

Chapter 88: Day of Leisure

Raimie

Again, Nessaira attacked me with her tiny crossbow, so intent on the fight that she ended up aiming at her students, and I gritted my teeth, only moving a fraction of an inch so that the bolt wouldn't puncture my throat. It embedded in my shoulder instead, and in a flash, I ripped what I could of the projectile free, sending Ele to circle the wound and keep it from bleeding. I tried not to think about the metal tip that I'd left in my muscle.

When Nessaira laughed, I realized that perhaps her aim hadn't been as distracted as I'd thought. She'd forced me to take the hit to make an opening in my flesh.

Daevetch tendrils leapt across the distance between her hand and my wound, one after the other in an endless parade, and I nimbly dodged them all until she growled, sweeping forward with her sword raised.

My leg was aching. I wouldn't last long against a Daevetch empowered opponent, so instead of standing my ground against her, I ran away.

Nessaira, who'd always been an uninspired warrior, didn't take advantage of the room's abundant shadows to shade meld in front of me or use Daevetch creatively at all, in fact. Instead, she chased me on her own two feet.

As I approached the wall, I hoped that I'd mastered the attraction skill that Rhylix had been teaching me over the last month. Since I'd become king, few moments had come along where we were together, unoccupied with another task, and without observers nearby, but when those rare times came, messengers and aids knew to look for me and Rhylix in the palace's training yard, the sole place where we could spar or practice primeancy techniques.

How many times had I left those sessions exhausted and frustrated? The skills Rhylix had been trying to impart, including the one I'd soon use, were often ones that I'd mastered as a child, but my proficiency with them had failed to return with my memories. While I'd managed to occasionally resonate with the wholes again, like I had against Teron years ago, I'd lost count of how many times I'd stared at the ceiling, wishing for my feet to stick to an impossible height. They never had, hence why I'd asked Rhylix for help.

Perhaps our training would soon come to fruition.

Calling to the Ele in the obsidian ahead of me, I willed it to bind to my feet, hoping to put some distance between me and Nessaira, but before I could finish that task, I ground to a halt, halfway through a step, and tipping, I fell to the side with my lungs stunned on hitting the ground. When had Nessaira snuck Daevetch into my shoulder wound?

“Sorry, Raimie. I could not warn you in time,” Nylion said. “She is too fast.”

Leaning against a wall where he’d been watching the fight, he uncrossed his arms and ankles, wrinkling his nose.

“Do you think she will-?”

Nessaira stepped between me and the crowd, wiggling her fingers, and I twitched and spasmed, a puppet at the end of her strings.

“Oh... that is *annoying*,” Nylion grunted.

And humiliating. At least she hadn’t used the pain node of her Vice, though. Given a moment of respite, I could escape from her with ease.

“See here why Daevetch shall always be superior to Ele,” Nessaira said. “Once allowed into the body, our dark energy can control anyone, even a king, and if they dare try to escape...”

She curled her fingers. White-hot fire sparked in every part of me, inside and out, unraveling my delicate work to destroy her Vice’s nodes. As Nylion collapsed into a heap by the wall, a rough scream drowned out Nessaira’s lecture, and a pink film fell over my vision. Before red could completely blind me, I watched Rhylix lead his Ele students into the room, stopping short on seeing me on the floor, and my pain paled when compared to what this display might do to our audience.

Forget the surgical approach and conserving Ele. Students on both sides of the primeancy line couldn’t see me defeated. Not like this. If this demonstration ended with me pinned in place, unable to writhe from the agony scouring me clean, the Daevetch students would use my defeat to justify using overt power to solve their problems. Meanwhile, fear of the dark energy would breed among the Ele students.

Despite pain’s nipping attempts to distract me and Nylion’s sobs, tearing at my heart, I reached for Bright, yanking a vast swathe of Ele to me. Tranquility and calm washed my body free of Daevetch’s corruption. A sparking, red mist cleared, and even though I was still twitching from the cessation of such an overload, I managed to direct an Ele spike into Nessaira’s turned face. The thread wiggled through her eye socket and to the base of her skull, and I promptly sent her to sleep.

Rhylix started running to me, but I shouted at him—

“NO!”

—sending him stumbling to a halt.

“I nghh-” I moaned with my jaw unintentionally clenching. “I can nghh-”

I panted on my side, waiting. Watching Nylion gather himself. With a fierce shake of his body, he crawled to me, sitting at my head, until we held our body’s strings once more. Accepting Nylion’s help, I climbed to my feet, and only then did I let Rhylix come to me. While my friend looked me over, quickly focusing on my shoulder wound, I cleared my throat.

“Daevetch has its uses,” I said, addressing the students. “It has more practical applications in combat, allows instantaneous travel across the globe, and can easily hold an enemy captive. In every way, it seems superior to Ele. But!”

I held up a finger.

“One should never underestimate an Ele primeancer. What matters in a battle between primeancers, you see, isn’t which primal force holds dominion or what each primeancer can accomplish. What matters is you.”

I swept my finger over the students.

“Your resourcefulness, your ingenuity, your internal abilities—not what Ele and Daevetch give you—will determine the fight.”

With that, I turned my back on the crowd, and gradually, the students started chattering, a mumble tinged with incredulity and grudging respect. I let my friend finish his work on my shoulder, but then, Nylion, Rhylix, and I trudged to stand over Nessaira with my other half quietly hissing, and after waking her, I offered her a hand to her feet, tightly clenching it before she could let go.

“Don’t EVER do that to me again,” I said.

Her face fell, and when I released her hand, she hugged herself.

“I’m sorry, Your Majesty, but my students needed to see a victory. They’re the ones who are most hunted in Auden, more so than those of Ele, because of Doldimar’s legacy. I wanted to show them that we can protect ourselves, that we can be safe. I wanted to...”

Trailing off, Nessaira winced.

“I wanted to win,” she whispered. “I don’t know what came over me.”

Rhylix and I exchanged a glance.

“How much Daevetch have you been using recently?” the Eselan asked.

“More than normal,” Nessaira said, flicking her eyes to Rhylix and away. “The kids... they need an adult to forge the way for them. I’ve been using Daevetch to an abnormal degree, trying to show them that it isn’t wrong for them to be what they are.”

Chewing on my lip, I glanced at the Daevetch students. Not many were standing in that corner. While on her tour of Auden, Ring had found six who'd agreed to attend a school for primeancy, but of them, one had disappeared on her way to Elisk.

Of the five who'd safely arrived, the oldest was Tejesper, who said he was fourteen, and the rest clung to him, looking for protection. Everyone in that group was motley, despondent, and withdrawn. One of the girls had even developed a nervous tic, a condition that had only facilitated her status as 'a crazy primeancer', and the others presented a visage of guarded vulnerability to the world, flinching from raised voices and unexpected motion. They reminded me of Nylion.

So, I understood why Nessaira seemed so careworn.

"I know you're doing what you must to care for your charges," Rhylix said, "but you need to take care of yourself too. Daevetch primeancers are considered unstable for a reason. Use too much dark energy, and you *will* go insane."

"Earning these kids' trust without your primeancy will be difficult, but we need you able in body and mind to teach them. Ease up on your usage," I finished for my friend.

I was curious whether Nessaira would take what I'd said as a suggestion or a command.

Rhylix's kindness toward Nessaira surprised me. Supposedly, the very sight of Daevetch and its primeancers revolted my friend, one of the reasons that Nylion continued to be so wary of a second encounter with him. My friend must truly believe in my vision, considering how far he'd gone to accommodate this woman.

"Thank you. I'll keep your advice in mind," Nessaira said. "In the meantime, you might want to return your students to their spire. The way they're looking at my kids makes me uneasy."

Making a face, Rhylix said, "You're probably right. Always a pleasure, Nessaira."

He bowed before calling for his Ele students to follow him home.

"I dislike that man," Nessaira said once he was gone, "but you made an excellent choice with him, Your Majesty. He's right. I used a *Vice* on you, for Alouin's sake! I'll stop using my primeancy for a time."

"Probably for the best," I said. "Is there anything else I should show your students? Shade melding? If you want, I could make a stair out of the wall."

"I appreciate the sentiment, but no, Your Majesty. You've spent enough of your day of leisure on us," Nessaira said. "Go see your wife. I'm sure she's eagerly waiting for your return."

"I doubt it," Nylion said. "She has been rather busy with her own projects lately."

Fixing him with a stare, I gave a small shake of my head.

"In that case, I'll take my leave," I said.

Nessaira bowed, and in a fit of mischief, I shade melded home, leaving Pointer behind. I stepped out of the shadows and into the dark. Thick satin and velvet smothered me, and I swam through fabric until I emerged, gasping, into empty air.

"This is not where you meant to go, is it?" Nylion asked.

"What do you think?" I said under my breath.

Where was I, though? Illuminating the area with Ele, I irritably huffed on viewing navy-blue uniforms folded on one side of the space while gowns hung on the other. Gods, Ren hated those things, but the proper appearance of a queen must be maintained, especially when she faced an ever-present hatred, simply for her heritage.

The uniforms, the dresses, the heels, the boots. I'd overshot. Again. Pushing the wardrobe's doors open, I tumbled to the floor, springing to my feet on landing.

"You here, love?" I called.

Once beside our bed, I unbuttoned and loosened my jacket's collar, listening for any sound, but no answer was returned to me.

Humming, I stepped around the bed to a spacious, curved wall. Drawing its curtains to the side, I squinted at sunlight's sudden appearance before strolling onto the balcony outside.

Not in bed, not out here, and I'd seen no sign of her in the rest of our small suite. Where was she?

Behind me, paper flapped in the breeze, and I turned to the garden table that the noise had come from. Wilting foliage was draped over a flowerpot's rim, one that was pinning a folded sheaf to the table. A largely lettered 'My Love' was scrawled in Ren's handwriting above a wax seal, and sighing, I retrieved it. While Nylion settled into a chair on the other side of the table, I flopped into the other one, breaking the seal.

NylRaimie,

I've gone to see Chela. The healer thought she felt something during my last visit, so she's increased their frequency. Knowing Chela, I may be with her for the rest of the afternoon. I know you probably wanted to spend your day of leisure with me, but these visits are important, and we'll always have tonight.

Besides, when was the last time you had time alone, to be used in whatever fashion you desire? Try to have fun, and for the sake of all that's holy, DO NOT research Doldimar's possible hiding spots this afternoon. Your wife begs you to indulge yourself for once.

-Ren

P.S. I want both of you at once tonight. Shall we try again?

I lowered the paper with a groan while Nylion clicked his tongue. *One time*, I'd shared with Ren the fate of the Enforcer who'd killed her brother. I'd meant it as a kindness, so that she would know justice and vengeance had been served, but she'd only absorbed one fact from the story: that Nylion and I had shared our body for a brief spell.

Ever since then, she'd badgered us to once more attempt that wondrous experience. How many times had I told my wife that we didn't know how we'd managed it the handful of times that we had? Ren couldn't wrap her mind around the fact that what we'd done had been totally and completely instinctual, mind separate from action.

Plus, I didn't think she knew what she was asking of us. Attempting to merge Nylion while being intimate with her *in any way* made my skin crawl, and Nylion always cringed from the idea as well. Withstanding her touch without first recoiling *still* took everything we had.

But Ren had stayed with us. Despite the mess we were, she'd stayed.

"She is incorrigible," Nylion said, lifting his face with closed eyes to the Sun.

"We love her anyway," I murmured.

"Yes, we do."

Leaning my head against the glass behind me, I closed my eyes, wondering how long I had before Pointer came looking for me.

Poor man. He'd assumed the worst bodyguard rotation of the year: the week of the liberation's anniversary. Only four years had passed since Doldimar had vanished, and the Audish people had begun to celebrate this time of year with gusto, forgetting their fear. It made me sick, not out of disgust for them but with dread. How could they not see this period of lulling for the trap that it was?

The members of the Hand dreaded this week. Their charge was at his most petulant, his most likely to slip free of their watch. Oswin had laughingly told me that Little, the one originally assigned the duty this year, had bargained two months of bodyguard rotation away to get Pointer to switch with him, a testament to his reluctance. Since he'd lost his target after the investiture ceremony, Little had taken his diligence to previously unseen extremes, even more so than after the events at Qena.

Too bad for him. Now that Ren and I were 'officially' married, I'd mellowed. I was actually looking forward to the Anniversary Ball in two days' time. Then again, my excitement probably had more to do with the announcement that Ren and I planned to make that night than anything else.

I wondered if Auntie would come. Kaedesa had recently returned to Auden for a short, two-month sojourn, but I knew Ada'ir inundated its queen with balls when she was home. She probably wouldn't want to attend another one while she was here.

If she failed to make an appearance, I'd personally share the announcement at a later date, which might be better for everyone involved. I'd love to see the look on Auntie's face, not to mention Dath's, when I gave her the news.

The ball wasn't for a couple of days, though, and in the meantime, I needed something to occupy my time.

"What to do, what to do?" I yawned, lazily drumming my fingers on the table.

"We could go exploring," Nylion said. "Scurrying about Daira's districts was our favorite pastime as a kid. Now, we have the world at our fingertips."

"That sounds nice, Nyl, but perhaps a nap first," I said. "Gods, how old does that make me sound?"

"We are almost twenty-four. While not old, it is also not eighteen," Nylion said. "Besides, you are running a kingdom, heart of my heart, and since you refuse to appoint sufficient ministers to help you with governance, the task runs you ragged. So, yes. A quick nap might be in order."

All that answered him was my quiet snoring, and softly chuckling, he reached across the table to run his hand through our hair. Then, he vanished.

Revision #1

Created 7 September 2025 01:49:46 by FatalisticFable

Updated 7 September 2025 02:03:14 by FatalisticFable