

Chapter Seventeen: Goodbye to New And Old Friends - Part One

A hand shaking Evan's shoulder woke him.

His mind adjusted to his surroundings, fighting off the weariness of sleep. His eyes felt bruised and puffy as he looked up to see Sam standing over him.

"Time to get going, buddy," Sam said quietly.

Through the dim lamp light, Evan saw James standing across the room, strapping on his sword belt. A black sky showed through the window slats.

Evan rose and sat on the edge of the bed, nodding to Sam. "Aye," Evan rasped, finding it hard to speak. The sheets felt cold and wet where his hand lay, and he realised he had sweated in the night.

"You okay?" Sam asked, still watching him. "We tried waking you earlier but you wouldn't budge. Figured we'd give you a few more minutes."

Evan rubbed the sleep from his eyes. "We are ready to go?" he asked, deflecting Sam's question.

Sam said, "Ready when you are. Best to be on our way before the sun clears the horizon. There'll be fewer eyes watching us that way."

Evan nodded again. A deep sadness was upon him. Thinking about Reisa and the others, particularly that night in Moon Bay, always drew him into a disturbed melancholy. He began pulling on his long boots, attempting to focus his thoughts on the present.

"Sam," James said. "I have a question, about what you said last night. If my father could wield the power of all the Gynen Crystals, why didn't he use it when he came to rescue me from Doon? In the... Dalgredda Valley attack. Or just use one or two of the crystals during the fight?"

Sam turned to him, standing in the centre of the room. "The power of the Gynen Crystals is not something Hayden would have wanted to use in front of his enemies. I don't even think he ever intended on using them, for anything. He likely would have wanted them kept hidden, away from anyone's use."

Evan did not need his gift-which was not active right then anyway-to see that James had gathered a lot of questions during the night.

"And so Doon and the Dark Sorcerer are still looking for me," James said thoughtfully.

"Once we determine what Jaxx's plans are for the Riondon Iron Forge, we can focus on tracking down Hayden and getting you on track with a fresh start to your life."

James nodded, looking away with a troubled expression.

Evan slung his father's sword over him and collected the sceptre from against the wall. There was no discernible power coming from the sceptre, but he was still not comfortable possessing it, remembering how disturbed Tabetha had been from what she had sensed from it. He strapped it to a loop on his leather belt, the wider end hanging down.

A feeling within told him to look up. His gift was present.

Sam held a cloud of dark blue mist over him, steadily shifting calmly. Evan had to admire Sam's strong will and determination that showed in his aura, although he found the dark saturation somewhat troubling. Darker shades were never a good thing, he had come to realise. James's glow was the usual purple with shimmers of pale green. His guard was up, and he was scared. Or uncertain. It was a subtle art, Evan had found, to determination exactly what the shades and textures of the colours really meant, and while he had mostly tried to ignore his ability, he had learned a few things over the years.

Evan turned away from them, finding it difficult enough to fight off a throbbing headache, let alone concentrate on the intricate ramifications of a person's Glow. He wished he could shut off the colours when he wanted. Or at least have some control over when they showed.

"Looks like that's everything," Sam said, making his way to the door. He had a new satchel slung over him. This one was a grey fabric with three main compartments in successively smaller sizes. A gift from Tabetha, Evan guessed.

"Sam, your shoulder," Evan said, remembering.

"Not a problem," Sam said, tapping his injured shoulder. "I gave it a look over this morning, and cast another healing touch over it. It just needs time to heal properly now. I also gave James a quick clean up too."

"A brief touch will only do for a short while," Evan said. "It relieves the current pain but does not heal the source of the injury. What we all need is a focused, deep cleanse, if we are to go ahead with our best strength."

Sam nodded. "That would be best, for sure. But that'll fatigue the healer too much. I don't know about you, but that kind of magic would exhaust me for days. I'd rather we all run at less than maximum than have one of us out of the fight completely."

"Very well," Evan said. He was impressed that Sam had managed to give both himself and James another heal, after only a few hours sleep. The Voarn had sorcery running through their blood, and it did not take as much of a toll on the body as it did for a human, or lesser race. The Oneron must surely be an admirable race.

"My worry is that trouble always seems to find us," Evan said.

"Our path should be clear to Riondon," Sam said. "I know, we don't always have the best of luck. But I don't anticipate us getting into any fights any time soon. Unless we run into Red Guards."

"And if that huntsman from earlier decides he cannot live without me?" Evan asked, giving Sam a hard look.

"He doesn't concern me. We gave him a good scare. And we'll be gone from town in no time."

Evan wasn't so sure, but left it there.

They followed Sam out of the room, into the quiet corridor. Floorboards creaked in the quiet air as they made their way down the stairs.

There was movement coming from the kitchen when they entered the main room. Tabettha stood over the counter, wrapping a fist-sized parcel with a thin paper. Several more wrapped parcels lay on the counter. She wore shorts and a loose, flowing blouse. Reisa had also been fond of shorts, Evan noted, frowning.

"Morning, fellas," she said.

"No, it's night still," Sam said to her sternly. "Tabs, you didn't have to see us out. It's early, you should be—"

"Now, Sam," Tabettha cut in, matching his tone. "You say what you like about what I should have done, but, what I've done is done, and it's no use in arguing now." She stepped to him and rubbed a hand on his cheek, slapping it lightly. "Here, give me that." Before Sam could protest, she unslung his new satchel, and laughed when the strap jerked his head down and flapped his ear. She placed the bag on the counter and shoved in three bottles of water, and then began filling it with the parcels.

"Just some things for the road," Tabettha said, "we have mallidae, some old posshi—not mine, from the market—and hirrilon squares. Oh." She grabbed a plastic container from the counter, and had to press it down into the bulging bag to keep it from spilling out. "And some more vapino's for your sweet teeth."

Sam sighed, stifling a laugh. "That's enough, Tabs. You've done enough. If we pick up anything else on our travels we'll have to stop and have a big feast before fitting anything else in here." He laid a hand on the satchel in her hands, positioning himself close to her. She looked up into his eyes. Her tense movements stopped and she relaxed as a smile formed.

"I just want you all to have enough. Leave me alone," she added in a low, somewhat embarrassed voice, and elbowed him away. She almost seemed teary-eyed.

A cool wind blew in from the kitchen window. The early morning air had yet to warm. This made Evan realise he was not wearing his short-cape, and his heart quickened.

He said to them, "I have forgotten something in the room. I will not be a moment."

Not waiting for a response, he left them and went back up the stairs. The corridor was quiet and carried a heady aroma that seemed to linger all over the house. Likely a result of the flowers from Tabetha's work stall.

Back in the room, Evan immediately saw his green cape draped over a chair in the corner. The silence of the room was a welcome release. Away from people, and their thoughts and auras and questioning looks. He took his time clasping his cape on, studying himself in a tall mirror.

His hair was a mess of wavy curls that fluffed out around his long ears, a far cry from the combed, neat appearance he had managed to regain after his shower yesterday. His green tunic was faded with smudges of dirt and mud. The short-sleeved shirt he wore underneath appeared more grey than cream, now, and his boots were scratched and dulled, no longer a gleaming silver. His mother would never have let him leave the castle looking like this.

He asked himself who he was. He was a warrior. A soldier. A prince. Loved and guided by the parents who were no longer with him. And yet, he was no one. A lost soul on a far-off planet, hoping he was on the right path. He told himself that one day he would recognise the person in the mirror again. Noting his sunken cheeks and the dark patches under his eyes, he scowled at his reflection and turned away, leaving the room.

Tabetha waited for him at the bottom of the stairs.