

Chapter 53: Who Are You, Really?

Raimie

When Kaedesa eventually rested her quill atop on top of her notebook, I set my cup down, ready for the questioning to continue once more.

“This man who's hunting you. Who is he? He has, in essence, declared war on Ada'ir and must be brought to justice for his crimes,” she said. “If we have a name, my army can start looking for him.”

How had I told my story about Fissid without mentioning a name?

“He's a powerful battle mage,” I said. “Goes by Teron, I believe.”

Something shifted in Kaedesa's eyes.

“Teron?” she said. “Chief of Doldimar's Enforcers for the last few decades?”

With a half-shrug, I said, “Maybe? I'm just sharing what I've been told, Your Majesty.”

Turning inward, Kaedesa brushed her quill's feather along her jaw.

“If it's him, I wonder why he wants you dead,” she said.

“To get rid of a threat to Doldimar's reign? I don't know.”

I realized too late that Kaedesa had been directing that question at herself, not me. The flat stare she was showing me propelled me straight from a numb state to the world of the hyper-aware.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

Swallowing hard, I said, “Um.”

I looked for help anywhere I might find it, but the attendant from before was impassively gazing at me, Bright and Dim shrugged, and the target dummies had nothing to add. The reminder of Kaedesa's tube did, however, encourage me to tell the truth.

“There’s a... foretelling about my family,” I said. “It claims that the person who found that sword—”

I tossed a hand toward Shadowsteal.

“—would return to Auden, freeing it from its conquering darkness. I assume that means Doldimar, but I don’t know how much credence I’d give it. After all, it’s a *foretelling*, but even still, it drove my family out of our home and drew Teron to me.”

Narrowing her eyes, Kaedesa flicked them between Shadowsteal and me.

“And who is your family to have so much attention paid to you?” she asked.

Releasing a sigh, I slumped in my chair. Apparently, I’d have to play this card.

“Descendants of the Audish royal line,” I said.

Wordlessly, Kaedesa tried to flatten me with her gaze.

“Really?” she said without inflection. “If that were true, I’m fairly certain my little birdie would have told me.”

“It’s what I’m told,” I said, glancing over Kaedesa’s head.

I also knew it to be true. Before, I’d had vague sensations in my head, making me believe the story, but sitting here, getting scrutinized by a queen and *withstanding* her, it was etched into stone inside of me. Centuries ago, one of my ancestors had ruled a kingdom.

A quill’s scratching drew my gaze to the table.

“Subject begins to display irrationality,” Kaedesa said to herself. “After a lengthy, logical conversation, this comes as a surprise. Perhaps the older members of his family have indoctrinated this belief in him?”

Rolling my eyes, I crossed my arms, which had Kaedesa looking up at me.

“Let’s change subjects,” she said before pointing her quill at me. “Tell me how you got out of your cell last night.”

Holding perfectly still, I glanced at my splinters, pleading for their help.

Huffing, Dim said, “Lie, of course. Unless you want to get strung up.”

When I focused on Bright, it grimaced.

“The insufferable ignoramus makes a good point,” it choked out.

Great. I was about to try misleading a monarch. This was just *great*.

“What do you mean?” I asked. “I slept on a cell’s cold floor until your guards woke me up this morning. Besides, if I’d managed to escape, would we be having this conversation right now?”

Slowly, Kaedesa lowered her quill’s point to her journal, holding my gaze as she wrote in it.

“Only now does the subject lie to me. It took longer than expected. Subject uses logic to convince me of the story he’s selling. Clever tactic, that.”

I held the queen’s gaze, but she was resolute. Eventually, I gave in.

“If I may, how would I have escaped, if I’d done so?” I said. “The only way out was through a locked door, and I can’t pick a lock to save my life.”

Resting her quill on the table, Kaedesa said, “We shall see.”

She rose from the table, and I was quick to join her.

“You’ve given me much to think on, child, and most of it was unexpected,” she said. “I’m afraid that my answer to your grandfather’s question will have to wait a while longer.”

Noting the change in her tone, I bowed to her.

“I am at Her Majesty’s disposal,” I said.

Nodding, Kaedesa gestured for her attendant.

“Have a room prepared for our new guests,” she said, “and find out who put them in a cell last night. I need to have a word with them.”

With a bow and a ‘Yes, Your Majesty’, the attendant scurried away, and Kaedesa turned her attention on me.

“You realize that if you won’t admit how you escaped last night, I’ll have to double the guard on you,” she said.

“As you should know that I’ll do my damndest to reach my people while there’s still breath in my body,” I said.

With a smile, Kaedesa said, “We have an agreement, then.”

She extended a hand, and firmly grasping her wrist, I shook it. When I released her, Kaedesa rested her fingers on Shadowsteal’s hilt.

“You were eyeing this throughout our conversation,” she said. “Would you like to take it up once more? Once we’re done here, it’ll go into my collection.”

With a dry mouth, I said, “You’d let me do that?”

"I don't see why not. Yes, right now, you're my prisoner, but that's a loose status, and if you are from the Audish royal line, unbelievable as that is, I should foster a good relationship between us," Kaedesa said. "Besides, I have this if you try anything."

She waggled her tube into view, and I struggled to control what was swelling in me.

"I would very much like to hold it," I said. "Thank you for allowing it, Your Majesty."

"Of course."

Kaedesa waved at the table, and breathless, I reached for Shadowsteal. When I wrapped my hand around its hilt, Bright appeared center stage with Dim cowering behind it.

"Feel the whole," it said.

I wasn't sure what it was talking about, but something *was* different. It thrummed through the air, something so powerful...

Tensing, I staggered backward as a mote of light sped for me, but with its light fading, it only sunk into my body, leaving no physical sensation behind to mark its loss. More appeared—from the grass, from the queen, from the guards coming around the terrace—and as I absorbed them, the thrum around me grew stronger, falling into a beat.

I tilted my head back, shivering at the harmony running through me. This was the epitome of peace.

"Not the pistols!" Kaedesa shouted.

Snapping my head down, I barely stepped out of the way of a blade, swinging for my neck. In slow motion, the guard who'd chopped at me recovered, but I casually stepped around her, placing my hand on her chest. White light flared from me, and the guard flew toward the opposite terrace, buckling it on impact.

And all the while, motes of light... of Ele flowed my way.

The other guards converged on my position, but they couldn't touch me. I danced among them while they moved at a snail's pace. With a beat pulsing inside, I disarmed or otherwise incapacitated them all, although something within me refused to kill them.

Once only groaning bodies surrounded me, I examined my perfectly accomplished task with satisfaction, flicking Shadowsteal in rhythmic circles around my body.

Gods, this blade had been well-crafted. Feel how perfectly balanced it was!

"Raimie."

Spinning toward Dim, I both rejoiced and recoiled at the sight of the splinter's hunched state.

“The forgetful one’s still pointing a weapon at you,” it croaked.

The forgetful one? Who-?

No, wait. Someone with a weapon. Kaedesa!

Dropping Shadowsteal, I tripped over a downed guard in my haste to retreat, scuttling backward once I’d hit the ground.

“I- I- I- I-” I stammered.

What the hell had I revealed to the woman who held my life in her hands?

“I’m guessing that’s never happened before,” Kaedesa said, rather mildly.

When I nodded, she retrieved her quill and journal.

“Subject displays special abilities when using a unique blade. Perhaps I should give more credence to his claim. The Audish royals were known for their proficiency in combat, after all,” she said before snapping her journal closed. “You certainly made quick work of my guards.”

Oh... shit.

“I’m so sorry, Your Majesty,” I said. “I don’t know what came over-”

“Oh, stop,” Kaedesa interrupted. “I expected something like this might happen.”

Offering me a hand, she hauled me to my feet while releasing a piercing whistle. As another group of guards came into view, she brushed her skirt off.

“Well, this was fun,” she said. “I look forward to our next meeting.”

Turning to the guards, she said, “Take my guest to his room. He’s to be treated with respect, but while you escort him, keep in mind what you see here.”

Without a word, the guards surrounded me, and Kaedesa smiled.

“Until next time.”

Then, I was led away, completely frazzled by the last half hour.

TTS Chapter Fifty-Three

Revision #2

Created 22 August 2024 04:25:45 by FatalisticFable

Updated 27 March 2026 02:52:23 by FatalisticFable