

Episode 3: Extracurriculars

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Looking out the window over his desk, Will could see the winds of autumn stirring fallen leaves across the courtyard. Students in the blue and red of Prismari passed by, laughing and chatting, sipping on hot drinks. When his eyes finally drifted back to the *Ethics of Aetheric Manipulation* assignment, the questions had yet to complete themselves. He sighed and picked up his pencil again just as the door to his dorm room creaked open. Rowan came in, her hair windblown and disordered, smiling about who-knew-what.



Explosive Welcome | Art by: Mathias Kollros

“Hey,” said Will, already annoyed.

“Oh! Hey.”

“Where have you been?”

“With Auvernine and Plink,” Rowan responded, her smile departing.

“Your Witherbloom friends?”

“That’s right.” She crossed the room to their closet and dug through it. They shared that closet, of course, but Rowan’s half was little better than a bird’s nest of assorted garments.

Will stood up from his desk. “Already finished your *Ethics of Aetheric Manipulation* assignment?”

“Yep,” said Rowan, tossing out bits and pieces of her winter uniform.

“And you’re ready for the end of the week? They say Professor Onyx’s exams are notoriously difficult.”

Rowan fiddled with a buckle. “Her what?”

“The exam. You know, the one that’s in two days?”

“Oh. Right.”

Will threw his hands up. “Rowan, you’re not taking any of this seriously! It’s a privilege for us to be here. Don’t you get that?”

She whirled on him, anger clear in her eyes. “Oh, you think I’m just too dumb to understand the *grand significance* of all this, is that it?”

“Rowan, I didn’t say—”

“I think there are plenty of lecturers at Strixhaven without you joining them!”

It wasn’t the words or the sudden, surprising anger that made Will step back—it was the coils of electricity jumping between loose strands of hair on his sister’s face.

“Rowan,” was all he could manage.

He watched her cycle past anger, to confusion, then embarrassment. She scrunched up her features and the sparks faded into nothing.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

“I’m fine,” she said bitterly. Before he could say another word, she grabbed the cloak of her winter uniform and stormed out the door.

Two days later, he was no closer to completing Professor Onyx’s assignment, despite moving from his room to one of the communal study areas of the Biblioplex. Will slumped down in his chair, kneading his palms into his eyes. “If someone would just turn me into a newt or something it would probably save us all a lot of trouble.”

Across the table, Quint looked up from his own reading, his hands folded around a cup of tea, his long snout sniffing with delight at the rising steam. “Is it about the aetheric tether?”

Will nodded weakly. “I hate aether. I hate tethers. I hate the whole idea.”

“Tricky concept,” agreed Quint. “Have you tried consulting Il-Samar’s—”

Will only raised the book he was reading so his friend could see the title.

“*Treatise on Corporeal Manipulation* . Hm.”

“Thanks for trying,” said Will.

“Well, I’m sure something will come to you,” said Quint cheerily.

For a while, the only sound between them was the flipping of pages and the occasional sipping of tea. “Oh my,” Quint said, after some time had passed. “This is—wait, I’ve seen this before.” He grabbed another book, flipping until he found the page he wanted, and traced a line of text, comparing the two tomes in front of him. “I knew it! Arthelas the Magnificent and Bairod Horizon-Seeker were the *same person* .”

Will nodded absently, still stuck on Professor Onyx’s unsolvable riddle.

Quint let out a breathless laugh. “There’s just no mistaking this arcane sigil! This is astounding—it means the histories of the Kingdoms Below have to be rewritten from scratch, or at the very least reordered to account for—oops!”

Will jumped as Quint’s tea sloshed from his cup and landed on the books in front of him, splashing across the ancient vellum. His eyes went wide. “What are we going to—? Isabough will have us in Detention Bog for a month!”

“Not if she doesn’t see it.” Quint set down his teacup next to the stained pages.

“You can’t lift it,” Will said. “It’ll take the ink with it.”

“True, but if I call like to like—”

Quint’s finger began to glow. He dipped it in his teacup, then touched it to the book. The spilled tea began to rise, small droplets floating from the page to fall back into Quint’s cup. He looked up with a grin. “It’s one of the spells we use to help us find scattered pieces during our digs.”

Quint took another sip of his collected tea as Will chuckled and ran a hand over the pages, finding them smooth and dry to the touch. “Impressive.”

Quint only shrugged. “There’s always a spell.”

Rowan looked around the Bow’s End from the table she shared with Auvernine and Plink. She had been meeting the Witherbloom witches there after classes for a week now, and it was quickly becoming one of her favorite places on the campus. She took a sip of the fizzing potion, pleased with the sharp fruity taste.

“Did you hear about the duel yesterday? Dinsley’s exam construct was destroyed,” Plink said around a bite of food. “That Silverquill mage might as well have just set him on fire. Would have hurt less.”

“Not if she did it right,” said Rowan, grinning.

“I don’t understand why they can’t just wait until the Mage Tower match. Prismari, Silverquill—they can blast each other as much as they want, then. All these duels are just pointless posturing,” said Auvernine.

The other girls laughed and agreed, but Rowan’s smile slipped. A duel sounded like just the thing to blow off some steam. Ever since the deans had broken up the duel she and Will had stumbled into on their first day at Strixhaven, she’d been itching for another chance to let loose. That had been the only worthwhile part of coming here so far—well, that and her friends from Witherbloom. Will, of course, seemed to be having the time of his life.

As if she’d summoned him herself, Will walked through the door. He scanned the room until he met her gaze, then made a beeline for the table. Rowan sighed and slumped over her potion. “Oh, great.”

“What?” Plink looked up just as Will made it to the table. “Oh, it’s your brother! Hello, Will.”

Will nodded to her before turning to Rowan. “Professor Onyx posted the exam scores.”

Rowan shrugged. “And?”

“You barely passed, Rowan,” Will said, his voice hard. “I thought you said you didn’t need any help.”

“I passed, didn’t I?” Rowan shook her head. “Not that it’s any of your business.”

"We had weeks to prepare." Will frowned. "You should know this stuff by now. And I could have helped you with the rest, if you hadn't been so busy running around with your friends. Do they even know about how your powers—"

"Outside. Now," said Rowan, interrupting him.

Will shot a glance at the Witherbloom witches, then turned on his heels and stalked toward the door. When she caught up with him, Rowan grabbed her brother's arm. "Where do you get off embarrassing me like that?"

"So they don't know about your magic sparking up any time you get angry." Will shook his head. "Rowan, we're here to learn *better* control of our powers, not to get worse! And we're definitely not here to just have fun. We're Kenriths! That still means something here."

"Actually, Will, it doesn't," said Rowan. "Nobody here's even *heard* of Eldraine. I'm not here to represent anybody or anything but myself!"

Will scoffed. "And you say you don't want to be like our birth mother."

Rowan's eyes turned flinty, hard. "What did you say?"

Will could feel the hair on his arms stand up as an electric charge coursed through the air around him. "Calm down," he said carefully. "I didn't mean—"

Rowan took a step toward her brother. "No, Will. Say it again. Tell me how I'm like our mother."

The door of the Bow's End opened, and Auvernine and Plink rushed toward them with wide grins. "We figured out the conversion! We're going to Widdershins to get supplies."

Rowan glanced at them and plastered a friendly smile on her face. "Wait up. I'll come with you."

The Witherbloom witches nodded and fell into a frantic exchange as they headed off. When they were out of earshot, Rowan turned back to Will, the smile gone. "Leave me alone, Will. You can't tell me what to do."

Will grimaced. "I—"

Before he could finish, Rowan pushed past him and went to catch up with her friends.

Despite sharing a room, he barely saw Rowan after that. Every day, by the time Will woke, his sister would already be gone, out to do whatever it was she did besides study. By the time the much-anticipated Mage Tower match between the Prismari and Silverquill teams came along, he hadn't spoken to her in weeks. As the players rushed across the field, whipping the elements into one another's paths, Will found himself wondering how she was doing.

Next to him, Quint gasped and jumped up in his seat. "Unreal! Wickel's using the fourth earth-concept out there, in the middle of all that chaos! He's making it look *easy*!"

Will watched along with Quint as the Prismari player shifted great mounds of dirt and grass in circular formations, shoving them in the way of opponents and intercepting spells. Downfield, a Silverquill player suddenly turned and leapt into the air, an arc of black flame propelling her upward as she caught the floating mascot for her team, a blob-like, shapeshifting inkling. Cheers erupted in the stands around them. Will turned to Quint. "What about that one?"

Quint frowned. "I'm not sure. Maybe a variation on Arnault's Combustion?"

Across the field, another wave of Silverquill spells sent the crowd into a frenzy. Memories of the duel they had witnessed on their first day floated through Will's mind, with thoughts of Rowan inevitably

trailing behind them. He'd heard that she'd gotten into a few duels around campus since their fight at Bow's End.

Suddenly, Quint grew tense next to him, leaning forward in his seat.

"No"—Quint sat up even straighter, his eyes glued to the field—"no way is that going to work."

Will followed his gaze to where a Prismari player barreled toward the opposite team, charging right at the player holding the mascot.

All the crowd watched as the Prismari player threw out a hand wreathed in a circle of crimson light. The inkling began to glow, a halo of red light appearing over its shifting black head. Suddenly, it leaned over and sunk two long liquid fangs into the Silverquill player's hand.

"Ow!" she yelped, dropping the inkling—just in time for the Prismari player to scoop it up.

The entire arena exploded in cheers.



Team Pennant | Art by: Anna Fehr

"Mascot interception! Brilliant!" Quint grabbed Will and wrapped him in a hug as they both cheered with the rest of the crowd.

"So he hypnotized it?" said Will, delighted but confused.

"He took control of it altogether. It's a simple trick, you understand—only works on summoned creatures—but wow!"

Will turned, looking at the students and professors and even some villagers in the stands. He took in their excitement, a smile crossing his face—but it wilted as he spotted Rowan across the aisle, staring directly at him.

"Let's get out of here," said Rowan.

"But the game isn't ov—"

Plink grunted as Auvernine elbowed her into silence. She nodded toward the other side of the aisle, and Plink followed her gaze. “Oh.”

“You should at least say hello,” said Auvernine.

“Oh, should I?”

Plink patted her arm. “He’s your brother. That’s not something to take for granted.”

Rowan scowled, but her resolve crumbled under the attention of both her friends. “Fine.”

She sidled past the others seated in her row and stepped into the aisle. A moment later, Will met her there. They both stood there for a moment, awkward, unsure what to say.

“So,” said Will. “How are things?”

“You know,” said Rowan. “Fine.”

“Still hanging out with your Witherbloom friends?” said Will, gesturing behind her.

Rowan’s lip stiffened. “That’s not a problem, is it?”

“No. Maybe you just chose the wrong college, is all.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Well, you clearly have no interest in really learning. And they’re nature mages—it’s not like they’d care that you can’t control your powers.”

“I can control them,” said Rowan, scowling now. “See me, right now, not blasting you with lightning?”

“Oh, so you didn’t brawl enough around campus these last few weeks? Then what exactly have you been doing, because I know ‘studying’ hasn’t made the list!” Will knew better than to needle her like this, but he couldn’t help himself—he was angry at her for shutting him out, for leaving him on his own these last few weeks. “If all you wanted to do was fight, I wish you had just stayed on Kylem!”

He didn’t mean it, but that didn’t matter. He saw, from the strands of hair that began to stand up on Rowan’s head, twitching and crackling with energy, that he had gone too far. “Oh, I’ll show you what I’ve been learning.”

Will felt the spark jump from her outstretched hand and pass through his whole body in an instant. His muscles jerked and seized, and he pitched over sideways, collapsing.

“You wish I’d stayed on Kylem? Well I wish you’d stayed *dead*!” yelled Rowan.

“Hey!” he heard Quint shout, somewhere behind him.

Will could barely move his arms—but he could reach out with his other senses. Rowan gasped as a rime of frost suddenly solidified around her boots, freezing her feet in place.

He muttered under his breath, fog puffing around his face. Rowan extended another hand, crackling with energy, but before she could discharge it, a layer of ice condensed around her fist. She cried out from the sudden cold and pain.

“Stop!”

In an instant, the crowd went silent. Rowan glanced toward the students around them, only to see Auvernine and Plink back away. More students moved, clearing a path as a shadow fell over Will. He squinted as he looked up, meeting Professor Onyx’s gaze.

“All of you will return to your seats,” she said in a commanding voice. “You two, however, are to come with me.”

Will and Rowan followed Professor Onyx through the dark halls of one of the Witherbloom buildings. The shadows here were too deep to make out details, but something organic grew from the joined stone of the hallway, and a scent somewhere between floral and rot surrounded them on all sides.

By all accounts, you didn't want to end up on the wrong side of Professor Onyx. All sorts of horror stories about her passed through the Prismari dorms, and while Will didn't think it was *likely* that they'd end up incubators for some carnivorous undead fungus, he wasn't ready to completely rule it out. Worse, what if they got kicked out?

They followed her into her office. With a gesture, Professor Onyx ignited a few candles, which burned with purple flame. "What was all of that about?"



Professor's Warning | Art by: Kieran Yanner

"Nothing," Rowan said, taking a casual tone. "Just two siblings blowing off steam."

"Last I checked, tossing around bolts of lightning is more than ordinary sibling rivalry," said the professor. She glared at Rowan. "Strife between brother and sister is a special kind of pain. And it takes a special kind of fool to foment it."

Will saw Rowan bristle at the insult. He cleared his throat. "It's my fault. I started the fight."

He felt Rowan's eyes on him but kept his gaze forward.

Professor Onyx looked between them, then shook her head. She sat down in her chair. For a moment, Will could have sworn she looked very tired. "There are those who wish this place—and all who call it home—great harm. If we're fighting amongst ourselves, they'll find that task far easier."

"Professor," said Will. "Who exactly are you talking about?"

She regarded him for a moment, holding him with those violet eyes. "Have you heard of the Oriq?"

"Losers who couldn't pass the entrance exam," said Rowan, before Will could answer. "Or who flunked out. Right?"

Professor Onyx chuckled, but it sounded far from happy to Will. “That’s one way to put it. But underestimating them would be foolish. For all we might think otherwise, Strixhaven doesn’t have a monopoly on power in this plane.”

That made Will sit straight up in his seat. *This plane? Then Professor Onyx is*

But all she did was smile.

Rowan must have missed it. She was still chewing over the comment about the Oriq. “But if they were actually planning some sort of attack, the professors would do something about it. Wouldn’t they?”

“Maybe,” said Professor Onyx. “And maybe not. The question to consider is: what would *you* do about it?”

The fresh air hit Will’s lungs, cold and clear, as he followed Rowan out of the Witherbloom building. His sister was already halfway down the path, headed for the cafe. “Later.”

“What? Didn’t you hear what the professor just said? We have to do something!”

“Like what?” Rowan asked, turning back. “It’s their college. Let them deal with it.”

Will shook his head. “What if that’s not enough? There are only so many professors here, Rowan. And we can’t rely on them to be able to defend us all. There has to be a way that we can protect ourselves—protect the other students.”

“For the last time, Will, this isn’t Eldraine. We’re not royalty here. We can’t just,” she waved her hands, “order problems away!”

“Being royalty didn’t stop us from nearly being killed back home, either.” Will shook his head. “At least here we have the Biblioplex. All that knowledge—there has to be something that will help us. I don’t want to be helpless again.”

Will didn’t miss the shudder that went over Rowan. She squared her shoulders and clenched her jaw. She must have been remembering Oko and their father. Even now, it wasn’t something that either of them could completely forget.

Rowan looked back at him, over her shoulder. “You dig through all the old books you want, Will. I’ll prepare my own way for whatever’s coming.”

Will sighed as Rowan turned on her heels and left. *On my own, then. Again.*

Kasmina sat still among the trees outside campus as her owl showed her a small courtyard just outside the Biblioplex. Below, she could see the Kenrith girl sending forked lightning across the lawn. Nearby, two Witherbloom students watched. One applauded; the other said something she couldn’t make out.

The vision of the courtyard blurred at the edges, fading into a vastly different landscape. Kasmina switched her focus to a different owl. The twins disappeared as shadows and red stone filled her vision instead.

She watched as Lukka stood with a masked Oriq agent. The agent shifted, pulling something from beneath their cloak and holding it out to the planeswalker. Kasmina’s owl turned its head to get a better view.

It was a silver mask, shaped like a human skull.

Lukka shook his head. His face shifted, his skin darkening, and his ears stretching to points as he took on the markings of his fox companion. He watched the Oriq agent leave—then, suddenly, turned to stare right at the owl, causing Kasmina to lean back on reflex.

She sent a mental command to the bird, and it took flight, soaring up and out of the Oriq caves. She'd seen more than enough.

Rowan sat in Auvernine's room, watching absently as the girl poured and stirred a glowing potion at her desk. She was exhausted; she'd been training for weeks, working out the best ways to channel the power that seemed to be flowing through her day and night now. For all that, though, she'd made little progress.

A high screech pulled Rowan from her thoughts. She frowned as Auvernine lifted a squirming worm-like creature from a glass jar. "What is that?"

Auvernine's focus stayed on the creature as she placed it in a metal dish. "Common saltgobbler. Took me an hour to find one this big."

"What are you—"

Rowan's words died as Auvernine began to chant, her hands held over the pest.

The creature went still, its bunches of beady black eyes wide. As Auvernine's voice filled the room, the worm began to rise from the plate, twisting and shivering as glimmering energy rose from its plump body.

Rowan's hand went to her mouth as she watched the creature's life force flow through the air and into her friend's potion. The liquid flared and bubbled, the color fading from a deep purple to a vibrant red. As Auvernine finished the spell, the saltgobbler flopped onto the dish, its body heaving as it struggled to breathe. Rowan grimaced. "That is just creepy."

"A little," Auvernine said with a nod. She picked up her potion and inspected it. "The potion requires more power than I can get from pure herbology. But if I can get it right, this could help a lot of people. Some sacrifices are necessary for the greater good, don't you think?"

Rowan only shrugged, her gaze falling back to the pest. Unpleasant memories of her mother welled to the surface; she willed them right back down. *Sacrifices. Right.*

Rowan found Will in the Biblioplex, surrounded by a pile of tomes and scrolls. Will reached for another book, flipping through its pages as he mumbled under his breath.

"This isn't exactly what I'd call training."

He looked up at her, clearly surprised. After a moment, his attention dropped back to the texts in front of him. "If the Oriq are as dangerous as people say they are, then the spells we know may not be enough," Will said, shaking his head. "We should focus on adding more to our arsenal."

"Or we could find a way to put more power behind what we already have."

But Will only turned another page, his eyes scanning the text.

Ignoring his dismissal, Rowan looked around. Across the room, next to a diligently studying Prismari student, floated a jellyfish-looking creature—an elemental, a construct of enchanted water shot through with glowing veins of pure arcane energy. Rowan swallowed some of the disgust she'd felt at what Auvernine had done. *It's just a spell, like any other.*

“Rowan, what are you doing?” Will asked, finally looking up from his books.

She shushed him; her focus narrowed to the elemental. Electricity crackled and leapt across her fingers as she pulled the veins of power out of its watery surface, toward her. It collapsed, finally, into a puddle on the stone floor. The energy gathered in her palm, sparking and roiling, before suddenly exploding in a burst of lightning that stood her hair on end. The Prismari student nearly fell out of his chair, scooping up his books and glaring back at Rowan as he fled.

“Rowan!” hissed Will. “You can’t just—pull the magic out of whatever you feel like! Besides, we haven’t taken any classes on siphoning theory! You’ll hurt yourself, or somebody else.”

“Will, the Oriq aren’t worried about following syllabi, and they aren’t going to follow campus guidelines,” said Rowan. For the first time in what felt like forever, she was speaking calmly and evenly. “They’re going to do whatever it takes. That means we’ve got to do the same.”

“Having these powers is a responsibility, Rowan. That’s part of what being here is all about. Otherwise we might use them for”—Will struggled to put his fears into words—“for selfish purposes. For dark ones. Didn’t you learn anything from our mother, or from Oko?”

“Yeah,” she shot back. “I learned that when you’re not afraid to break the rules, you can get a whole lot done. Good luck with your books.” She left him there. When a Lorehold librarian came by a few minutes later to ask about the lightning bolt that had briefly illuminated the stacks, Will didn’t have much of an answer.

Kasmina felt her owl land on the top of her staff, but her gaze was fixed on the horizon. A figure appeared at the edge of the courtyard, silhouetted by the light of the setting suns. She recognized the set to his shoulders—the rigid, military way he carried himself. She recognized the fox that stood at his feet, too. “It’s a shame to see a man like you fallen so far. What would your unit think of their former leader becoming a pawn in someone else’s scheme?”

“They wouldn’t think much of it, I imagine,” said Lukka. “Considering half are in the ground and the other half want me dead. Just how long have you and your fake birds been watching me?”

“Long enough to know that this path will only lead to more pain,” Kasmina said. “For you and many others. I’m not going to let you do that, Lukka.” Her voice, in that moment, was neither wise nor benevolent—it was icy cold.

“I’m done being told how to live,” he growled. “And I’m nobody’s pawn. The mages who run this school think they’re better than anyone else—and the whole damn world just nods and goes along with it. I’m going to show them they’re wrong.”

“I had hoped you might yet become an ally. That you could use those gifts of yours for the common good.” Kasmina sighed. “But I see I have overestimated you.”

Before Lukka could respond, Kasmina’s owl shot off her shoulder, launching itself into the air. With a flap of its wings, the air around Lukka’s fox suddenly condensed into a raging sphere. As the wind spun and swirled around the animal, Kasmina sent a scythe of pressurized air straight at Lukka’s chest.

He narrowly ducked under the invisible blade, and it went straight past him, slicing through a stand of trees. Lukka glanced at Mila, his face growing sharper and leaner as he tried to connect with her, but the animalistic features faded almost as soon as they surfaced.

With a slash of her arm, Kasmina sent another blast of wind toward him, this one narrow and pointed like a lance. Lukka rolled to one side, then came up unsheathing his blade.

He charged Kasmina with bestial speed. She brought up her staff just in time to catch the sword on the wooden shaft. Her eyes lit up silver, but before she could unleash another spell, Lukka spun away, snatching his blade free and sending her stumbling forward.

“These dragons,” Lukka said, his voice a growl. “Those Dragonsguard. They’ve held power over these people for too long. They’ve made them fearful of every shadow, every unfamiliar face. What happens when it’s not just the Oriq they’re hunting down—when it’s anyone who practices magic in a way they don’t like?”

Kasmina turned and threw out her hand as Lukka swung again. A wall of blue light went up between them, curving around her. “You can’t see beyond your own pain, Lukka. Do you think Extus is going to change all that? Do you think he’s going to share power with you? He only fights for himself.”

Lukka slammed his weapon against the wall of light, his face contorted with rage. “Frankly? I don’t give a damn what he does after all this is burned to the ground.”



Test of Talents | Art by: Lie Setiawan

She took a step forward, her shield forcing Lukka back. He swung his blade again and again, trying to force his way through with brute strength, until Kasmina flicked her hand. The light shifted, beams of it shooting out and catching Lukka in the stomach. He flew back and landed next to his trapped fox. Before he could get up, Kasmina was there, the point of her staff held just under his chin.

“Yield,” she said. “It’s over.”

Lukka’s snarl burst into a savage laugh. “Over? Oh, no—it’s only beginning.”

Kasmina paused. In the rush of combat, she’d stopped keeping track of her owls. What she saw now, what had crept up to the very outskirts of the school, sent cold shocks through her.

“I didn’t come here to beat you,” said Lukka, grinning. “I’m not dumb enough to believe I could do that yet. But they sure can.”

The ground trembled beneath them. The horizon began to crawl and shift with movement as a swarm of chitinous, chittering forms scurried between the trees. From their segmented bodies rose a sickly purple glow—it was as if the whole forest burned with unnatural fire.

“Mage hunters,” whispered Kasmina. “What have you done?”

“Done? I told you,” Lukka turned his head and spat blood from his mouth. He smiled, baring his stained teeth. “We’re just getting started.”

The mage hunters’ glow was even brighter now as they closed in. Kasmina closed her eyes and concentrated on another plane, another place; a cloud of white feathers whipped over her, and she was gone.

Lukka got to his feet and dusted himself off. Light footsteps approached, and soon Extus stood next to him.

“Are you sure you’re in control?” asked the Oriq leader. “No Oriq has ever tried to control this many at once.”

Lukka nodded. “I’m not like your other mages.”

There was movement behind him: the rest of the Oriq, coming to a stop at the edge of the courtyard. The agents stood ready, waiting for Extus’s command. Extus squared his shoulders and nodded. “Commence the attack.”