tripped up by a difference in length or weight."

Salna turned wistful.

"I can't believe I'm making a sword for that boy," she said. "Time was... well. Time was."

I gave her a moment to compose herself, even curious as I was about how she might know Raimie.

"When can I expect it finished?" I eventually asked.

"Hmm?"

Jerking her head up, Salna flapped a hand at me.

"It'll be done before you need it; don't you worry," she said. "If I were to guess, though, I'd say a week. Maybe. it's become my top priority, but I won't lower the quality of my work because we're short on time."

"Nor would I ask you to," I said. "A week should be fine."

"Do you have any requests for its name?" Salna asked.

I paused, narrowing my eyes.

"You want to name this sword?" I asked. "Do you want to bring its future bearers bad luck?"

"Don't be silly. I'd never wish such a thing on anyone," Salna said, "but it will belong to a king. It needs a name."

Making a face, I said, "Fine, but *you* have to choose it. I want nothing to do with cursing a sword."

"I'm thinking... Silverblade," Salna said. "Or something like that. Sound good?"

Rubbing my eyes, I released a long sigh.

"Salna, I just said I don't want anything to do with it," I said. "Now, here's your payment. I hope it helps with your back."

After digging in my cloak's pockets, I set several containers on the countertop, and Salna descended on them like an addict would on a drug of choice.

"Thank you, Rhylix," she said. "I don't know what I'd do without these salves."

With a strained smile, I said, "You're welcome. I'll see you in a week."

Patting the woman's hand, I stalked out of her shop. If I had the time, I should make more of that salve so Salna would have a stockpile when I left. If I had time...

As a broken chuckle burst from me, I hurried along. One more errand and I could go home. With trudging feet and a slight wobble, I took a path long abandoned, eventually turning down a corridor that I hadn't walked in eight years.

With sleep roaring my name, I could almost ignore the whispers rising behind me and the hostile stares directed my way. I'd expected a reaction like this, though, which made it easier to let the Zrelnach's loathing slide off my back.

What else was I supposed to do? Stay away from their quarters when the man I must meet was here?

At least with night having fallen, less warriors populated the corridors outside their rooms than normal, and I didn't need to invade their sanctuary too much. I followed laughter and the sounds of conversation to a narrow entrance, and when my shadow darkened the room behind it, silence fell while the three people inside threw sour looks at me.

"Good evening, gentlemen," I said.

With a huff, the man closest to the door—I couldn't remember his name for the life of me—strode into the corridor, roughly brushing me as he passed. This left two behind.

One of them was lounging on the bed. Bits of a metal ring peeked from beneath his tunic's hem, and noticing my eyes on that, he tugged the cloth down.

I didn't know why he'd done that. I'd gotten the damn thing in place earlier.

The other man leaned against a wall, crossing his arm across his chest. A bandage wrapped his shoulder where a second limb should go, and on viewing the two, I fought to keep from pinching my nose.

"You shouldn't be on your feet," I said to the man wrapped in black leather.

"I know. We were waiting for a cot so both of us can rest," Gistrick said. "Can I help you, Rhylix?"

"I was hoping to speak with my patient," I answered. "Privately, if possible."

With air hissing between his teeth, Gistrick looked to the other man for advice, and Aramar inclined his head. Pushing off the wall, Gistrick made to leave, but he paused as he passed me.

"Thank you for saving my life," he stiffly said.

"I wish I could have done more."

Clicking his tongue, Gistrick strode out of view, and for a moment, I merely watched Aramar fidget, perfectly aware of the tension in the air. When he looked uncomfortable enough, I glided into Gistrick's room, squeezing between the bed's foot and a wall. Once I'd settled in the corner opposite the room's entrance, I waved at Aramar's waistline.

"How are you adjusting to it?" I asked.

Aramar snapped his eyes to slits.

"Slowly," he answered. "Why are you here? Has something happened with Raimie?"

"Overall, he's fine. We'll get to him in a moment," I said. "Right now, you, not your son, are my patient, so I need to know if you're having any problems. Integration can be a tricky process."

Looking away, Aramar said, "There've been some twinges when I move, but I can handle that."

"Still. I'd like to look at it the next time you come to my clinic," I said. "You can visit Raimie while you're there."

Aramar curled his fingers into the blanket.

"He's awake, then?" he asked.

"Awake and extremely confused. I haven't seen someone as lost as him in ages. He could use an explanation from his father," I said, "as I'd like one about him at some point. He acted oddly in my clinic and those nightmares while on the way here..."

Flinching, Aramar said, "He's always had those, although they've gotten worse since his mother died. As for his behavior, he's never been normal."

Pursing my lips, I examined the man cringing in front of me. That explanation had sounded like a brush-off. Perhaps something more lay in what I'd asked about, but I couldn't explore it further. I'd pushed hard enough for now.

"I gave him a tincture to help him sleep, and with my oversight, he should be prepared for his trials within the next week," I said. "On that note, I'd ask that you withhold the news of what's happened to you, at least until after he's completed them."

Aramar whipped his gaze to me, leveling a glare.

"Of course I'm not telling him yet," he growled. "I remember my own trials perfectly well. He doesn't need anything to distract him."

Smirking, I said, "Forgive me. I had to know whether your years of sedentary living had dulled the legendary Aramar I've heard about."

"I'm as sharp as I've ever been," Aramar grumbled.

"Yes. I saw glimpses of that when you fought Teron," I said. "I have to ask. Did your talent rub off on your son? How likely is he to pass his trials? He seems tenacious enough for it."

A smile quirked Aramar's lips.

"Raimie will be fine," was all he'd say on the matter.

After a moment, I jerked my head in a nod, straightening as if to leave, but I made no move toward the entrance.

"I'm alive," I said. "I take that to mean you've kept my secret."

Aramar pulled his lips into a flat line.

"I told you I would," he said. "I don't go back on my word."

"I didn't think that would happen," I said. "I had to check anyway."

Cocking my head, I stared at Aramar, the first to learn this particular secret in a while. I could live in fear of him retracting his promise or...

Scanning him from head to foot, I sighed before sinking onto the foot of the bed.

"I know you don't trust me, and I can't blame you for it," I said. "Not only am I a stranger but I'm a... you know what. Given that, I'll understand if you don't want to answer me, but besides everything else, I *am* a healer. I have to ensure my patient's wellbeing, in every capacity."

"So, how are you, Aramar? In the last few days, you've lost more than anyone should and learned that your son is the subject of a foretelling."

"I know you're not ok. I suppose... I suppose I'm saying that if you need someone to talk to, I'm willing to listen."

I didn't think he'd take me up on the offer, especially given the role he'd held in Allanovian before retreating to the woods. So, when he turned aside with his fingers almost tearing through his tunic, I started getting up to leave.

"I trained my whole life to fulfill that blasted foretelling."

Frozen in place, I felt my mouth gaping as a red-faced man spilled his turmoil onto an unknown.

"I did my damndest to be worthy of it because I wanted to make my dad and Eledis proud," Aramar said. "So, a part of me is sickeningly jealous of my son, and that kills me. Especially... especially..."

"Alouin! His life's already been difficult enough. Have you read the foretellings about him? I know looking into the future rarely yields exact results but..."

"*Damn!* I just wanted him... wanted us to have a quiet life. To live out our days in an empty corner of the world and hopefully, end our cursed family line with him. How... why did this happen? Why my son?"

Wet eyes begged me for an answer, and I had so many empty platitudes I could give, so many ways to cultivate a potential ally, but when I met Aramar's gaze, something ripped that plan to shreds. The stirrings my heart had experienced over the last few days decided they'd had enough of my placidity. They squeezed my chest, hard enough that I couldn't breathe, and only truth could emerge from my closed-off throat.

"Life is a bitch," I said. "She's always throwing challenges at you, expecting you to trip, and when you don't, she brings them on more quickly until all you can do is fall."

This was truth, and from his drooping head, Aramar must know it. It wasn't the whole truth, though.

"The great thing about being alive, however, is that when life sends you skidding across the ground, you can get back up and spit blood in her face," I continued. "Persist long enough with this refusal to surrender, and life will impart a gift to you rather than a challenge.

"Finding a love so deep that your core aches when you're not with them. Swapping stories with friends as close to you as brothers. The birth of a child whose significance might one day eclipse your own. In my humble opinion, these glorious moments in life far overshadow the times when she makes you fall.

"I don't know why Raimie is a foretold child or why you've lost all that you have, Aramar. I can't tell you why life is the way it is, but I *know* that if you rise from this, something wonderful awaits you. You just have to fight for it."

Tears threatened to fall from Aramar's eyes, and sniffing, he rubbed them away.

"You're wise for someone so young," he said.

I managed to wrangle my manic giggles under control before Aramar lowered his hands.

"Thank you," he said. "I wasn't sure about sharing my troubles with you, but I'm glad I did."

"Any time."

Slapping my knees, I got to my feet.

"I expect to see you in my clinic-"

Someone burst into the room, catching his stumble on the bed with a single arm.

"You need to come with me," Gistrick gasped, fixing his eyes on Aramar.

"What? Why-?"

"It's Raimie," Gistrick said. "He got in a fight. With a Zrelnach."

Cursing, Aramar lifted a hand for help to his feet while I slapped a palm to my face, groaning. This ally was going to kill me.

TTS Chapter Thirteen

Revision #3

Created 19 August 2024 05:01:37 by FatalisticFable

Updated 18 March 2026 21:47:32 by FatalisticFable