

Chapter 73: Fixing a Rip in Reality

Raimie

Swallowing hard, I stared at the broken tear in front of me.

“Wow,” I said with a dry mouth. “Ok. Bright? Dim? You two plan on being helpful?”

My splinters were swaying in place with Ele and Daevetch fragments blipping off of the tear to absorb into them.

“Hello?” I said, snapping my fingers in their faces. “Anyone there?”

At their lack of response, I sighed. I hated to do this to them, but they weren't exactly giving me a choice.

“Order and Chaos, I require your focus,” I commanded.

Between blinks, the two turned their gazes on me, although their bodies still faced the tear, but something wild and feral lurked behind those usually friendly eyes.

“I'm sorry that I had to force the issue, but I need to know if you'll be able to watch my back or not,” I said.

They seemed to hear me this time. Softening, they fully turned toward me.

“We'll always watch your back, Raimie,” Bright said.

“Why do you need someone to do that now?” Dim asked.

“That tear is very broken. It needs a quick fix before it gets any worse,” I said. “I can't close it because not only did I tell the Qenans that I wouldn't, but I made a promise to you two as well. The only other way I know to manipulate that terrifying break in our world is to... touch it, and I'd prefer it if someone makes sure that nothing attacks me while I'm distracted.”

“I don't know...” Bright said.

Slowly, they turned back to the tear, gazing longingly at the distortion in reality's plane, until Dim flicked their shoulder. Then, they hissed at their counterpart.

"We can withstand our wholes' pull long enough to keep you safe," Dim said, "but try not to take too long? We probably can't give you more than a few minutes."

With a wry grin, I said, "I can promise that. Touching those things is never pleasant."

"Then, good luck," Dim said.

That would have to be good enough.

With a nod to them, I advanced on the misbehaving tear, swallowing my rising terror the closer I came to it. Trying to prepare for what I knew was coming.

Gods, this was a bad idea. This was a bad idea. This was a *bad idea!*

But it must be done.

Once I was within reach, I extended a hand toward the black center, and it yawed open, swallowing me whole.

I flailed, unsurprised when I hit an utter lack of anything. The clamor of chattering voices on all sides plunged into me, and for a moment, I forgot why I should fear them or why I'd sought out this particular tear, allowing the stream of information to rush through my head without truly listening to it.

For I was floating in the space between realities, and it FELT LIKE HOME. More so than the homestead from when I was young, more than the palace or Ren's presence. It was the comforting caress of those rare moments when I could relax in the fullness of Nylion's presence or the long-departed relief that had once been found in mama's embrace.

Familiarity, I'd have expected. I'd been here four time before: once at Allanovian's tear, once after the incident in the Withriingalm, once in Daira, and once after Teron's ambush. But HOME? This sense of comfort was unexpected and utterly foreign, although... shouldn't I have expected it? I was sure that I'd experienced this before: the irrational desire to kick off my shoes, unbutton my jacket, and rest in this weightless float.

Unfortunately, life never seemed to like accommodating my desires. The incomprehensible babble of voices running through my head screamed for my attention, blaring so loudly that a fire spread across my mind, and while I was glad they hadn't coalesced yet, their discombobulated state still HURT.

Wiping at my ears, I hoped I wasn't bleeding from them, like had happened before, but my fingers did come away sticky. Best to get this over with, before my mind melted or the voices became one.

“Why are the tears in my reality going haywire?” I asked. “How do I stop them from spreading? That’s what the Qenan tear is doing, isn’t it? Uncontrollably spreading? How far will it go? To the ends of the earth? My world’s primary driver for our economy shouldn’t be what destroys us.”

The voices went silent, and I floated alone. What had happened? Had I scared them off, and if so, how? That seemed like a useful skill to-

I dropped into a familiar world of blue and green, but something was off. Something was different.

Trees. A thick canopy blocked my view of the sky, including the miniature painting of the Eternal War fixed at its summit. The mind-bending part of this change, however, was the lack of trunks anywhere in sight. Branches and leaves rustled in an unfelt breeze, high overhead, but no solid, wooden supports impaled this perfectly cropped grass.

The only thing that disturbed this endless spread of green was a man who was huddled in a ball, gently rocking and crooning to himself.

“Hello?” I called. “Do you need help?”

The man... no. The god was on his feet in an instant, advancing on me like a storm cloud. Alouin’s loose-fitting, phosphorescent trousers and shirt fluttered in his wake with light bouncing off of their shiny surfaces, and he lifted his hands like he was strangling the air.

“Why would I need help do I look helpless who are you what are you doing here.”

Those words had flowed from him in a monotone flood, coming so fast that I could barely parse between the individual questions. When Alouin strode so close to me that I could feel his body heat, I stepped back.

“Why won’t you answer me have I become so intimidating wait remember the last time you finished your turn and you were allowed to leave that awful place you’re talking in stream of consciousness again they don’t do that on the outside they use inflections and pauses and-”

Alouin took a long, deep breath.

“My apologies,” he slowly said, enunciating every syllable. “Let’s try this again. Who are you, and how did you get here?”

For a few heartbeats, I could do nothing more than stare at Alouin. What in the *void* was going on?

“We’ve met before,” I said. “I know you’ve been busy in other realities, fixing problems, but I thought I’d made an impression on you the last few times I was here.”

“Is *that* what I’ve been up to for the last millennia how interesting but I don’t know you.”

Alouin cleared his throat, twitching.

“Sorry. A thousand years with only my internal monologue as a distraction has gotten me out of practice with conversations,” he said. “I don’t remember you. Why and how are you in my safe space?”

“I came looking for a solution to the malfunctioning tears in my world,” I said.

That questions had seemed like the safest one to answer first. Something had obviously happened since I’d last saw Alouin, something that had turned him a little... unstable. The last time I’d seen him, he’d warned me that it would happen, but that warning hadn’t prepared me for standing so close to an all-powerful being who seemed to have come unhinged.

“Which iteration are you from?”

Alouin snatched my hand while his fingers twitched in the air.

“Ah,” he said with his eyes clearing. “The breakdowns are my fault, but you can hardly blame me. I’ve only recently pieced enough of myself together to remember who I am. Getting to tear maintenance is next on the agenda. It’s not my fault!”

Seemingly finished with me, Alouin poked me *hard*, but I only sprang back upright once that pressure had been released, a little tempted to smack him.

“That’s... you’re supposed to go!” Alouin breathed. “Who *are* you?”

While he swiveled his head between his finger and me, I clicked my tongue.

“My name’s Raimie,” I said. “It seems you *have* forgotten me. How is that possible?”

And why the hell would I find that so surprising, given how much of my own past I’d temporarily forgotten?

“You’re the one who’s invading my privacy,” Alouin snapped. “Answer my questions and maybe I’ll answer yours.”

“I already answered...”

Sighing, I cradled my forehead.

Maybe if I repeated the circumstances that had captured Alouin’s attention so many years ago, it would jog his memory, but when I looked for the clash at the sky’s summit, only leaves greeted me. Without a direct view of it, the Eternal War’s pull was diminished to near non-existence, such that I could barely pick out its location from behind a screen of tree limbs.

If I couldn’t use a visual depiction, I could try what Alouin had made me do during our first meeting: forcing Ele and Daevetch to merge into something... other. The exhaustion I’d accrue while doing that would be incapacitating, and I’d have to rely on both Alouin to kick me back home and on my soldiers to find me later, if I was to reach safety. I’d be trusting in predicted behaviors, something I

hated doing, but right now, a demonstration of my supposedly fascinating ability might be easier than explaining everything to him.

I'd called Ele and Daevetch to separate hands, concentrating on bringing them together, when a fist to my face knocked me off of my feet.

"None of that!" Alouin shouted.

With his hands balled into fists, he stood over me.

"I've had quite enough of those assholes recently, thanks very much."

Dropping to his knees with one leg on either side of my waist, he lowered his face until our noses were almost touching. All I could see were his blue eyes, dancing with carefully controlled violence.

"No primal energy allowed," Alouin whispered with a manic giggle.

Humming, he rose while his fingers stroked the air until he'd found what he wanted. Then, they froze in place.

"Bye-bye, anomalous one," he giggled, planting a finger on my forehead.

"Wait!" I shouted. "You said to remind you there's—"

Revision #1

Created 9 November 2024 19:08:37 by FatalisticFable

Updated 29 August 2025 18:29:45 by FatalisticFable