

Interlude 2.6: The Beginning

Eriadren

As I watched a woman weep over her murdered daughter, my sword was heavy in my hand. I let its tip fall into the dirt, and she spun, becoming fury incarnate as she stalked toward me. She screamed and cursed, soon bending down to pinch my blade. Resting it on her chest, she fiercely grinned at me.

"I told you. You shouldn't have done something you'll regret."

She thrust herself onto my sword, and life fled from her, but as it did, her skin and clothing flaked away, revealing the figure of white light beneath. As it stepped free of my blade, another guise oozed over its body, and I stared at a copy of myself while the wound in his chest knit together.

"Now, you're ours," he said.

Gasping, I shot upright, half-aware of the cold sweat covering me, and with a shiver, I rubbed my arms.

"Eri?" Lirilith sleepily said. "What's the mat-?"

A frantic noise, coming from below, interrupted her. Who could be knocking at this hour of the morning? Whoever it was, they couldn't have brought anything good with them.

As I got out of bed, I pointed at Lirilith.

"Stay here. I can handle this," I said. "You have more than yourself to worry about now."

Paling, Lirilith glanced at her abdomen.

"Ok," she said.

As I threw on clothing, my best knife went into my trousers' waistband, and snatching my sword from its corner, I raced downstairs. Once at the door, I eased it open, hiding my weapon behind it.

Arivor was on the other side.

As always, I sought out the bandaging on his cheek, but it wasn't there tonight, which displayed his burns for the world to see. Frowning, I was wondering why he'd do such a thing when he snapped

his fingers in my face.

"Let us in," he hissed. "They're coming."

Automatically, I flung the door open, ushering Arivor and- and Rafe—*fuck*—inside.

"What's going on?" I asked.

Nervously, Arivor glanced at his son, and I saw how badly Rafe was shaking. Crouching, I touched his elbow, and when he focused, I squeezed it.

"Hey, buddy," I said. "You ok?"

Swallowing hard, Rafe said, "I'm scared, Uncle Eri. Angry men came to our home, looking for me..."

As he went distant, my stomach dropped. This was it, what I'd been afraid of for months. Why hadn't Arivor gotten his family out of the city like I'd told him to do? *Why* had he thought he could make changes in the Council before something like this happened?

I couldn't say any of that, not to Rafe. Never to Arivor.

"You're safe here," I said before pausing.

I wasn't sure how to comfort the boy. Fortunately, Lirilith saved me, as usual.

"Why don't you come with me?" she said. "I should have some cookies in the kitchen."

Rafe barked a shaky laugh.

"That sounds good, Aunt Lirilith," he said.

Once they'd gone, I turned on Arivor to demand an explanation, but his drawn demeanor—by the stars, my stomach clenched on seeing that look—almost had me pausing.

Even still, I had to know.

"Well?" I said.

Rubbing his eyes, Arivor said, "Goons from the Council came to our estate, demanding Rafe. I had Clariss stall while getting him out and..."

He shuffled in place, and I suppressed a grin, knowing why he was uncomfortable.

"And you came to me because with my history, I might know a secret way out of the city," I said.

Ducking his head, Arivor said, "Yes. I'm sorry, Eri, but I didn't know what else to-"

"I have a way out," I said.

When he looked up at me, I stuck my tongue out.

"Of course I have a way to escape this city. I'm not some pampered noble," I said with a smirk.

But then, I turned serious.

"You were right to come here."

Frowning, Arivor drawled, "So...?"

I grimaced.

"You won't like it," I said. "My bolt hole starts in my shed."

Recoiling from me, Arivor said, "But that's where-"

"I'm perfectly aware of where *it* is," I interrupted. "This is *my* home."

Arivor and I still weren't sure what Alouin had made in my shed. After the fire, Lirilith and I had rebuilt the rickety place so we could hide that wretched, black pinhole, but the sense of unease it gave off had us believing that it *wasn't good*.

"You'd be exposed for thirty seconds, tops," I said. "The entrance is in the shed's corner while the exit's in my mother's home. You remember her?"

With a fond smile, Arivor said, "How could I forget such a gracious lady?"

Somehow, I hid how much his words had warmed me. Since graduation, I hadn't interacted with my mother, for her own safety, and I missed her dearly.

"She'll get you out of the city," I said. "She can also get letters back in, although I'd limit that as much as you can. We can work out next steps once you and Rafe are safe."

Shivering, Arivor nodded.

"Ok," he said before shaking his arms out. "Ok."

He looked determined now, which was heartening. Over the next few days, he'd need a great deal of fortitude, something he hadn't been showing before.

Lunging for me, Arivor dragged me into a hug.

"Thank you, Eri," he said. "You have no idea-"

Pounding on the door interrupted him, jerking us apart with a fearful glance exchanged.

"Open up!" someone shouted outside. "By decree of the Council, we have leave to search any home for our fugitive. If you can hear me, you have thirty seconds to open this door before we

break it down."

"Fucking *damn* it," Arivor muttered.

Giving him an incredulous look, I shoved him toward the kitchen.

"Less cursing, more running," I said.

He spared me the most cursory of glares before taking off, and I turned to my task: stalling.

"All right, all right. I'm coming!" I called. "Hold on!"

Meanwhile, I was ruffling my hair into more of a mess while rumpling my tunic.

"Citizen, if you don't let us in, we are authorized to arrest you for obstructing our search," the same voice shouted, sounding much more annoyed.

"Yes, I understand! By the stars," I said, louder now. "I hope *you* understand how much of a hellion my wife can be if you wake her up before she's ready."

A snort had me looking over my shoulder. Leaning out of the kitchen, Lirilith signaled the all clear, retreating once I'd nodded.

"Journeyman Healer Eriadren, this is your last—"

Oh, so they did know whose home this was. Good to know.

Yanking the door open, I poured as much disdain as possible onto the squad of city guardsmen on the other side.

"What the *fuck* do you want?" I snapped.

One of them—their captain, I presumed—waved at the air as if swatting at a bug.

"Step aside," he said.

Crossing my arms, I said, "No. Not until someone tells me what's—"

With a click of his tongue, the captain shoved his way past me with his subordinates filing in after him. The last guard inside pinned me to the wall with a look of delight on his face.

Hell. What had I ever done to him?

When one of the guards ducked into the kitchen, a piercing shriek sounded, followed by a thunk. The guard hurried back out, chased by a host of utensils and plates, and I snorted. Trust my wife to create a distraction from nothing.

This went on for a while before the captain herded a wriggling, hissing Lirilith toward me. When he tossed her my way, the guard pinning me backed off, giving me barely enough time to steady her stumble.

"Control your woman," the captain snarled.

Somehow, I kept from laughing at the scratch marks on his face, nodding instead. Once he was gone, I squeezed Lirilith, perfectly aware of our guard's scrutiny.

"Are you hurt?" I asked.

Grimacing, Lirilith said, "Manhandled but fine."

She looked me over.

"From the way they're tearing through our home, I'm surprised they've let you keep your clothes on," she sarcastically said. "Who knows? Maybe you're somehow hiding what they want under there."

'Keep your clothes'. One of our many codes, used to ask if someone was armed during the war. Considering I was still holding my sword, Lirilith must be asking about hidden weapons.

"Even if they take my clothes, I doubt they'll want my underpants," I said before cupping my mouth. "They don't seem like the type to enjoy that sort of thing."

Our guard growled a warning, but we ignored him.

Smirking at me, Lirilith said, "Well, that's good. I don't have much on under this shift. If they took it, they wouldn't get much of a strip tease."

Got it. If this became a fight, I was in charge of protecting us until Lirilith got her hands on a weapon.

For a while, I held her with both of us flinching whenever something made of glass broke, but eventually, the captain rejoined us, looking like a cat who'd caught the canary, and the first bit of a crack spliced into my world.

"Our work's done here," he said. "Time to get back."

Nodding, our guard relaxed, but I wasn't paying attention to him.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

Turning gleeful eyes on me, the captain smiled.

"Your bolt hole wasn't as well hidden as you must have thought, Journeyman Healer," he said. "We found our fugitives in there as well as several *interesting* items. In fact, now that I think about it,

you should probably join us for this evening's proceedings."

He nodded at our guard, and that man grabbed me while the captain took my sword. I wanted to fight them, but Lirilith was standing right there. As they pulled me out of our home, she turned wide eyes on me.

"Rastchaka, Eri," she said.

Rastchaka, the last battle of the war. Where Arivor and I had infiltrated the enemy's ranks on a suicide mission. Where Lirilith had led the cavalry charge that had eventually saved our lives.

She wanted to repeat that travesty.

Ok. That might work but... but she had no backup this time. She'd be alone in a sea of hostiles, and our home's door was closing with her behind it, planning to do something stupid.

Now, I struggled against the guard's hold.

"No!" I shouted. "Lirilith, *no*. You have to stay-"

But the door had closed, and the crack in my world spread a little further.

TTS Interlude 2.6

Revision #3

Created 21 August 2024 19:36:40 by FatalisticFable

Updated 26 March 2026 02:17:22 by FatalisticFable