

Interlude 4: The Fall

King Eledis of Auden

18th of Seventh, 3484

My fears have proven true. The peace is over. My son is dead.

1st of Ninth, 3485

Thirteen months, an entire year, of juggling my secret with resisting Doldimar's sniping attacks. That's how long Nebailie gave me before sharing my lack of a splinter with the ministers. Two months passed until the cowardly lot had the palace guard arrest me and what's left of my family. I can hardly blame them for those decisions, especially not my brother. For weeks, Nebailie has been dropping hints of what was to come, like the alms he's so fond of dispensing to the poor.

I'm almost grateful that it's come to this. No more struggling with my inability to wield Ele. No more hiding.

At the same time, I want to throttle my jailors because they've trapped me in a prison cell with only my angry wife, my terrified heir, and my grief for company. For not only have I spent fifteen months fighting Doldimar, but I've also been fleeing the inescapable image that's burned into my brain. The one where I opened a box that contained my son's piecemeal body.

Now, I have nowhere to run.

I'm so proud of that brilliant boy. I'll never know how he kept his evil, son of a bitch captor appeased for five years, but he gave us time to prepare, although after the last year of war, I know that no amount of preparation would have been enough.

The sad saps who are currently discussing my family's fate have no idea. If they think they can resist evil's embodiment better than I have, then they're welcome to try. I only wish they'd make up their minds more quickly about what to do with us.

I know what's delaying them. The ministers want to publicly execute the three of us, but Nebailie has constantly argued against corporal punishment like that. I doubt he'd back down from that conviction when it comes to the brother he once loved, and he controls Auden's military. The ministers can't afford to anger him.

As an added surprise, my family has gained an ally in the Eselan diplomat. Alouin knows why he's been pleading for us to keep our lives. I've shown him nothing but contempt when he's visited in

the past.

Supposedly, he's sided with us at his seer wife, Drena's, bidding. The woman must have provided a compelling reason for keeping us alive because we've been waiting in this cell for three days, and still, they argue.

I just want to know if my deception has damned us. My gloriously gorgeous wife. My fantastically intelligent heir...

It seems that I'm about to find out. I can hear the tramp of guards' boots on the prison stairs. Whatever fate awaits us, I thank you, my longtime companion, for being the best of listeners. Hopefully, I can write again soon.

Enjoy it while it lasts, old man.

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