

# Chapter 18: My Perspective

## Eledis

*The role of the king is harsh and unforgiving. Impossible, even. Your subjects will always find fault with you.*

*-Kinlith, scholar and tutor to the Audish heir*

As usual, I waited for Raimie in the spot where the boy typically descended from the lattice above to join the mortals below. His insistence on occasionally sleeping in such a dangerous location, the 'only place where I can be alone', had been a constant annoyance over the last few months in Tiro, the act of a child who was grasping at something he didn't yet realize was lost forever.

But that was what Raimie was: a child. At nineteen-years-old, he'd begun to make adult decisions, but they had yet to outweigh the immaturity of his other behaviors.

Then again, when one had lived as long as I had, most people under the age of thirty seemed like children. The circle of my disdain encompassed more than Raimie alone.

Considering that, I thought the kid had done well since our arrival to Auden.

He'd earned his soldiers' trust, an accomplishment that was usually much harder than it sounded, but for some reason, Raimie's open-faced honesty and insistence on self-sacrifice had fiercely bound these people to him. He'd also killed an Enforcer, a task I'd learned most considered impossible. He'd convinced Tanwadur, a man who hated him, to not only let him live but allow his army inside of that hostile man's refuge.

After defusing tension in this city, Raimie had subsequently taken a fortress that Tanwadur and his eldest son had been trying to capture for years. I had yet to meet Kylorian, but if his small list of successes was anything to go by, that teenager would be of little consequence. Raimie, on the other hand, had proven that he had a mind for tactics with Da'kul's capture.

Overall, I'd been stuck oscillating between pride and disappointment when it came to Raimie's progress. It had been a frustrating experience all around.

When a body landed beside me in an explosion of white light, I yelled, and as that blinding light evaporated, Raimie mischievously grinned at me. Whatever indecision I might have been fighting

before temporarily hardened into disapproval.

“How can I help you, Eledis?” Raimie asked.

Really? The kid was asking if I needed help?

I'd seen how busy Raimie was on a daily basis. The kid lived a life of non-stop activity, one that exhausted me to watch. If he didn't learn time management soon, he was sure to burn out, and while I could possibly use something like that in the long run, it wouldn't be helpful yet. I had to encourage him to slow down.

“Don't you have enough on your plate?” I asked.

“Sure!” Raimie said. “But if you need something from me, I'm more than happy to help. The other stuff can wait.”

By other stuff, did he mean battle plans and handling logistics for his army? Because no, those couldn't wait. Hell, this kid was an idiot sometimes.

Patently, I said, “I don't need anything, Raimie. I'm only here because I've been assigned the role of messenger this morning.”

“Oh, really?” Raimie said with his lips twitching. “Must be important to have you leaving your comfortable office behind. I know how much you like that place.”

...One day, I was going to smack the smirk off of this little shit's face.

“Speaking of that study, a man's waiting for you there,” I said with an indulgent smile. “He insists that he's part of your Hand. Says he has important information for you.”

“Fantastic! I'm glad one of them is back,” Raimie said. “Which one's waiting for me?”

What on Alouin's green earth was he talking about?

Raimie must have seen my confusion because he continued.

“What did he look like?”

“Short,” I said. “Actually, he was quite small in general.”

Humming, the kid smiled to himself.

“That sounds like Little. I think Oswin deployed him to the Birthing Grounds,” he said. “Fantastic! I've been looking forward to hearing his report.”

...The kid had formed a Hand?! When had this happened? And why hadn't I known about it?

“Do you mind if I run ahead, Eledis?” Raimie asked. “I can accompany you back to your office if you’d rather, but... I really need to hear Little’s report.”

Numbly, I said, “Please. Do what you must, grandson. Don’t mind me.”

“Thanks! See you there.”

Raimie became a streak of flesh, accompanied by light, and with my nose wrinkled, I clicked my tongue.

Magic. Alouin damned magic. How was it that the person I must rely upon to reach my goals used the one thing that I despised almost as much as the Dark Lord himself? At least Rhylix, the other primeancer, wasn’t here to corrupt the kid any longer.

When I’d read about that bit of news, I’d nearly jumped for joy, but doing so wouldn’t have been polite with Raimie standing ten feet away from me. At the time, the kid had been unquestionably in the clutches of grief. What else could explain how short he’d been with me during that conversation?

Later, I’d shared my glee with Marcuset, and although my friend had expressed sorrow at the loss of life, he’d still joined me in a celebratory round of drinks.

Speaking of my friend, I hoped Marcuset would come to Tanwadur’s house soon. I had the feeling that whatever news this Little had brought would lead to a meeting, one where I’d need allies present if I was going to temper the crazy idea that Raimie would inevitably present.

As hoped, Marcuset was waiting for me outside the house when I reached it about an hour later.

“I’m glad you sent that messenger,” he said as I approached. “You were right. He’s called a meeting to discuss our next steps.”

I strode through the door without replying, heading upstairs with Marcuset on my heels.

“Should be interesting to see what he wants to do now,” he said, laughing under his breath.

Snapping my head toward him, I made sure he saw my glare.

“Don’t tell me you’ve fallen under his sway as well,” I said.

Shrugging, Marcuset said, “You have to admit that he’s performed better than we expected.”

I made a face, even if I shouldn’t be so disparaging of the kid around Marcuset. My friend was already stuck in a difficult position, torn between the kid he’d sworn his fealty to and the friend he suspected might be plotting against his king.

“I’ll do no such thing,” I said in a lighter tone. “Have any hints for me before we go inside?”

“Hmm,” Marcuset said before breaking into a secret smile that I *hated* to see. “Tanwadur and his oldest son will be joining us today and Eledis? Kylorian... he’ll look familiar to you. Thought you deserved the warning.”

Ominous...

“That’s all I get?” I said, making sure the whine in my voice was evident.

“That’s all you get.”

At the glint in my friend’s eyes, I groaned. Nothing good had ever come after seeing that.

The dining room loomed ahead of us, and reaching it, I shoved through its door and into the room, scanning each of the people present. Raimie and his bodyguard were standing at one end of the room while Aramar stiffly sat at the center of the table, and Tanwadur was with his-

On seeing the teenager beside Tiro’s leader, I clutched at the table, certain I was about to tumble to the floor. It was like I’d been gut-punched because... because Kylorian could have been a twin of my long-dead brother.

Behind me, Marcuset chuckled, and I made a mental note to smack the man later. While he got settled beside Aramar, I straightened.

“You must be Kylorian,” I said.

“And you, Eledis,” the teenager replied.

He’d even inherited my brother’s classic sullenness! Damn, this kid was going to cause me trouble, wasn’t he?

With my eyes still fixed on Kylorian, I said, “So, what did your spy tell you, Raimie?”

“He gave me enough to form a new battle plan,” Raimie said, “I was just waiting for you and Marcuset to explain it.”

“Well, we’re here,” I said. “Let me sit, and we can get started.”

Wandering to the chair beside Kylorian, I gingerly dropped into it, and the younger man barely leaned away. Even slight as it had been, I noticed the motion.

“I’m sorry to have made you wait,” I made myself say.

“Not to worry! We weren’t waiting for long,” Raimie said. “So, where do I begin?”

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