

Chapter 4: An Interrogation

Rhylix

To my great surprise, Nessaira had made tracking her a challenge. Not difficult! I'd simply had to expend more effort than usual with it.

I'd lost her soon after entering the forest, and since then, she'd left few signs of her passage, only the occasional broken twig or depressed footprint in the earth. It, however, had been enough, and she must know this.

I found her in a small clearing, sparsely lit through the leaves by the moon. Out of breath, she loosed another crossbow bolt at me when I came into view, and as I swayed to avoid it, she drew her sword.

"Why dodge like that if you can't die?" she sneered.

Shrugging, I said, "Because it would still hurt. Obviously."

"All the more reason not to duck."

...What?

Rolling her eyes, Nessaira lifted her sword.

"So, what now?" she asked. "I can't outrun you. Does that mean we'll fight? Will... will you kill me?"

I really should. All of me cried for it, rebelling at the Corruption in her. It didn't matter how much her voice had shaken while speaking or that her arms were trembling. She was an affront to Ele, and it would not abide her continued existence.

I, however, still saw her value. She could provide Raimie with inside information on current events in Doldimar's kingdom and besides that...

Besides that...

No matter how much the Kiraak repelled me, I'd always hated killing them. They'd had no choice in what they'd become, and because of that, one of my most secret and vain hopes had been to find a cure for their affliction.

So. Would I kill Nessaira?

“That should never have been a question,” Creation said from behind me. “End the enemy, Eriadren.”

I ignored them, examining Nessaira instead.

“Just this once, let’s try something else,” I said.

Nessaira got a breath to look surprised before I shot a thread of Ele into her eye. Once there, I bade her to sleep, and she collapsed.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Creation snapped.

I couldn’t help my smile as I crouched. Much as my babysitter had been less of a pain this cycle, I still enjoyed the times when I got to annoy them.

“Something you don’t want me to do, of course,” I said. “And don’t look at me like that. Raimie needs information, and this woman has it. That’s all there is to this.”

Making a face, I shoved my arms under Nessaira so I could sling her over my shoulders. As always in these situations, wherever I touched her and the Corruption inside her body, my skin crawled.

Getting her back to the fort would be *fun*.

I got about halfway to the forest’s edge before my crawling skin and the exhaustion of carrying a fully armored human being caught up with me. Dropping Nessaira, I slumped against a tree trunk, all while Creation watched me with tight lips.

Rolling my eyes, I said, “What? Something bothering you?”

They refused to say a word, and soon enough, I gave up any pretense of trying to appease them. Thumping my head against the tree’s bark, I stared through its leaves at the stars.

“What happened at the tear with Raimie...” I said. “Did you know that closing one of them hurts him so badly?”

I shuddered on recalling that awful tearing of my essence. It had been like a piece of it had gotten sucked away, and while that piece had returned to me, I couldn’t guarantee that Raimie had experienced the same. Would the gnawing ache of its absence forever haunt him?

“Raimie is an anomaly to me and my whole,” Creation said. “We’ve seen much of what he’s done before, but closing a rip in reality? No. In the distant past, one of you mortals learned how to create those, but no one has stitched one back together, not until Raimie.”

Interesting. Also concerning as hell. How was I supposed to handle something and someone that not even Ele had experience with? It was another reminder of how utterly unique my ally was this time around—his fluctuating mastery of the blade, his ability to resuscitate a splinter from destruction, the distinct oddness of people he’d never met still knowing who he was—and this both

gave me hope and terrified me.

After millennia of the same grind year after year, anything different had become another chance to break the cycle of violence and death between me and Arivor. At the same time, though, having all of these anomalies circling my friend made me worry about what might happen to him. In my experience, no one as unique as Raimie could pass through life unscathed.

For now, I chose to focus on my fascination with my friend's irregularities rather than everything else.

"Well. Thank you for sharing with me," I said, lowering my eyes from the sky.

But Creation had disappeared.

"Of course they have," I sighed.

They'd always been good at avoiding the truths they most wanted to keep hidden.

For a while, I didn't move, enjoying the forest's quiet while I rested, but once I had my strength back, I finished the journey back to Da'kul. I left Nessaira in the forest's eaves, near where the soldiers had begun their assault. Her presence had begun to excessively tire me, and with the Ele in her, keeping her asleep, she wouldn't be going anywhere anytime soon.

After making sure of this, I headed to the fort, hoping to task a soldier with retrieving our new prisoner.

The assault seemed to have gone well. While bodies were scattered across the fortress' bailey, few of them were wearing the uniform of Raimie's soldiers under their armor.

Several of my allies were clumped around a couple of the place's buildings. I assumed that was where I'd find the enemy's last holdouts, but while I could certainly help with clearing those buildings, I'd rather leave it to the soldiers. Given their numbers, they could handle that issue with little danger, and I was *tired* after such a hectic day.

So, instead, I approached a few of the solitary soldiers who were handling clean-up. As expected, most of them went out of their way to avoid me, barely holding their contempt in check when I caught their attention, and a few outright ignored me, not that this was much of a bother.

After the battle of the beach, the secrecy of my primeancy was out, and unlike Raimie, I had little to protect me from the general populace's hatred of my magic. To date, only my 'heroics' during said battle had kept me from getting killed.

When I eventually came upon someone receptive to my request, it was in the oddest of people. While his body was smaller than the average man's with signs of puberty rampant on him, he carried himself like the wisest of adults. As I explained what I needed, he listened with the most serious expression on his surprisingly handsome face, nodding once I'd finished.

“I can retrieve the prisoner for you, no problem,” he said. “Where do you want her delivered? Probably the tower, right? That’s where ‘His Royal Majesty’ has made his base, after all.”

For a breath, I could only blink at this kid. Most of the soldiers didn’t go around teasing their chosen king, and this person in front of me was so young... What had dragged him from his home in Ada’ir, if not king and country?

With a smirk, the kid asked, “You know... if you don’t need my help, I should get back to-”

“No. Thank you,” I interjected. “And the tower will do nicely. There should be some cells in the lower levels, unless I’m greatly mistaken. Leave her in one of those.”

Going stiff, the soldier saluted me.

“Yes, sir!” he said before relaxing. “And so you know, I think your friend needs you. He looked a little worn once the battle was over.”

Oh, no...

I knew that in the past, Raimie had usually fallen into a deep depression following periods of violence, but considering how carefree he’d seemed after our last battle, I’d thought maybe he’d been learning how to handle that.

“Thank you for telling me,” I said. “Do you know where I can find him?”

Pointing, the small soldier said, “Top of the tower. At least, that’s where it looked like he was headed.”

Of course. Raimie had always loved his heights.

“Again, thank you,” I said, “and good luck with the prisoner.”

Flicking his fingers in another salute, the kid raced for the gate, and I made my way to the tower. As I climbed its stairs, I wondered what I’d find at the top. How much damage control would I need to handle?

The room at the tower’s top had, unsurprisingly, stayed much the same as the last time I’d been here. A grand desk, covered in documents, faced a wall with a window above it. Many others filled the wall’s circle, all with colored panes to filter the moonlight, and in one pseudo-corner, a four-poster bed took up far too much of the floor. The room’s main feature, however, was a fireplace, surrounded by a stone mantle, and the scattering of armchairs in front of it.

Raimie was slumped in one of these, just... staring off into space. Unmoving. And my heart sank on seeing it.

When I cleared my throat, Raimie jumped, spinning toward me. He’d halfway raised his hands before seeing me, but once he recognized my presence, those got dropped, replaced by a clearly

false smile.

“Oh, Rhy! Good to see you,” he said. “Did you catch Nessaira?”

Ok. I had two choices here. I could comment on what I’d seen, probably making my friend uncomfortable in the process, or I could ignore it, trusting him to tell me if he needed to talk.

That was an easy choice to make. Raimie had always been consistent when it came to asking for my help, once he was ready for it.

So, I smiled and said.

“I did. A soldier’s bringing her to the tower as we speak.”

Raimie’s shaky smile turned mischievous, which was good to see even as I silently groaned about what was surely coming.

“You couldn’t do that yourself?” he said. “I’m surprised! You’ve always seemed so self-sufficient.”

Rolling my eyes, I headed for the desk, picking at the paper on it.

“Usually, I would have handled it by myself, but she had a lot of Corruption in her body,” I said. “And you should know how much that dark energy affects me.”

“Right... sorry.”

Glancing back at Raimie, I winced to see him staring at his lap with his teeth caught in his teeth. Even months after learning about it, he got antsy when I talked about the negative consequences of my status as the Champion of Ele, and I hated that. I didn’t like making him uncomfortable.

“So, have you looked through these yet?” I said, lifting a piece of paper overhead. “Any useful information here?”

With a sigh, Raimie shook himself.

“Not that I saw,” he said. “But then, most of it’s coded, and I don’t know how to break through that.”

“Huh.”

Making a face, I replaced the sheet of paper.

“That makes sense. Enforcers have always been secretive,” I said. “I’ll take a look at this mess later, if I have time. Hopefully, though, we can get what we need from Nessaira.”

“Right. Her.”

Leaning on his knees, Raimie started scrubbing his face, and I winced. What had I been thinking, bringing her up so quickly? She was unlikely to give us any information without a thorough interrogation, and that... wouldn't be pleasant.

Was it something that Raimie could handle right now?

Probably not.

"Don't worry," I said. "I'll take care of her."

Slowly, Raimie lifted his face until he was peeking over his fingers.

"Are you sure about that?" he asked.

Shrugging, I said, "Sure. It won't be a problem."

I strode to my friend, laying a hand on his shoulder.

"Besides, you look like you need some rest," I said. "Get a good night's sleep, and I'll bring you a report on what I discover in the morning."

Gods, Raimie had never looked so skeptical around me before, but after a pause, one where he seemed to be evaluating me... or maybe listening to something unheard, he nodded.

"Ok," he said. "Thanks, Rhy."

"No problem," I said, squeezing his shoulder. "I'll see you later."

But then, I left him alone. If I was going to do something so unpleasant, I should get it over with.

Right?

Getting this room ready for an interrogation had taken me a while. In fact, if there had been a window in here, I might have seen the first blush of dawn through it.

This delay had had little to do with the actual preparations needed. Arranging instruments on a table and securing a woman to a chair didn't take much time, but for some reason, I'd found all of it difficult. Choosing which tools I'd use had seemed impossible, stalling me for far too long, and while working on knots, I'd constantly fought to keep my eyes off of Nessaira's face.

And I didn't know where this struggle had come from. In my many years and cycles of life, I'd interrogated my fair share of people, including those as thoroughly ensnared by Daevetch as this woman, and it had never been a problem before.

So, why was I standing here, staring at Nessaira and unable to begin?

"This is pathetic," I said.

Behind me, Creation snorted, probably leaning against a wall with their arms crossed. I could imagine them shaking their head or rolling their eyes, and the summoned image was... annoying. It gave me the motivation I needed to reach for the Ele in Nessaira and tear it out.

She roused with a snort. Rapidly blinking, she took in her surroundings before recoiling into her chair.

"I'll never give you what you want," she hissed.

The same thing every interrogation victim claimed. How I'd love to meet one person who'd share the information I needed before I had to force it out of them.

"Whatever you say," I said before rubbing my eyes.

I truly didn't want to do this today. Why was that?

"Come on, coward," Nessaira said. "Do your worst."

She was right. It was better if I just started.

Dropping my hands to my sides, I said, "Remember. This can stop whenever you're ready."

I was halfway through breaking the fingers of Nessaira's left hand when her howling scream trailed off into a... moan. What in the...?

Panting, she lifted hungry eyes to me.

"Again," she breathed. "Please."

And I froze.

Really, I should have expected this. Sometimes, Daevetch warped certain people's already rare, if perfectly natural, appreciation of pain into something else entirely, and it seemed Nessaira had fallen into that category.

In my past experience with people like her, milking valid information from them had been difficult, to say the least, but I'd always prevailed. Stomaching the horrors that the process had forced from me had never been a problem.

Until today. Today, I considered what I must do to this woman, and my typical resistances to it, built to shore up my coming collapse, failed. My hands started trembling while my lips twitched.

For the love of the gods, why was this a problem today?

It didn't matter why. I looked upon this woman, eager to accept the torment I'd pile on her, and my stomach heaved. Slapping a hand to my mouth, I raced out of the room, closing my ears to the laughter that chased me.

In the hallway, I crouched with my back to the wall and rocked in place. What was happening? Why-?

“Are you ok?”

At the sound of that voice, whatever realization had been lurking, just out of awareness, got shoved to the side, and I leapt to my feet, spinning toward Raimie. Thank the gods, he was alone with no Oswin in sight. I’d rather not give that spy more ammunition to use against me.

“I... yes,” I said. “Yes, I’m fine.”

And I was, although the conundrum that I’d left in a nearby room still made me cringe.

For an interminably long time, Raimie stared at me before sighing.

“Having trouble with Nessaira?” he asked. “Why did you volunteer to handle her if it was going to be such a problem?”

For a moment, I considered lying to my friend. Doing so would certainly be easier, but when it came to him, the truth had always served me better in the past.

So, I might wince, but I said.

“What can I say? Sometimes, I don’t know what I’m thinking.”

“I see,” Raimie said.

Cocking his head, he narrowed his eyes at the door beside me, and I wondered what he was thinking. Had what he’d seen shaken his confidence in me? Did he doubt my claim of being Ele’s Champion?

If he did, I wouldn’t blame him.

“Why don’t I give it a try?” he asked. “I probably won’t get anywhere, but it couldn’t hurt, right?”

Oh... he didn’t know what he was asking for. Plus, I’d volunteered for this task specifically because I didn’t think he could handle it.

“I don’t know...” I drawled, stalling for time.

Because I’d never known how to change my friend’s mind once he’d decided to do something.

“Come on, Rhy,” Raimie said. “It needs doing, yes?”

“Well... yes. We need to know what she knows,” I said, “but-”

“Then, let me try.”

As he brushed past me, Raimie smirked.

“I promise I won’t do something I’ll regret.”

Didn’t he know? Whatever he did in that room, he’d regret it.

But he turned through the doorway, and I’d lost my chance at convincing him to stop. Slumping against a wall, I hung my head, preparing for what would come. I was so focused on this that when Raimie stuck his head back into the hallway, it made me jump.

“Stay there, will you?” he said. “If I need help...”

Trailing off, he chewed on his lip, and I couldn’t help but smile.

“I’m not going anywhere,” I said.

“Thanks!”

Raimie popped back into the room, and relaxing, I slid to the floor. Whatever my friend needed from me in the next hour, I’d be here for him.

Revision #1

Created 5 September 2024 21:44:49 by FatalisticFable

Updated 29 August 2025 18:29:44 by FatalisticFable