

Chapter 97: That Was Close

Rhylix

When I woke up surrounded by Ele, all I could do was lie still and stunned.

“Huh,” I grunted.

“What a total fuck up, Gaelen.”

I shot upright, but it wasn't because of the man speaking to me. I searched for and found the never-ending Daevetch landscape, separated from me by a thinning, gray line. When I sprang to my feet, meaning to sprint to the border, Alouin caught my shoulder.

“He's not there.”

Sucking in a breath, I shrugged Alouin's hand off of me, and in a fugue, I paced, twining my fingers in my hair.

“What do I do?” I gasped. “What do I *do*?”

Losing control of my legs, I painfully landed on my back with the breath knocked from me.

“Ships, you're annoying sometimes.”

Alouin's twitching fingers gave me a clue about how I'd ended up on the ground.

Shaking his head, he continued, “You do nothing, silly man. I do everything. Again. I swear. Your iteration drains more from me than the sum of the others. Get your shit together, Gaelen.”

Galen...?

“What's wrong with you?” I snapped. “You should know better than to manipulate me with your strange magic, and my name hasn't been Gaelen in ages. It's Rhylix now.”

Stopping with his annoying habit of playing with the air, Alouin coldly stared at me.

“Do you want my help or not?” he asked.

I wanted to stay. I wanted to be free of this curse, as I might be with this change, but the world...

And Raimie...

"Please," I hissed. "If you can... if it's possible for you to take a side in this miserable war, please help me."

Alouin nodded with his fingers caressing the air once more before kneeling at my side. He moved to poke my forehead but paused midway to touching me.

"Can I ask," he said with a troubled expression crossing his face, "who's your friend? He came here once. Insisted that we'd met. I'm afraid I lost my temper and pushed him away before he could explain, though."

Only one friend had ever made the slightest mention of meeting Alouin.

"Who, Raimie?" I said. "What do you want to know about him?"

"Raimie."

Alouin said the name like he was chewing on it, trying it out for size, before focusing on me once more.

"He's a... What do you call it in your iteration?"

"A primeancer?" I asked.

Because what else from my world could interest this unfathomable being?

"Yes, thank you. That. Of which primal force?" Alouin asked.

"...Both," I said, now utterly confused.

I didn't believe in gods, never had, but over the millennia, Alouin had shaken that conviction. I couldn't fully commit to calling him a *god*, but he *was* immensely powerful and could always answer my many questions. Shouldn't he know that Ramie was a dual primeancer?

"I thought I felt both energies in him after reviewing that visit," Alouin said, as if to himself.

When he fell silent, I barely held my own tongue, itching to get going. I needed to have control of my feet and *go home*.

"When I stabilized the tears after my release, I noticed there were two fewer in your iteration," Alouin soon continued. "Your friend's doing?"

If I could, I would have cocked my head.

"Over the course of our journey together, Raimie has closed tears, yes," I said.

Alouin fell still with his eyes so wide that I was afraid they might fall out of their sockets.

"Finally," he breathed. "Hope."

He smiled, but it wasn't a pleasant one that might warm the people who saw it. It was cold, calculating, triumphant, and on seeing it, I suddenly wanted to be nowhere near this being. Wishing I could fidget, I cleared my throat.

"If you can get me back to the physical plane, could you *please* just do it?" I asked. "I have time-sensitive issues to address there."

The spell that had frozen Alouin shattered, and his smile softened. It was the first time he'd looked like himself throughout this strange encounter.

"Yes, of course," he said. "Thank you, Rhylix!"

He pressed his finger to my brow, and white light blinded me.

A shaky gasp broke the stillness of my old laboratory. Gingerly, I sat up, wincing at the tugging ache in my chest, and when I removed my hand from my breastbone, it came away sticky, making me groan. Over my heart, blood was soaking my tunic and ever-trusty cloak, front and back. At least the fabric's saturated state could hide its torn rents. For now.

"Oh, thank the whole!" Creation said in a rush. "I thought the war was lost."

The splinter was kneeling beside me, and at the sound of their voice, I jerked away from them, grunting at the wash of pain that followed the sudden movement.

"Creation," I said once the twinge had passed. "Where've you been?"

"Busy," the splinter snapped. "Not busy enough to miss the wrench across the iterations when Arivor *stabbed* you, nor to feel you completely cut from the whole. To feel when you died in truth. How are you alive? Your death should have ended this cycle, albeit in the enemy's favor for once, but ended it nonetheless."

"Alouin helped," I said.

I was still unclear about why or even how that being had helped, but for now, I wasn't going to question it, not when I had somewhere to be.

Groaning, I delicately climbed to my feet. Creation was silent while I trudged to the door, but then, they snapped in front of me, shoving a shaking finger in my face.

With fear widening their eyes, they whispered, "You *cannot* accept Alouin's help, Eriadren."

"Why not?" I asked, pushing through Creation and moving outside.

Night had fallen, but the glow of a city wrapped in Ele almost fooled me into thinking otherwise. In the dark, light blazed, a glistening beacon that promised comfort and warmth to the weary

traveler. It was beautiful.

I shook myself out of my reverie, realizing that Creation had continued jabbering while the view had distracted me.

“-tip the scales of the war!” they said in a barely contained scream. “You must promise me, Eriadren. Do *not* accept his help.”

Should I ask for a repeat of their explanation? Creation could have unintentionally revealed something important in the jumble they’d unleashed but...

Honestly, I didn’t care right now. My body *ached*, my chest felt like an elephant had stomped on it, and exhaustion was wearing me like a second skin. I was wrung-out and couldn’t be bothered to listen again so...

“An easy promise to make,” I said. “I don’t like accepting his help in the first place.”

Sagging, Creation clung to their knees.

“Thank you.”

I wanly smiled. It truly hadn’t been a hard promise to make.

“Come on, you,” I said. “Let’s find Doldimar. I have a debt to repay.”

The street that my home bordered was empty, but it had been abandoned as I’d approached it as well. Maybe I’d get lucky for once and avoid the Kiraak while on my way to find my old enemy (friend). Where could he have gone in this city we’d both once called home?

Then again, why should I worry about stumbling across one of Doldimar’s minions right now? After what had happened, I doubted I’d need to worry about them for a time. I could probably meander my way through a crowd of them without comment now that Doldimar thought I was dead.

As I strolled toward the markets, I hummed to myself, enjoying the imagined look on Doldimar’s face when I shoved a sword through *his* heart. A blank slate of black hung above my head with the stars drowned out by the city’s light.

My city. Maybe in the next cycle, I’d find time to lead my fellow Esela here, guiding them in the old ways. I could show them...

Having arrived at the closest marketplace, I screeched to a stop, both in stride and mind. Where before Kiraak had crowded this square, now it was deserted. Fearful of what I’d discover, I cast my senses in all directions, as far as they’d go, searching for any sign of Daevetch, and came up empty.

“Where are they?”

I rounded on Creation with my stomach plummeting.

“How long was I out?”

“If they’re not here, you know exactly where they’ve gone,” Creation said, “and you weren’t dead for long. Maybe half a day? I lost track after panic set in.”

“Damn it!”

The invitation here, the presentation of my father; it had all been a ruse. To kill me, yes, but more importantly, to get me out of the way. Away from the city that I’d, in part, protected with my very presence for the last year and a half. Elisk.

Gods, Raimie and Ren! I’d left without saying a word. Auden had enjoyed peace for four years, long enough to believe that said peace might be permanent. They’d never see the attack coming.

“I have to get back,” I moaned.

But the task’s futility was already slashing through my heart.

“You’ll never make it in time,” Creation said, echoing my budding despair.

I ignored the splinter—easy after years of practice—and fled a city of memories, careening into the night like a bullet of light aimed for Auden’s heart.

Revision #1

Created 1 December 2025 20:07:54 by FatalisticFable

Updated 1 December 2025 20:13:51 by FatalisticFable