

# Chapter 50: Another Tear

## Raimie

As I scoured the dungeon I'd found myself in, I crept down far too many corridors, but I found nothing useful, and after ducking into a room for what felt like the hundredth time, I took a break.

What should I do? Kaedesa had said she'd answer Eledis' challenge before we reached Daira, but we had yet to hear from her. What did that mean?

Had she decided we were rebels? If so, this might be the only time for us to escape. If not, my current search might tip Kaedesa toward an unfavorable decision. I didn't know what to do, and my splinters weren't helping with my concentration.

Throughout my search, they'd been jittery, holding a silent conversation, but their opposite natures made that next to impossible. So, clicking its tongue, Dim spoke up.

"We should tell him," it said.

"Are you insane?" Bright hissed. "He'll close it like he did with the last one, and I don't know about you, but I despise forcing my way onto this plane of existence."

Dim stepped toward Bright with its hand extended, almost pleading with the gesture, and my frown, already entrenched on my face, deepened when I saw that the splinter was trembling.

"He had Shadowsteal, Order. *Shadowsteal*," it said. "Do you know what could happen if he retrieves it and finds out I kept something from him?"

Bright showed its opposite an enigmatic smile.

"I'd have one less enemy to worry about," it said, "and he'd be totally mine?"

Dim froze before its body flushed.

"You *asshole*," it shouted, gathering darkness in its hand.

Rubbing my face, I decided to intervene.

"Exactly what are you hiding from me?" I asked.

With its mouth gaping, Dim glanced between me and Bright, clicking its teeth together after a few heartbeats.

“You wanted him to know, otherwise, you’d never have responded, not when you knew he could hear us,” it growled, pointing at Bright. “Why did you make it so difficult?”

“I’m sorry. Have you forgotten our natures?” Bright said. “I have to oppose you sometimes. If I don’t, we might have *problems*.”

I was going to kill them. As soon as I figured out how to do it.

Interrupting their argument, I hissed, “What. were. you. hiding?”

After exchanging a glance with Dim, Bright hesitantly said, “There’s a break in reality nearby.”

“A tear?” I squeaked. “Where?”

Dashing forward, Dim plastered its hands over my mouth.

“I swear. You’re such a child sometimes,” it grumbled.

Narrowing my eyes, I swatted at its arms before raising an eyebrow at Bright.

“I can take you there,” it said.

It led us down several more hallways until it stood in front of a plain door. Bowing, it fluttered a hand for me to enter, and I brushed past the splinter with no comment on its theatrics.

As with the last time I’d been near a tear, a glow from an unknown source illuminated the space within. Dips and rises in the floor resembled the hills that had surrounded Allonovian’s tear, even if the tallest one here only rose to my hip, and beneath the tear, cracks radiated outward.

The tear itself was smaller than the one beneath the mountains. If I angled my hand the right way, I could get my fingers through its ovoid, not that I planned to expose so much of myself to it this time.

And of course, the light leaking from the tear’s edge defused the disquiet emanating from its center.

All of this was well and good, exactly what I’d expected. What I hadn’t anticipated, though, was the cage that surrounded the tear.

“That’s problematic,” Bright said.

“Is it, though?” I asked before Dim could say a word.

As before, I called for Daevetch’s energy, and it answered. But it didn’t just come from Dim. A wave of it cascaded from the tear, crashing into me, and I fought its influence on me.

I wasn't sure why I was doing that, though. With this much power, Queen Kaedesa wouldn't be a problem.

It made me reckless, made me foolish, made me arrogant, and with the way I was now, these attitudes would get me killed.

Forget Kaedesa. I could take on Doldimar with this.

Light splashed against my chest, staggering me, and the darkness I was holding fled from it, although I kept enough on hand to complete my task.

Shaking my head, I headed for the cage, only stopped when Bright leapt at me with a garbled shriek. Before it could reach me, arms appeared around its waist, holding it back.

"Do what you must," Dim shouted, "but hurry. I can't repel Order for long."

Swallowing hard, I nodded before sprinting to the cage. Once there, I bent its bars like I had in my cell, and when I could fit through the gap, I flung Daevetch away from me, glancing over my shoulder.

Dim and Bright were fighting one another, rolling on the ground while they clawed at each other's forms. Just like they had beside Allanovian's tear. Given that, I needed to finish my business quickly.

Despite knowing this, I approached the tear with hesitant steps. Alouin had said we could talk through one of these, implying I must touch it. That should make it safe, right?

If only that logic would kick what had happened the last time I'd done this out of my mind.

Taking deep breaths, I turned my face away from the tear, lifting a finger to nauseating black-

*Fear was gone. Like a mother would its child, this place wrapped itself around me, or it did so as much as it could. I wasn't entirely there.*

*And that might be my saving grace. No matter that floating here imparted a greater sense of calm than I'd ever experienced before, a stream of nonsensical images and phrases flowed through me, much like last time, and this, my brain could not withstand.*

*"It's time. Tell Morihei and Taro to start the rebellion."*

*"Are you sure, Himi? We're entering the most delicate part of the scheme. If anything goes wrong--"*

*"I'll die. Yes, I know, Zhao. Do as I say, and remember. Once we're through this door, I'm the empress, not Himi."*

*"You don't have to remind me, MOST BLESSED."*

*What had that been? Had those been...? Had I picked an intelligible conversation out of the mush?*

*And why was I marveling at that when I was burning from the inside out, when Bright and Dim were fighting in the real world, when I didn't have what I needed?*

*"Al-"*

*A coughing fit seized me, choking my voice. When had I started screaming?*

*"Alouin?" I croaked. "Are you there?"*

*Nothing changed. For- for- for-*

*...*

*"The hell is going on in here?" someone on the outside asked.*

*Shit. That had been bad. I couldn't stay here for much longer, not if my mind was going to stall like that.*

*"Alouin!" I called again. "Come on, you bastard."*

*Maybe I'd hallucinated my conversation with the god. I'd just died, after all. One's consciousness did strange things when-*

*"I won't go anywhere near that thing. You get him out."*

*I should leave this place. How had I done that last time?*

*Someone shouted in pain.*

*"Hell! He's burning up."*

*A million-million voices coalesced, turning their attention my way, and I couldn't let them see me. They couldn't know I was here, couldn't see me so weakened...*

*The place without substance went still and quiet.*

*"Raimie?" Alouin asked. "What are you doing here?"*

*Force yanked me backward, and I fell to the ground, addled beyond belief.*

*It hadn't been a hallucination! I had talked to a god.*

*And had gotten nowhere with this attempt at it. Great.*

*Two guards came into view, flanking me with their swords drawn.*

“What did you do?” the woman asked. “What *are* you?”

There was nothing but white in the man’s eyes, and seeing that, I went still.

This was not good. What conclusions were these two drawing about me? They were enemies, not allies like the Zrelnach near Allanovian’s tear had been, and they’d seen me sticking my fingers into this one.

Slowly, I raised my hands where they could see them.

“I-” I started.

“Shut up! Shut up, shut up!” the man shouted.

Oh. And they were standing next to a *tear*, with all of its granted panic.

They were going to kill me.

I pondered this idea for a heartbeat, and then, the woman moved, lifting her sword. Without thinking, I reacted.

Threads of light shot into their eyes, all while I wished for them to leave me alone. I needed them to go. to. sleep.

And they collapsed into snoring piles.

With a yelp, I scrambled away from the guards, only to get hit in the face with a wave of Ele from the tear. It wiped away my terror and questions, leaving only logic behind.

I should return to my cell before these guards woke up, minimizing the damage done to me. If I did that, perhaps these two’s story would seem ridiculous enough that their compatriots wouldn’t believe it.

Better to take that chance than to make a run for it. After hearing these guards’ tale, people would eventually put two and two together—especially if I didn’t encourage doubt for it—and they’d label me a primeancer. If I escaped this place, I didn’t want a mob on my trail on top of the queen’s forces.

With my decision made, I climbed to my feet, dusting myself off, before facing the cacophony outside of the cage. Dim and Bright were still at it, struggling to rend each other asunder, and huffing at their foolishness, I ignored them. At some point, they’d calm down.

After searching the guards for keys, I tossed them through the hole I’d made in the cage before stepping through it myself, closing the gap behind me. Holding the energies of both primal forces at once was uncomfortable, to say the least, but I couldn’t let go of Ele’s peace yet. So, I was quick with the bars, focusing on them instead of the war taking place within me, one that was threatening to tear me apart.

Casting Daevetch aside, I hurried into the hallway, making slow progress back to my cell. I noted the sudden silence when Bright and Dim stopped fighting, holding up a finger before they could speak.

“Don’t apologize,” I said. “You couldn’t help it.”

After a beat, Dim grumbled, “Ugh. He’s clinging to you.”

But they said nothing else until I was back in my cell.

## **TTS Chapter Fifty**

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