

Chapter 71: Second Meeting

Raimie

Bored, I sprawled on neatly trimmed grass while waiting for Alouin. Humming to myself, I ignored the keening that was ever present here, no matter how difficult that was proving to be, because I didn't need a reminder of what was hanging at the sky's apex.

At least one good thing would come of dying. I could finally learn why Alouin had taken such an interest in me. I was pretty sure it had something to do with the gray mist that I'd made twice before: once at Allanovian's tear and once my first time here. I still didn't know what it was besides powerful and draining to create, but that mystery should be resolved any minute now.

Any minute...

Sighing, I shifted in place. Satisfying as solving one of the puzzles that had plagued my life would be, I was miffed that I'd be leaving so many others behind. I'd never know why certain people and places had been inexplicably familiar to me or understand the whole 'Balancer' business. That one had been particularly annoying because Dim and Bright, who'd obviously known what it meant, wouldn't share that meaning with me.

Gods, Bright...

With a wince, I rubbed my eyes.

How had Teron killed a splinter? Given what I knew about them, that should be impossible, right?

I chose to focus on that rather than the throbbing ache inside of me, caused by a being I'd both feared and despised just a few months ago.

"Another essence here? Ships, I really need to look at the sequences that guard this place."

Shooting my head up, I scrambled to my feet when I saw Alouin brushing himself off. His clothes had changed since the last time we'd met, which only made sense, but this was more than a simple change in outfit. A shiny tunic and trouser combination clung to his body while strips at the clothing's seams had colored lights bouncing in them. I gaped at this impossibility while Alouin straightened.

"It's not enough that I'm constantly fixing disasters in my chosen iterations, is it?" he said. "I have to deal with you essences too..."

When his eyes landed on me, the god froze, becoming a statue.

“Um. Hello?” I said with a wave. “I’m back.”

As motion embedded itself in Alouin again, he lifted his hands as if to strangle the air with a frustrated cry.

“You were supposed to find a tear so we could talk,” he shouted. “Not get yourself killed again!”

Rolling my eyes, I rested my hands on my hips.

“I tried that. You took your sweet time with answering me,” I said. “And I can’t help it that my enemies are... were so much more powerful than me. It was inevitable that one would catch up with me. Could you just explain-?”

“More... powerful?” Alouin sputtered. “Kid, are you not with Rhylix yet? He should be teaching you about the primal forces by now.”

Frowning, I said, “He was. How do you know about Rhy? He’s-”

How had Rhylix attracted Alouin’s attention?

“Is it because he’s an Ele primeancer, like me?”

“A primeancer. Like you,” Alouin said. “Ha!”

Striding forward, he snatched my wrist, and while his eyes unfocused, his fingers danced in the air. Biting my lip, I resisted the urge to shudder.

With a gasp, Alouin released his hold, turning wide eyes on me, and if I hadn’t known better, I’d say he looked rattled.

“Ah,” Alouin said, swallowing hard. “He’s made a friend. That’s unusual.”

Wait a minute.

“Do... do you and Rhy know one another?” I squeaked.

Shaking himself, Alouin chuckled.

“You could say that,” he said before focusing on me. “Next time you see him, tell him to get his ass moving with your training. He’s taking too long.”

With difficulty, I closed my flapping mouth, licking my lips.

“How do you know Rhylix?” I shakily asked.

And why hadn't my friend said anything about this? I understood the need to keep things to oneself, but this was big.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" Alouin said with a teasing grin. "Now, what are we going to do with you?"

While he stroked his chin, I struggled to remember what I'd been planning on asking him. I wasn't sure why this secret of Rhylix's had shaken me so badly. No matter how much it might pain me, my enigmatic friend didn't matter anymore. How could he when I was dead?

So.

"You could tell me what you couldn't the last time I was here," I said. "We have plenty of time, right? I'm not going anywhere."

With his eyes twinkling, Alouin asked, "Why would you think that?"

"Because I'm dead," I said. "Where else would I go? Unless... is there another place where essences go?"

Lifting his eyes to the heavens, Alouin shook his head.

"Kid, if all essences ended up here, do you think this place would be so empty?" he asked.

That was a good question. If essences went elsewhere, though, why had I ended up here?

"You say you're dead, huh?" Alouin said while circling me. "Well. We'll just have to fix that, won't we?"

He smirked at the look on my face.

"What-?" I started before a finger was smashed into my lips.

"Hush, kid. I'm thinking," Alouin said while his other fingers started twitching. "Damn. You haven't given me much to work with this time. Teron's blade could have slipped when he slit your throat, but that scenario doesn't fit with your Teron's skill set. It could cause dissonance down the line, but the cost is low, and I have so little left to give."

As he glanced up at the sky, his fingers stopped moving.

"The next time you see me, I may seem different. If the past is any indication, I'll be more erratic, less patient, and most definitely irritable. You'll probably think I'm insane. I assure you. I won't be."

With his face set into grim lines, he placed a finger on my forehead.

"Please, be patient with me. Remind me there's hope."

Realizing what was about to happen, I reached for Alouin.

“Wait! What about my explanat-?”

Alouin nudged me into the space between realities.

“Come on, Raimie. Tell me I didn’t sink a ship and swim all this way for you to die on me.”

Was- was that... Rhylix? He’d sounded...

Ugh. Why was it so hard to think?

Something jostled my shoulder, and groaning, I cracked open my gummed-together eyelids, only to raise a hand so I could shield them. Had the sun always been this bright?

“Ohthankthegods.”

With my eyes adjusted, I dropped my hand into... sand. And the sky wasn’t swaying above me.

Holy shit. Was I on dry land?

“Are you ok?”

Hovering above me, Rhylix’s face looked so pinched, and seeing the worry on him, I remembered what had happened.

“Hello to you too,” I croaked.

But then, I sluggishly sat up before brushing my fingers along my neck. Other than some stickiness, there was no evidence that my throat had been slit...

How long had it been since Teron had attacked the fleet? And where was everyone else?

“We need to get out of here,” Rhylix said.

Ignoring him, I glanced around, trying to figure out where I was. Not far from us, the sea lapped at the shore, and opposite that, the ground rose in a gradual incline until it met with the cliffs cradling it. These craggy heights, covered in vines, sat close enough to one another that the beach was cast in shadows, and along the top of them, a brilliantly green forest ran to the point where the cliffs and beach met.

Listening to the waves crashing against rock, I could do nothing more than blink at this place. It was... beautiful.

Clambering to his feet, Rhylix brushed sand off of himself, before offering me a hand, which I dumbly stared at. Even knowing what was afflicting me, I couldn’t shake the fog swimming through my mind.

“What happened?” I managed. “How did we end up here? I- I died...”

Scanning the forest around us, Rhylix hauled me to my feet.

“We’ll have time for explanations once we’re somewhere safe,” he said.

He started walking, but I refused to follow, still caught in the morning’s chaos.

“No! This is important!” I said. “I... I met with Alouin again, and he knew who you are, Rhy! He said you needed to hurry with training me. That you’re taking too long. How do you know a god?”

With a brittle smile, Rhylix said, “I thought you didn’t believe in gods.”

“Rhylix!”

Shifting his eyes to me, Rhylix sighed.

“In case you’ve missed it, we’re in Auden now, and this place is more dangerous than you can imagine, full of people who are as strong, if not stronger, than Teron,” he said. “Before we have this conversation, I’d like your army around us or at the very least, to be armed. Can you wait that long?”

He... was right, damnit.

“Ok,” I said, “but we will have it, yes?”

Shaking his head, Rhylix started his climb up the beach again.

“If you haven’t reconsidered by then,” he said. “Follow me. Quiet as you can, please.”

Reaching the forest was a punishing endeavor. For the first bit, sand made our footing unstable, and then, the beach’s incline became difficult to traverse. By the time we reached the forest’s eaves, I was sweating and out of breath. Rhylix, on the other hand, looked like he’d barely expended any effort to get here, which was frustrating.

As he led us along the cliff’s edge, I examined the forest beside us. It was different from the one I’d grown up in, more vibrantly colored and with far different plant life in it. Perhaps it was a jungle, like what clogged most of the Southern Kingdoms.

Whatever it was, if anything besides a forest, it was interesting. Something about it... I couldn’t say why, but something about it was off-putting. Hopefully, we wouldn’t venture into it. Actually...

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“I’m looking for a good vantage point. We won’t know which direction to take until we know where the fleet has weighed anchor. Hopefully, if we get high enough, we can spot it,” Rhylix said. “Try to keep quiet. We don’t want to attract anything.”

Attract what?

Even curious as I was, I kept my mouth shut until we reached the cliff's edge. Below us, the sea sent sprays of water flying into the air, and as in Sev, a need to flee surged through me when I saw water for as far as the eye could see. Rhylix quelled this fear, pulling me down with him until we were flat on our bellies.

Cupping a hand over his eyes, he chewed on his lip while scanning the horizon. This took so long that eventually, I couldn't keep my questions buried, even with Rhylix's warning to stay silent.

"How long was I out?" I asked.

"Not long," Rhylix said before clicking his tongue. "I don't... damn. The current must have carried us further than I thought."

"And... how did I get from a ship's hold into the sea?"

Lowering his hand, Rhylix glared at me.

"Are you trying to draw a band of Kiraak to us?" he hissed.

Kiraak? What was that supposed to be?

"No...?" I drawled.

Huffing, Rhylix turned back to the sea, but after a few more heartbeats, he made a disgruntled noise.

"I don't see it, even with eagle eyes," he said. "We should keep moving. Hopefully, we'll spy the fleet further along."

Once we were on our feet, we moved away from the cliff's edge and toward the safety of the forest.

"In answer to your question, I used some fancy magic to break a hole in the ship's hull. Seemed the fastest way to get rid of Teron," Rhylix said. "Once the sea sucked us into its embrace, I surfaced further from the fleet than I expected, so I swam us to the closest beach instead of making my way back to it."

Glancing over his shoulder, he smirked, and I covered a snort with a raised hand. Of course he'd be proud of destroying a ship.

As we continued along, I sighed. This was nice. Alone with my friend, away from my responsibilities, and at our destination, I let myself relax. Sure, we should find the others, for safety if nothing else, but I'd enjoy this moment of peace while I could. Who knew when I'd get another of them?

Revision #1

Created 25 August 2024 18:54:49 by FatalisticFable

Updated 29 August 2025 18:29:44 by FatalisticFable