

Leloran Anima

Chapter One: Barthes, The Royal City.

Laelen and Kendrion are riding across the plains before the great lake and the royal city of Barthes. Neither of them have been to this part of the world and they are in awe of the large city spread out before them. Barthes has the tallest buildings they have ever seen, and can even port airships right in the middle of the city. Kendrion is looking off of the bluff at the city as the sun begins to rise over the mountains. He looks tired, travel worn and heavy with emotional burden.

Laelen walks up from behind Kendrion, taking a bite from a tough looking strip of bread in her hands.

“Lunch in a real city, Ken. It's about time. Bannock is only good as long as the jam doesn't run out”.

Laelen sniffs at the bread and wrinkles her nose.

“Some fresh malt would be nice” Kendrion replies, still looking forward into the distance. He stands up.

“If we ride smart, we'll get to the gates right on time.” He looks at Laelen, a light returning to his eyes.

“Then let's ride smart.” is her curt reply, as she leads her mount towards the hard packed road.

Kendrion tightens the strap on his scabbard, securing his weapon and armour. He mounts his horse and trots quickly onto Laelen's path.

“Need help getting up today?” Kendrion taunts.

“You'll know it in a minute.” Laelen sings back. Kendrion crosses the path and waits expectantly. Laelen gets her determined face on and hops up. When she successfully mounts, a broad smile forms on her face. Kendrion cocks an eyebrow. As Laelen rides ahead of him, she gleefully says

“Off to the Royal City! I think today will be a good day!” Kendrion still looks unimpressed. When she can no longer see him, Kendrion smiles broadly and shakes his head, amused slightly by her antics.

A long shot, looking into the distance, the Royal City of Barthes spread out ahead, just coming to life with the day.

Kendrion and Laelen have made it to the city and are walking their horses through one of the street of the grand marketplace. Laelen looks bright eyed and interested at all the small things everyone is selling, much to Ken's annoyance.

“Look, Laelen, but if you touch anything so help me...” Ken warns

“Relax a little, everything is just so cute! Look at those little machines! What do you think they do?”

“Cost more money than we have. You want to eat lunch, right?”

“You're a wet blanket, Ken. All this stuff is wonderful! I've never seen anything like it. Have you?”

“I don't need to have seen this stuff before to know that we wouldn't be able to afford it if your clutzy

hands busted something.”

“I'm not touching, I promise!”

Kendrion gives her a sideways glance, sighing under his breath. He pushes forward, secretly hoping the marketplace will end soon so he can stop worrying about trouble. He very much wished the horses would have fit in the back alleys so he could have avoided the marketplace all together.

Ken points up,

“The Palace grounds are up that way. Shall we scout it out before we eat?”

Laelen doesn't look at him, still in wonder about all of the goods on display, “If you insist...”

“I insist.”

Laelen snaps to attention, walking briskly with Kendrion. Her nose slightly in the air.

“It's not necessary to treat me like a kid all the time, Kendrion. Just because I'm excited about all the different things in the world doesn't make me childish. The fact that you aren't makes you a fool. Perhaps you should stop worrying so much about the future and start living your present.”

“If you say so.”

“I do, and I suggest you take it if you want to make it to the meeting with all your limbs.”

Looking from behind we see Kendrion sigh, his body showing his desire to avoid a fight with his companion. Subtly, he slips Laelens arm through his. She doesn't resist, but her face becomes quickly flushed and she can't quite bring herself to look at him.

"Today is going to be a good day." ken recites, a smile coming over his lips. He leads laelen away from the marketplace and towards the stables outside of the Royal quarter.

After leaving their horses, the pair walks up several long flights of stairs, attempting to reach one of the highest points of the city. They reach the top feeling worn out and sweaty, having to haul their gear along with them.

The season is just touching on autumn, and many of the trees in this lush and rich area are just starting to become golden. Here is where the attire of the inhabitants shifts from the simple layered clothing of the businessmen and patrons, to the complicated and lacy patterns of the nobles. Many women are carrying finely adorned parasols, shading their delicate skin from the midday sun, a starch and upright man on her arms. Around the central gardens cadres of women stand about, exchanging pleasantries and exciting news they had heard or read about since they last met.

The tall, spiraling towers in the background settle behind the ornated and gardened town houses of Barthes nobility. A few gardeners can be seen here or there, bustling about their daily chores.

Laelen looks up at the much taller Kendrion with a surprised terror on her face, then quickly glances at her own travel worn battle gear. Kendrion looks back at her and shrugs, indifferent to the nobles beginning to take notice of them. Kendrion is the first to move forward, his posture upright and proud

and his route determined. Laelen quickly shuffles to catch up.

On the opposite end of the wide brick road, a towering, ornate black iron gate stands closed to the rest of the quarter. Two royal guards stand at attention, stiff as statues, two handed swords on their backs. There is a third guard in a small barrack that serves as a post for the entrance.

The guards notice the pair walking towards them immediately. The guard from the barrack comes out briskly, pulling his uniform straight.

"Good afternoon sir, miss. Do you have official business here today?"

Laelen nods briskly, "That we do! We have an appointment with her Highness Princess Aldrenna Telos."

A glimmer in the guard's eye becomes apparent for a brief moment, as if he's found the missing piece of his complex puzzle.

"Of course. Do you have your invitation?"

Laelen reaches into her leather sack and gently pulls out a rolled piece of paper with a velvet ribbon in a golden orange colour. Beneath the ribbon, a complex wax seal is broken, where Kendrion had opened the letter previously. Laelen gently hands it over to the guard, as if it's the most precious item she owns. The guard takes it from her, smiling, and opens it to examine. Kendrion looks a little shifty, almost annoyed.

"We're early," Kendrion says, "We weren't expecting to be greeted, we just wanted to find our way before buying a bite to eat."

"No need," the guard replies, "I have instructions to send everyone for the Princess right through. She's in a bit of rush today..."

One of the statue guards smirks a little at the remark as the invitation gets passed back to Laelen. Laelen and Kendrion stand still.

"Carry on ahead," the guard tells them, "Everything will be taken care of for you, probably even lunch. You will have to leave any weapons here with me."

Laelen and Kendrion quickly hand over their weapons, a quarter staff, broadsword, two daggers and a buckler.

"Royal Ltn Sortei will be your escort to the visiting area, do stick with him."

The three begin walking through the front courtyard and gardens. The gardens are well kept, with beautiful and flamboyant autumn blooms. The area is dotted with fountains, ponds and water elements, reaching high into the air and stretching haphazardly across the grounds. Towering high above the gardens is the tallest of the five glass towers, the home of the Nyphian Royal Family. Both Laelen and Kendrion look up, in a sense of veiled awe. The escort keeps his eyes forward, guiding them towards the entrance.

The visiting area is a small garden alcove just in the wake of the glass tower. Circular in shape, marble benches with plush silk cushions border a grand stone table with a small fountain in the middle. The vines and trees are still in full bloom, and filtered midday sunlight sparkles in the fountain mist. Already in the visiting area is a tall and stern looking Meerin in a smart and slick looking robe with Royal insignia embroidered down the front. A large tome is open before her, but she seems to be less interested in that than the small gear she is fiddling with in her lap.

“The guests of Princess Aldrenna Telos have arrived.” The Royal Lt. Says curtly before turning on his heel and walking back down the garden walk. The Meerin looks up from her gear, her golden green eyes piercingly exotic and curious.

“She can sure pick them.” Her voice come purring out of her throat.

Laelen cocks her head, neither of the two have moved from their introductory spot.”Pardon me?” Laelen asks, genuine questioning in her voice.

“I’m sorry, I speak without thinking first.” The Meerin stands, towering over Laelen, “My name is Symphony. I am ... a friend of Princess Aldrenna Telos.”

“I’m Laelen,” she nods her head, “and this is Kendrion. He doesn't talk much when he first meets someone. He's not being rude, just observant.”

“Thanks, Laelen.” Kendrion venomously replies, his eyes rolling with his intended sarcasm. Symphony smirks a little.

“Not to worry, she's quite courteous in explaining. Kitty... Princess Aldrenna Telos, that is, may not understand his silence like you do.”

“Kitty?” Kendrion says, a tone of mocking almost making it into his voice.

“There are some things to get use to, perhaps, with this job you've been contracted for. If you know anything about Nymphian royalty...”

“I don't.” Kendrion interrupts.

“Well, he doesn't.” Laelen mocks, “but I know a little. I'm sorry if he comes off as a bit of an ass...”

“You do make a habit of apologizing for him, don't you?” Symphony asks, observantly.

“He seems to always need it.” Laelen glares at Kendrion from a sideways glance.

“Well, I was going to say that you can forget anything you've learned about Nymphian royalty,” Symphony continues, “Kitty is a bit of an odd duck. Thus you two being here on contract instead of individuals of, let's say, more experience with these matters.”

“It did all seem too good to be true. High level imperial contract without being on Nymph before.” Kendrion shrugs, “Why would her highness want inexperienced escorts?”

“First thing to know,” Symphony continues, almost as if she didn't hear Kendrion's question, “is to call

Kitty Kitty. She gets a little sorted with formality. Katharine Aldrenna Telos is the baby of the family, with two older sisters and a cadre of dotting aunts, uncles and cousins. She has this crazy notion that she wants to change the process of her position, no formality and more openness.”

“Do you support her with this too?” Laelen asks, finally comfortable enough to take a seat.

“I'm here to make sure you two don't screw up and get her killed.”

A silence breezes through the zen-like sitting area. Laelen is looking at her hands, flustered at what to say next.

“This would be a great moment for the great Kitty to make her appearance. You know, break the ice a little.” Kendrion says coolly.

“I think we made a mistake, Ken.” Laelen says softly under her breath.

“What are you talking about?”

“The Meerin is right. We have no experience. I don't know if I want to be responsible for a naive child of Fae royalty as she galavants over the countryside.”

“Perhaps we can hear what she has to say and discuss our decision later... in private.”

Laelen takes the hint and quiets herself. Symphony looks between the two of them, slightly bemused. “I think the witch-child has a point. I'm willing to offer you a quarter of the contract payout to just walk away, no questions asked.”

Kendrion looks at Laelen, but both remain silent.

“That is the problem, isn't it?” Symphony continues, “Money? You didn't come here to the Royal City to leave empty handed, now did you?”

“No, we came here to...”

“We'll take it.” Kendrion interrupts, “No questions asked. We'll take it now and leave, if you so wish.”

Symphony pulls a well stocked coin purse from her robe and hands it to Kendrion, “I suggest you head to the Frozen Blossom Inn, if you are looking for accommodations. I say a malt is about the right thing to go for after being payed this much for relatively no work at all.”

“We'll keep that in mind.” Kendrion replies, securing the coin purse in his belt, “Let's go Laelen, before we over extend our welcome.”

Laelen stands up and follows Kendrion out of the garden sitting area. Symphony bends down under the table and replaces the gear into the water mechanism of the fountain. The water begins to dance more vigorously and majestically than before.

Laelen and Kendrion are sitting in two arm chairs in front of a kindling fire in a small inn. Kendrion is looking into the small, dancing flames, lost in thought. Laelen is cupping her tankard of malt as if it's a child's blanket during a storm. Kendrion finally looks over at her and notices her mood.

“I didn't kill your familiar or anything, stop looking like I did.”

“I'm not mad at you or anything, I'm just disappointed with the circumstances.”

“Why, we got paid for pretty much nothing. We're set for quite a while.”

“I'm not here to be 'set', Kendrion, I'm here to learn. I don't want to spend the next three months wasting away in some inn, I need to be out there, figuring stuff out.”

“Serves me right for pairing up with an academic, I'd love to spend the next three months without a care in the world.”

“You speak as if you had a choice in being here with me.” Laelen stands up after draining her glass, “Don't take off with that cash, Kendrion. I'm expecting my cut to be in my hands before sundown.” Laelen starts to walk off.

“Where are you going now?” Kendrion throws at her.

“I need another damn drink.” She spits back. Kendrion chews his lower lip and tightens his fist on the chair arm.

“Symphony, that damn alley cat.” A sing song voice huffs out from behind Kendrion, her frustration as calm as a spring breeze. A fair haired Fae walks around Kendrion's chair and plops down in the one beside him. Kendrion eyes his new guest for a moment, and then the light bulb goes off.

“Oh no....” He begins to get up.

“Sit that boney butt of yours back in that chair, mister, or I'll have you arrested in the blink of an eye.”

Kendrion pauses, glaring at the Fae. She adjusts her clothing before speaking again.

“If you really know who I am, than you know I can follow through on my threats.”

Kendrion sits down, “Kitty, right?”

“Katharine Aldrenna Telos, to be exact. Youngest daughter of the King of all Nymph.” Kitty looks at Ken smugly, knowing she has won whatever battle that was about to ensue, “You can call me Kitty, though.”

“Charming.”

“I take it you're the realist of the pair.”

“Realist?”

“My politically correct term for depressing cynic. You sure took my money real quick. I was expecting a little more of a contest from you.”

“You expected me to demand to work for the money that she was just going to hand me like nothing?”

“Well, I guess it was a bit much to ask.”

They sit in silence for a moment.

“You know, I picked you and Laelen out specifically. It took a long time to finally come to that decision.”

“It took you a while to get to the bottom of the list, huh?”

“If you didn't think you stood a chance at winning the contract, why did you apply?”

“Kicks and giggles”

“You've got a twisted sense of humour.”

“It's why I got the contract, huh?”

“You know, I could spend all day verbally sparring with you, or I can get to my point. We're going to complete the contract, and if you refuse, I'll have you arrested for theft.”

“You can't be serious.”

“Try me.”

“I'm gone for two seconds and you're already picking up other girls?” Laelen accuses as she thrusts another tankard at Kendrion.

“No, I'm going to get us arrested.”

“Oh good marks, arrested again?” Laelen sits down, “Did he accost you? Please, just stab him, I don't want to spend the night in a cell again.”

Kitty bursts out into a fit of laughter.