

Chapter 33: What You Are

Rhylix

But in the end, how can I do that?

Raimie's splinters had left, and after another five heartbeats of quiet, I lowered my hands, grateful to see only one version of my friend in front of me. Suddenly tired beyond measure, I sank into the grass before patting the ground in front of me.

"So," Raimie said. "Finally going to explain yourself?"

"Almost," I said. "One last question and then, I'll talk. I promise."

Shrugging, Raimie said, "Sure. Why not?"

All right. Here we go. From this point, nothing further could delay us, and I wasn't sure whether I hated that the time was here or annoyed that it had taken so long to come.

"I need you to tell me everything you know about magic, whether you believe the stories or not," I said.

Not exactly a question but... details.

Raimie looked confused.

"Including yours?" he asked.

"Everything, Raimie."

I needed to know how thorough the kid's knowledge was. What lies would I have to disabuse?

"All right. So far as I'm aware, only two magics have existed in our world, or so it's said. It wouldn't surprise me to learn that others are real as well," Raimie said. "There's Eselan magic, *your* magic. Conjunction, shifting, and illusions. Supposedly, more types of this magic existed when Alouin brought the Esela through the Accession Tear, but in the millennia since, these other types have been diluted from your people's blood."

He paused as if seeking approval.

“Sound about right so far,” I said. “What else?”

Swallowing, Raimie glanced over my head, probably checking Gistrick and Aya’s positions. The Zrelnach were still waiting on the edge of Paft’s fields, having never moved, but when Raimie met my eyes, he still seemed skittish, like prey trapped in a corner.

“You want me to talk about *primeancy*?” he hissed.

“Yes. I know the subject’s taboo, what with people’s disposition toward them-”

“You mean how everyone *reviles* them?” Raimie snapped. “Even centuries after the last one died?”

I took a moment to clamp down on the heat rising up my throat.

“Yes,” I eventually said. “I’m sorry. I know this might be uncomfortable for you, but learning what you know about magic is important. Trust me.”

“I trust you, Rhy. I do,” Raimie said, “and the subject isn’t uncomfortable for me, more...”

He swallowed, darting his gaze between me and the plains beside us.

“Look. I like stories about primeancy, ok?” he said. “But that interest hasn’t exactly been encouraged over the years.”

Oh... hell. For several tense heartbeats, I had to close my eyes so the burn in them wouldn’t embarrass me.

“I understand,” I said. “I still need you to tell me what you know.”

“Ok,” Raimie hesitantly said. “So... the primeancers. Let’s see.”

Drawing his knees up, he rested his chin on them, hugging his legs.

“They’ve caused or worsened every calamity our world’s seen, setting the clock back on it every time-”

“I don’t need to know about their history.”

Somehow, I kept the heat bubbling up my throat from crawling into my voice. What was this need to find something hostile and *tear its throat out*? Was this... anger? If it was, why was I so potently experiencing it now? Why were so many emotions returning to me so quickly, gradually filling my shell of a heart?

Clearing my throat, I said, “Just tell me about their magic, if you please.”

"I- I'm sorry, Rhy, but I don't know much about that part. Most of the tales I've read didn't focus on it," Raimie said, clearly getting flustered. "I know that unlike Eselan magic, only two types of primeancy existed, and each of them was the opposite of the other. Supposedly, their power originated in the gods or forces of nature—I always preferred that theory—that run our world, but these forces are at war with each other... or something. I know primeancers could use energies from those forces to do wonderful and horrific things."

Trailing off, he screwed his brow up in concentration, and I fought to keep quiet. Raimie needed to reach this conclusion *without* me handing over the answer.

As he straightened like a spring, the kid's face lit up.

"Oh!" he said. "I know that they talked to the sources of their power, invisible beings—"

After a moment spent choking on his next word, Raimie slammed his mouth closed with the whites of his eyes eating into their blue color. Prey trapped by his predator.

"I'm surprised. That was all true, if colored by history," I said. "You know less than I expected, though. We'll have to work on that."

"What are you saying?" Raimie whispered.

I quirked an eyebrow at him, which was apparently all the answer my friend needed.

"No."

Scooting backward, Raimie shook his head.

"This is a joke, right?" he said. "A bad prank to top off the upheavals in my life."

This was why I hadn't wanted to tell Raimie his new truth. After everything that had ruined his life, I hated to slash another rent in the fabric of it.

I looked into my friend's eyes, though, and saw that he was perfectly aware I wasn't playing a prank on him. The kid knew the death sentence he'd been handed.

Because if anyone learned what he was, that was what would happen. The fingers of hate from the last primeancer calamity had yet to loosen. Even now, anyone suspected of claiming that magic was near instantly torn limb from limb.

I should know. It had almost happened to me a few times. I wasn't sure if even Raimie's status as a royal could protect him from that.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I wish I could laugh and rib you about how gullible you are, but I can't. This is your reality, Raimie."

Biting my lip, I dropped my gaze to my hands, unable to bear the look in my friend's eyes, but I forged on regardless.

"I am a primeancer. Specifically, I'm aligned with the primal force that those of this world name Ele," I forced myself to say.

Squeezing my eyes closed, I reached for my source, teasing the smallest thread of Ele from it, before bringing it to my hands. Once done, I stared at that hated, soft glow for a moment before releasing it. Then, I raised my eyes until I met a terrified gaze to match mine.

"You're a primeancer too, Raimie. Ask your splinters if you doubt me. They're the sources of your power," I said. "Oh. In case you were curious, they're true names are Order and Chaos. I'll let you figure out which of those belong to which of them."

I dragged my traitor tongue to a stop before it could worsen this for Raimie.

Raimie, my friend, who was looking through me. Whose spirit was draining from his eyes, all while I scrambled for a way to keep it in place.

Without a word, he got to his feet before marching away, and for reasons I couldn't explain, I watched him go, not once trying to stop him.

I felt sick. My lungs refused to fully inflate, and a stone had replaced my heart. Gods, what was this pain?

Collapsing in a sprawl, I wondered why the stars were sparkling more than usual until a drop of moisture rolled over my cheek. Hastily, I scrubbed my eyes, cursing myself. What had I thought would happen when inviting emotions into my life again? That it would be all exuberance and fizzy happiness? How naïve.

And I couldn't indulge them right now. I didn't think Raimie would betray my secret. Within a few days, he'd come to accept his new reality—he'd had enough practice with such adjustments, after all—but I needed to prepare for if I was wrong. How did one protect one's ally after they'd decided to hate them?

If it came to that, I'd deal with it. For now, I had one more task to complete this evening.

When I returned to Paft's town square, most of the Zrelnach had bedded down while the rest were preparing for sleep, but beside the door to a smaller hovel, Aramar was leaning against the wall with his arms crossed. When he spotted me, he jerked his head for me to join him.

On approach, I said, "Raimie knows."

Already halfway through the hovel's door, Aramar froze. The question I'd expected, however, didn't come from him but from someone inside the cottage.

"Knows what?" Ferin asked.

Of course. I should have expected that the Zrelnach's commander would sleep near a member of the royal family, and it definitely wouldn't have been with Eledis. With Raimie... with Raimie handling recent revelations, that left Aramar. How unfortunate.

Striding inside, I said, "That I'll be teaching Dath at the same time as him. Hello, Ferin."

"Hiya, Rhy," Ferin said. "You here for Aramar?"

"I need to make some adjustments on his metal ring," I said. "Should I wait or...?"

Ferin shook her head, gesturing for me to enter the room in truth. Sitting at a table near the hearth, she looked tired, and awful as it was, I was glad for her exhaustion. Otherwise, she might have noticed the significant glances that Aramar kept throwing my way.

"You do your healer thing while we talk," she said, "because we badly need to do that."

Settling on the bed behind Aramar, I lifted his shirt, working to keep disquiet off of my face.

"About what?" I asked.

"Our strategy for the next few weeks," Ferin said. "I've talked to Eledis throughout the day, trying to change his mind about our route. I really tried, Rhy."

With unease trailing fingers up my spine, I leaned to the side so I could see her. She'd buried her face in her hands with her shoulders shaking.

"After what happened this afternoon, though, I don't think it's possible," she said, lifting a tear-streaked face. "We're going through the Withriingalm whether we like it or not."

TTS Chapter Thirty-Three

Revision #3

Created 20 August 2024 20:15:34 by FatalisticFable

Updated 18 March 2026 22:00:13 by FatalisticFable