

# Chapter 4: Mistakes

## Raimie

Huddled on the floor beside a candle, I glanced through Eledis' gifted book with a blanket draped over my shoulders.

So far, I didn't understand why my grandfather had wanted me to read this. The book most definitely discussed the subject I'd asked about. I now knew a wealth of Audish fold tales as well as a good swath of its ancient history, although I had yet to find anything from the last four hundred years, but nothing here explained my recognition of the kingdom's name.

At some point in the past, I must have known it. The familiarity that panged through me when I read the word had yet to dissipate, but I had no clue how I knew it. I'd spent most of the night running through my memories of read books, but after a few repeats of this, I'd given up.

I hadn't read about Auden, and if that was so, I despaired of solving this mystery on my own. My retention of anything but the written word could be abysmal at times, which meant that if I truly wanted this puzzle solved, I'd need to speak with Eledis or my father about it. Was finding answers worth troubling them with this?

And then, there was Eledis' suggestion after I'd asked about the sword in the forest.

Well. After I'd asked for advice about the opportunity it might present. I had no way of knowing for sure, but I thought he'd understood what the true subject of my question had been, although *how* he'd known...

Sighing, I rubbed my eyes. I should just finish the damn book. It would answer my questions or it wouldn't, and at the moment, I had nothing better to do. What else was there for me this late at night? Sleep?

With a chuckle, I flipped to the next chapter, and its title prompted a quiet groan.

### *The Legend of Shadowsteal*

*For a warrior nation like Auden, it should come as no surprise that the most sacred relic of its people was a sword.*

With my breath catching, I scanned that line again. Was this the tale Eledis has wanted me to read?

*No one knows how Shadowsteal came into the hands of the Audish royal family. It was the favored weapon of the Eselan Preserver, when he still walked among us, and rumors say that its origin lies at the feet of Alouin himself, but no record exists of the fall of a god-forged sword into mortals' hands.*

*What we know is that over the years, the sword became instrumental in Auden's never-ending struggle against dark primeancers. For generations, the kingdom's leader wielded the weapon, and not once did it leave their possession until the time of Auden's last king.*

*The rise of Doldimar saw the dismantling of the Audish royal family. Through a series of missteps, the last king ceded his kingdom to this man, someone who has many people lauding him as a Dark Lord. If one believes the stories told by Audish refugees, the title seems warranted. Even without it, however, his unprecedentedly long life explains some of the fear attributed to him.*

*After Doldimar's conquest, the Audish royal family disappeared, and their famed sword hasn't been seen in the three hundred years since. Some theorize that Auden's new ruler stamped out all traces of that family and their famed weapon, but others wonder if perhaps the time of Shadowsteal's foretellings has come (for a list of these, see the index). As the years have passed, still others believe the sword never existed, discounting it as a fairy tale instead.*

*Whatever the case may be, Shadowsteal remains an important piece of Audish history, one that any reputable text that discusses the subject must share.*

Licking my lips, I lifted trembling fingers and paged toward the back of the book.

As I'd been reading the chapter, something foreign had taken hold of me. I'd followed each of its lines at my normal reading pace, but my brain and tongue had skipped a few words ahead. I hadn't known what would come next in the tale, but something had, and it had seized control while a deep familiarity had taken root in the heart of me.

It made me want to throw the book across the room, and yet, I opened it to the index, finding the foretellings mentioned in what I'd read, and without permission, my feverish eyes landed on the first.

*Found by one, the master of-*

"Couldn't sleep?"

Jumping, I snapped the book closed, reaching for... what exactly?

"The story must have been good if you didn't hear me coming," my father said. "Usually, you're more aware of your surroundings than that."

As if moving through mud, I forced my thoughts away from the closed book, focusing on my father. He was looking down at me with his hands on his hips and a slight frown his only sign of concern.

"It is," I said.

After lifting the book, I slid it between my back and the wall.

"And no," I continued, "I couldn't."

Sighing, my father moved toward me, and I scooted to the side, giving him room. Once he was settled, he banged his head against the wall.

"Was it another nightmare?" he asked.

When I nodded, my father rubbed his face.

"They've been coming more frequently in the last month," he said.

"They come and go in waves, dad," I said. "You know that."

"That doesn't stop me from worrying when I wake up in the middle of the night to find my son, reading by candlelight," my father said.

I ducked my head, hunching on myself.

"Sorry," I whispered.

Waving a hand, my father said, "Don't be. It's not your fault. I only wish I could help."

Pursing my lips, I glanced at him. He couldn't do that. The only one who could ever help with the nightmares had been my mother, and she... wasn't here anymore.

But I was exhausted, and my father was staring at his hands with such dejection...

Fixing my eyes on the other side of the cottage, I slid down the wall until my head was resting in my father's lap. With my face burning, I pulled my blanket under my chin and cleared my throat.

"Tell me a story," I said. "Like mom used to."

My father went still with his leg tensing under my head, and almost, I shot to my feet so I could throw myself into bed, but after a moment, he relaxed, brushing his fingers through my hair.

"Fairy tale or horror story?" he asked.

Snorting, I said, "I'm trying to sleep, dad."

"Fairy tale it is, then," my father said. "Once upon a time, there was a woman from another world-"

It took a while, but gradually, my muscles loosened. I listened as my father told a story that I'd heard a million times before, and halfway between a 'loved her son' and a 'very much', I tumbled into sleep. For the first time in weeks, no dreams plagued me.

When I woke up, I was still lying on the floor with my father's snores vibrating through my makeshift pillow. Gently, I pulled free, draping my blanket over him before retrieving Eledis' book. Grabbing my cloak, I threw it over yesterday's clothes, stored the book in my mother's bag, and slipped out the door.

Tracing yesterday's path came easily to me. I knew the location of my family's hunting blind intimately, and every step taken from there was etched into my mind while the ringing from last night clearly led the way.

Still, I stumbled upon the clearing. I'd expected to find the same display as before, letting wanton light warn me of when I was approaching it, but that didn't happen. The clearing looked... normal—sunlight shining into its open expanse and all—albeit with a sheathed sword in it.

Last night's piercing light might have gone, but the compulsion remained, stronger than before. I'd stopped on the clearing's edge, but with an invisible chain dragging on me, I couldn't help but step forward.

"I shouldn't be here," I said.

Another step. *Then, why are you?*

"I'm happy with my life."

One step more. *Are you really?*

"Just because I'm missing something doesn't mean I should court danger!"

My steps faltered, and the pull on me lessened, enough for me to flop to the ground. Panting, I dropped back on my elbows. Why did I feel as if I'd run home from Fissid?

After a moment, I straightened, withdrawing Eledis' book. After making a cave of my body, I dried my hands before reaching into the bag. Manipulating the book while my mother's 'plastic' coated it wasn't the most enjoyable process, but soon enough, I was peering through bubbled raindrops at the page where I'd been interrupted last night.

Swallowing, I glanced at the sword lying within my reach. If I meant to touch that thing and get it away from a place where an unfortunate person might chance upon it, I'd learn everything I could about it beforehand.

So. What were these foretellings?

*Found by one, the master of three*

*Agent of hope to rise across the sea*

*Come to us, you who shall set us free*

*Hear our pain, our fear, our plea*

Pressing my hand over my mouth, I chuckled into it. I'd always found the idea of foretellings silly. This nonsense before me was one reason why I did. What help was a poorly crafted, nonsensical poem to anyone?

Still, I moved on to the next.

*A god's heir brings the sword of light to a home-not-home. Oh, how he soars. Oh, how he falls. Oh, the torments he will suffer.*

That one was... less funny. With a shiver, I shook it off, turning to the last two.

*Leaving chaos and order in his wake, Shadowsteal's rightful bearer shall destroy destruction's epitome, returning our land to peace and prosperity.*

And.

*He will be the Balancer. Let all lurking behind the veil tremble. He will be your end.*

Well, then.

Shaking, I returned the book to my cloak before turning to the sword.

What should I do? I couldn't know for sure if this was Shadowsteal. All I had were my suspicions, after all. No hard proof.

But it could be and if it was...

Should I risk taking it, given what I'd read? Thinking that drivel was about me seemed arrogant, yes, but looking at this, something potentially life changing, from every angle seemed wise.

I should leave it here, go home, and forget it existed. I really should.

But.

If I did that, someone else might come across it during one of its light shows. Someone else might pick up the sword without thinking it through.

And while the compulsion toward the sword had stopped, fading while I'd been reading, something at the core of who I was urged me to act recklessly for once. My hands twitched, waiting for steel to fill them.

This didn't feel like it would ease the piece that was missing from me. No, that seemed separate, but even still, I wanted this, even as my brain screamed *no*.

Plus, maybe it would stop the damn ringing in my head.

"To hell with it," I said.

Rocking to my feet, I strode to the blade. A hand and a half sword, it appeared every bit as plain as I remembered, but as I'd thought, it was well crafted. The scabbard matched the simplicity of the blade's hilt with an attached belt woven around blackened leather.

Taking a deep breath, I wrapped my hand in my cloak's sleeve before bending to retrieve the weapon. As I came close to it, however, I ran into resistance, a gentle rebuff, but something like that couldn't happen in empty air.

Right?

I paused before trying again. Nothing stopped my hand this time. Had I imagined that sense of resistance?

I curled my cloth-wrapped fingers around the scabbard, and... nothing happened.

Releasing a breath, I straightened, and what had initially rejected me decided it wanted to keep the sword. The force of the weapon's mid-air stop jerked me forward, and I teetered for a moment before toppling to the ground, knocking the breath out of me.

"That was embarrassing," I gasped into the dirt.

Wincing, I lifted my head, bracing to stand, and my palm cupped leather.

And it felt right.

Even still, I shot my gaze to my hand, and finding the sword's grip in it, my stomach dropped. A bead of light, much like what I'd seen last night, formed at the scabbard's tip before zipping up it. In a flash, it crossed to my arm, speeding toward my head, and everywhere it went, my muscles relaxed. By the time it reached my face, I could only lazily blink as the bead crawled out of view.

Light burst above my head, and for a moment, the ringing in my head was silence, replaced by a steady beat. For a moment, the world presented itself to me in varying degrees of illumination. For a moment, peace reigned supreme in me.

Then, terror shoved it aside. I snatched my hand to my chest, scrambling across the clearing. With my shoulders heaving, I tried to wrench my eyes away from the damn sword, but they wouldn't budge.

What had that been? It had been... had been...

Shooting to my feet, I had every intention of fleeing from the clearing, but instead, cautious steps took me to the sword once more. Why? Why would I do this?

"I can't leave it here," I said.

So, once again, I reached for the weapon, even as my mind shouted *FUCK no!* Once again, I lifted the sword, but nothing stopped my rise this time.

Through a fog, I watched myself unwind the belt and clasp it around my waist. The sword settled on my hip and...

This was how I was always meant to be.

And I hated it.

I finally let myself run home, working out what I'd do once I arrived. I *absolutely* must include my father and Eledis in this now. Maybe they'd know how to keep something like this out of-

A flash of motion caught my eye, and I stopped with my hunting knife, ever on me, drawn.

"Who's there?" I asked.

Another streak of shadow spun me around, but... there'd been no sound. What moved without making a noise?

Deep within the trees, two figures appeared from thin air, but while their forms seemed human in nature, they looked nothing like one. A brilliant being of white light stood beside another of black penumbra. They lifted their hands, as if to wave, and spinning, I took off.

"No. *Hell* no. Fuck. No, no, no!"

A string of denials and curses trailed me home while flashes of motion on my vision's periphery pushed me ever faster. When I burst out of the trees, I whirled on the forest, waiting for something horrible to emerge, but nothing did.

The faint buzz that had been blocking my ears faded, and I heard my family murmuring behind me. Safe.

Folding over, I leaned on my knees, gulping air. When my heart stopped beating in my ears, I trotted toward my family, pointing behind me.

"There was-"

What exactly had I seen?

"Something was following me!" I gasped.

But they weren't listening to me. Eledis and my father looked at me with voracious stares, or maybe they were doing that for what was hanging at my side. Had they not heard me?

"The ringing," my father said. "It got louder as he came closer. Please, tell me I'm wrong."

They weren't listening. Whatever those figures had been, they might appear at any moment, and we needed to-

Eledis strode to meet me, but no calming words came from him. Instead, he tangled one finger in my tunic, lifting me off of the ground until my toes barely touched it.

"What are you-?"

As I clawed at Eledis' grip, trying to kick him, my grandfather somehow whipped the sword at my side out of its scabbard. Releasing his hold, he retreated a step before laying the blade across his open palms.

Almost, I tackled Eledis despite the sharp edge between us, but what the sword's scabbard had been hiding stopped me short. Script in unrecognizable symbols flowed over the blade, and on a cursory inspection, they appeared etched into its steel. If one looked closely enough, though, one could see that nothing had indented the metal. The words simply brushed over the weapon's surface.

Now, that was more like what I'd expected from a mythical sword.

"Shadowsteal," Eledis said, as if to confirm my suspicions.

"It can't be," my father said. "It's been years, *centuries*. It can't be Raimie. Anyone but him!"

After casting a horrified look at me, he stormed into the cottage with its door slamming behind him. Eledis had yet to take his eyes off of the sword, and while still concerned about the phenomena I'd left in the woods, I set that aside in the wake of my grandfather *attacking* me.

Swathing a finger in cloth, I placed it on the blade, pushing it down.

When my grandfather looked at me, I hissed, "What. the. hell?"

"Did you read what I gave you?" Eledis blithely asked.

I couldn't say why he thought I had any obligation to answer his questions, but I nodded anyway.

"Then, you know what this is."

Eledis held the sword to the side, and again, I nodded.

"Good."

My grandfather slapped the sword's hilt to my chest.

"This is yours," he said. "Welcome to your new life, Raimie from the line of Audish kings."

Eledis twirled toward the cottage, striding to enter it, and something thumped to the ground in his wake. Stunned, I could only gape at my home's door with a sword of legend lying at my feet.

## **TTS Chapter Four**

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