

The Nineteenth Dolunay

THE AURAN CHRONICLES BONUS CONTENT

WENDY HEISS

This chapter takes place right after the events of Autumn Queens & Shadows, so I DO NOT advise you to read it until you have finished Mal's & Thora's novella. You will be so, so, so damn spoiled if you read it so please, please do not read it just yet.



The Nineteenth Dolunay

NIA

There was nothing else like nighttime in Adriata. Especially on the brightest, most holy night of the year, Dolunay. Gilt and glitz and sparkles had settled like first snow on the Amaris castle gardens which were now in full bloom. Each flower head had spread its petals widely while turning east in the direction of the moon which had hid behind a veil of gentle clouds like a shy mistress of the skies.

Few had already gathered out on the castle's patio, chatting with a drink in their hands while Karin and I took care of the food tables spread under the shades of magnolias gently shedding white petals.

This was the nineteenth Dolunay I had organised, something that had previously been Driada's responsibility. It was the inheritance she had left for me. One of the requests she had left to each and every one of us before she had become an eastern star, a bright freckle right next to the Goddess she had adored for so many years, steady and strong as

she watched upon us. Only when light bled around her celestial body, I knew she'd give everything to be down here with us, watching her grandchildren grow, watching her sons be so utterly in love and finally breathing peace.

"I hate teenagers," Mor muttered under her breath across from me as she attempted to make a neat bow with the silk ribbons I'd handed to her while keeping an eye on Sam who'd just approached our daughter a few feet from us. "Mostly the male ones."

I nudged her foot under the table. "He just has a crush. Leave the boy be."

She stopped fiddling with the Dolunay decorations, looking up at me. "He's Kilian's kid. You really think he'll drop this anytime soon? It was adorable when he was five, sort of cute when he was ten, and now it is just...concerning."

When I glanced at them, I understood what she meant. Sam had leaned against one of the many food tables scattered around the night gardens, his head tilted to the side and a small smile playing on his lips as he watched Karin neatly line the candles between the plates. As he was growing up, I'd always thought he looked a lot like Kilian, but he had grown into his mother's features. And as always, he noticed my attention, his gaze slowly rolling in my direction. Throwing me a wink, he went back to ogling my clueless daughter who had taken her duties of decorating the food tables entirely too seriously. Though she rarely engaged anyone in conversation and mostly kept to her quiet self, Karin always talked to him for some reason.

Mor slammed the silk ribbons down on the table and looked at me with a pair of dark, pleading eyes. "May I please be excused to go brood in some shadowed corner about the fact that I might be in laws with Snowlin if I allow this to happen?"

Laughing, I nodded, and she pressed one firm kiss to my lips before nearly running towards the garden bushes.

When I placed the last blue silk ribbon on the last gilded ornament, I leaned back in my chair, swivelling a look over the garden space which had filled with fireflies and the distant echo of cicadas. My eyes drew shut when the silky wind swept over the garden, swaying grass and bushes east, and lifting every fallen petal back up in the air. Glitter poured over my skin when flower spirits appeared from under their hidden spots under the flowers and jumped from petal to petal, murmuring and chanting around me.

"Oh, her heart aches. It aches tremendously," they quietly sang in my ears. *"But, oh she's happy. So happy she's scared."*

My attention went to Sam and Karin when they said, *"She's afraid of winter. Nightmares of another long winter plague her faith."*

The spirits stopped all of a sudden, gasping and screaming so loudly I winced. *"Death!"* they screeched, returning back to their hiding spots.

I nearly jumped out of my skin when a cold voice whispered a few chilling words in my ear, "Where do these go?"

"Gods!" I yelped, nearly dropping from my chair when Rain lowered a plate stacked with a mountain of flat moon bread in front of me.

"Where?" she asked, her long black pigtailed hitting me on the face when she turned to look around a little confused.

She yelped when I pulled on her hair. "Don't creep up on people like that."

Giving me a big old pout, she wrapped her arms around my neck and sat on my lap like she used to when she was little. "But it's so fun."

This strange, strange girl. If her mother had been an odd child, she was thrice as odd. "What's that?" I asked, tapping a finger on the bundle she had wedged under left arm.

"A little Dolunay gift for Oddie and Ollie," she said, unwrapping the colourful cloth to reveal two of her old creepy dolls that I thought had not survived Mal's exorcising attempts.

I winced. "I don't think that's a good idea." Mal was never going to find rest for the entirety of his long life ahead if those resided in his castle, let alone his room. And though that thought made me chuckle, I worried for Thora if he was to perish from existence.

Rain frowned. "I think he's going to find it very sentimental that I am handing them to his daughters. He used to like these. Would ask me all the time where I kept finding new ones from. I think he was a bit embarrassed to let me know he also wanted one."

I opened my mouth and then closed it, my entire body shaking with silent chuckles. "Can you drag Visha and Penelope down here for me? We're going to sit for dinner in a minute."

She let out a dramatic whine, pressing her hands to her ears. "The voices around their spell cave drive me nuts. I can hear the dead so strongly around Vee and Penny. And they're not nice ghosts either, that I can tell you."

"Go get Elias then," I said, pushing her fringe away from her eyes. "He'll know how to deal with them both."

With a little sigh, she handed me the dolls and stood. "Deal. But you give them to Ollie and Oddie then. I'm scared I might change my mind and keep them for myself. They're too pretty."

"Deal," I said, getting up after her and grabbing the dolls.

A symphony of snores seeped from behind the lemon tree Mor had gifted Snow and Kilian. Mal had sprawled on the grass, his twin daughters, Olympia and Odelia, had curled up next to him with

their long, soft brown hair matted to their sweaty cheeks tinted pink from the night summer warmth. After neatly placing each doll in his daughters' arms, I quietly slithered away.

Like a storm, Thora tore through the gardens in her silky pink dress, her head swivelling around. "Have you seen Oddie or Ollie?" she asked, kneeling on the grass to look under the food tables. "We were supposed to be playing hide and seek, and they just vanished."

Just when I opened her mouth to tell her, Mal's voice boomed around the gardens, "Holy fucking shit!"

"Holy fucking shit!" a small voice parroted his words, bursting into screeching giggles.

"Holy fucking shit, daddy!" little Oddie followed after her sister as usual. "Daddy, what is holy fucking shit?"

With a sigh, Thora lowered her head and cried out against her hands. "Oh, my Gods," she breathed full of devastating realisation. "We're raising pirates."

"They will be the cutest pirates to sail the five seas," I told her over my shoulder, heading for the moonflower garden with three plates of cake in my hands.

Kilian and Jonah had sat in front of Driada's grave, talking. Besides his gilded eyes, Jon was his twin. Same brown hair, same features, same mellow gaze, same soft manners. Snow had not even made an effort to assist in the making of this one.

"Thank you, Nia," Kilian offered, grabbing the plates from my hand at the same time his youngest son said, "Happy Dolunay, aunt."

Taking a cake plate from his father, he lowered it in front of Driada's grave. "Happy Dolunay, grandma."

Ruffling his hair, I said, "We're sitting down for dinner in a couple minutes."

I quickly rushed past the rose maze when I noticed Cai approach Eren who'd crouched down under a bush's shadow to smoke. Curiosity got the best of me just before I took the last turn, and I glanced at the two. After eighteen years, Eren had finally joined us for Dolunay. And unfortunately, I think it was not because of the reason Cai hoped it would be.

I knew that I might be correct to assume that when I saw Snow and Lilith sitting together on a bench under the shade of a willow. Neither of them was talking, but the youngest Krigborn sister had tipped her head up to the skies and had a huge smile on her face while her bigger sister watched her with a pair of devastated golden eyes. Two more years—that's all Lilith had left until she would join her betrothed in Hell. I doubted Eren had made peace with that even after preparing for it for so long.

Snow's attention finally left her sister when I said, "You should join the rest. Dinner will be served in a minute."

I found the one who loved to watch the world go around right behind a tall oak, observing all the guests slowly pouring in the lemon tree garden. After failing to discreetly hide the fact that he'd been smoking, Alaric pulled me to him and wrapped me in his big, grizzly embrace. He swayed us side to side, pressing little kisses to my temple. "You have to stop for a moment, kid. You have to stop for a moment and just live. You've been on your feet, hands busy, mind restless for the past nineteen years. Why won't you just stop and enjoy what you have built for yourself?"

He'd always seen right through me, and maybe that was why I kept avoiding him lately. I was ashamed that I could not let go of the past even though I'd always been the one to bury it the deepest. Nineteen years had passed since the war, and though my mind seemed to understand that, my body didn't. Every scar of mine remembered,

the one on my neck still choked me sometimes when I looked at myself in the mirror or when Mor grazed her fingers back and forth over it. I'd tried—I'd tried so hard to love it as she loved it. But all it reminded me was the cost Alastair had paid for me to live again. The only trick I'd found that worked was busying myself with just about anything, constantly. "I'm afraid to stand still," I confessed.

"The earth below your feet will not drop if you stop moving."

"It isn't the world I am trying to survive, Ric. It's me."

Gentle footsteps reached in our direction. "Mom?"

Pulling back, I turned to Karin who was carefully walking in our direction with a piece of flat moonbread, unsure if she should speak or approach us.

Reluctantly, she held the moonbread up to us, and both Ric and I reached to pull a piece from it as tradition required it.

Alaric threw the piece in his mouth and tugged her cheek. "Who pulled the first bit?"

Her lashes fluttered fast. "Sam. He insisted."

"Yeah," my father said, throwing a glance at me. "He does that a lot, doesn't he?"

"He's a silly kid," my daughter said, looking down at her feet. "The General is looking for you," she added as she accepted Ric's arm around her shoulders and sank against his embrace even though she was still as revolted by physical contact as the day Mor and I had found her. None of us had ever pushed, always offered. And at some point, she'd accepted us back. Starting with Alaric. He was the same old man who'd been so very patient with me back then, too.

A little yellow haired boy crashed into me halfway to the temple to get Atlas. Raising his head, Visha's little spawn gave me a huge grin, flashing me the gap of his two missing front teeth. In his little head, he'd considered an entire stage of life.

I tugged on his fat cheek. "What do we have here?"

Ezra yelped when Elias snatched him right off the ground and threw him over his shoulder. "He has locked Atlas inside his temple and swallowed the key. No more moonbread for him. We're going to sit this night out on the toilet, or his mother will tenderize and pulverise my limbs very, very slowly and then salt me up like one of her corpses if he has a tummy ache tonight."

Very tempted to let that just happen, I sighed. "I will unlock Atlas out of there."

"Thank you," he said, throwing me a wink as he turned to climb the stairs into the castle while throwing his giggling son up in the air a few times until he squealed like a piglet.

A strong arm was wrapped around my middle just when I was about to slide a shadow tendril inside the temple keyhole, pulling me against her chest as she pressed her lips to my ear, and whispered, "And the world goes around magnificently another day, my *ahana*."

I sank against her body. "I wish it would stop. That it would pause right at this very moment."

"And what about the possibilities that we might have many more magnificent ones in the future?"

How could I tell her that I'd grown not to trust the future? Especially when she worked so hard, suffering through countless, endless sleepless nights to make sure Karin and I were nothing but safe from our pasts, in our present, and forever in the future.

Her chest shook with a shaky exhale before she whispered in my ear, "I hold hope that you will one day tell me what troubles you. That you will let me torture it and slay it in your stead."

"You've done so much already."

"I want to do more. I exist to give you more. To give you everything, *ahana*."

Just when I opened my mouth to hand her every single trouble of mine and let her slay them all, I was interrupted by an echo inside the temple, “Hello?”

Mor pulled back a little and blinked at the temple doors. “Someone’s in there?”

“Atlas,” I said as my shadow tendrils solidified in the keyhole and clicked the lock back. “Ezra locked him in there.”

Groaning, she dropped her brow to my shoulder. “I thought you were leading me in here for some alone time.”

My jaw nearly met the floor. “You’d think I’d do that in a temple?”

Her hands moved up my thighs. “Considering how many times you call upon heavens and Gods when you’re sitting on my face, we might as well bring your prayers here.”

Elbowing her in the stomach, I shoved her off me and unlocked poor Atlas. “How on the heavens did Ezra manage to lock you in here?” Young Atlas and this Atlas were two entirely different people. His shoulders, arms, and legs had filled with too much muscle, and he’d grown at least a foot more since back then. I didn’t think a giant troll could take him prisoner let alone a five-year-old.

He shook the bottom of his robes. “He froze me to the carpet.”

That kid was such a menace. And I could bet my little toes that Visha loved it. “You should stop agreeing to babysit him. Last time he froze your mouth shut.”

He waved a hand as he backed away in the direction of the celebrations. “Nonsense. He’s a great kid. Besides all the freezing.”

Penelope had stood firm on her decision not to have children until her fate was determined as Grand Maiden, even though they both adored kids to pieces. And I understood her decision very well. All of us did. So, the two compensated that void between them in any way they could. They were always the first volunteers to look after the kids

when we were busy. They'd practically helped raise every kid out in the garden tonight.

Facing Mor, I asked, "Done brooding?"

"I could have brooded for five more minutes." Her hands expertly descended down my waist and slowly past my hips, settling against my backside as she drew me in for a kiss. "Unless you're thinking of doing something else."

I kissed her lips back, then her cheeks, her jaw, her lips again. "Yes. I was thinking we can go eat, too."

She grabbed my hand, trying to pull me inside the temple. "Exactly what I was thinking as well."

Chuckling, I pulled us out and shut the temple doors. "Not of that kind."

Drawing her eyes shut, she muttered, "I hate festivities. May I find some quiet place to brood for five more minutes?"

"No. I want you with me."

She nodded once and followed after me with her ears down like some kicked puppy. "As you say."

Lifting a finger, I counted all the heads that had filled the celebration space.

One was missing.

Snow.

Following that invisible pull that had always existed between the two of us, I found her sitting on the balcony overlooking the celebrations. "This is my favourite day of the year now, you know?"

"Mine, too," I said, wrapping my arms around myself when the wind turned chilly.

"We should come up with a few other holy days and celebrate more often."

"Lets."

"Lets," she agreed, her gaze sinking somewhere far and dark, turning troubled and fearing. "What a terrifying world, huh?"

"The most terrifying," I agreed, leaning against the balcony beside her.

Her strong, harsh eyes took a silver shine. "When am I supposed to stop doubting whether it is real or not?"

"Mor says it will happen eventually. That we will wake up one day and accept the reality we are in. For now, just enjoy it as it is." I turned to look at her. "If you weren't this angry lightning ball that threatened to break heaven and earth, none of us would have been here, Snow. This is all your doing."

She was quiet for a moment. "I know I should be grateful about my anger, but I only resent it now. It is making me bitter. And I hate being bitter. I miss what I could have been without it. We could have had more happy Dolunays. More happy Solstices. More happy birthdays."

"I think we're both mourning something that could have never existed in the world we were raised in. Without your anger, you would have not survived. And without your anger, I would have not survived either. I would have bled out and died in that basement that would have become my grave, too."

She shook her head. "Nonsense. You were kind despite all the unkindness that birthed you. You would have survived not to spite, but to heal. You persisted like a wildflower. I persisted like a storm."

I lifted a flat moonbread to her. "I am thankful for the rain. It helped me grow."

She pulled on the moonbread, and it parted in a perfect half. "And I am thankful for the gentleness. Having you by my side kept me human." With a sigh, her attention returned to her daughter who'd crouched before a patch of moonflowers below the balcony, holding a trembling hand above them. Children had so many dreams when they

were young. But all Rain Castemont had ever wanted was to hold a flower.

“She’s going back to that strange world at the end of the summer, isn’t she? To Arcane Academy.”

Distant thunder lit the far skies above the seas as she said, “She is.”

“You don’t want that.” I knew she hated it. That she loathed even the idea of letting her daughter remain worlds away for weeks and months long.

Snow took a slow, trembling inhale. “I want her to be okay. It’s unfair that I brought her to life to suffer like this. I want her to resent me only so she doesn’t blame herself for what she is. But she won’t resent me no matter what. She’s determined to suffer for what I could not fix. But someone else can help her. And I can’t deny her of it.”

At that moment, Rain got to her feet and turned to look at us over her shoulder, a silver tear sliding down her face before she forced a huge grin on and waved at us.

And I didn’t need to look at Snow to know of the heartbreak she had just felt at that sigh.

My hand closed around Snow’s. “She is persistent like you. Like a storm.”

Wind swayed a little more harshly than before, carrying her long hair back in waves. “I didn’t want her to be. I wanted her to live softly and gently like the name her father gave her.”

“She has you and Kilian, she will be alright.”

Both our heads whipped back when Kilian said, “Yes, she will.” He had braced his shoulder against a pillar, his arms crossed over his chest as he watched his troubled wife. “I will move heaven and earth to make sure that she will be nothing but alright.”

Like a dark shadow, Mor appeared behind him, knocking his shoulder with hers as she walked in my direction and sent him a scathing look over her shoulder. “Is your eldest son a barnacle?”

He raised an amused brow, his cold eyes bouncing between me and my wife. “A barnacle?”

Grabbing my hand and dragging me behind her, Mor nodded. “Why is he stuck to my daughter like one?”

“Ah.” He nodded, trying hard not to laugh. “I’m sure all will be okay when the tide pulls back.”

“That’s not funny,” Mor muttered between her teeth, still glaring at Kilian even as we stepped away. “Let’s go eat so I can eat what I want to eat.”

Laughing, I followed after her, letting her lead us right in the belly of the loud celebrations.

Tipping my head back in the direction of the balcony one last time, I watched Snow snuggled up against Kilian’s chest, and I knew right then that everything and anything would truly be alright.

Eventually.

Afterword

Dun dun dun!!! This was...as some of yall might have guessed it...a little look into what The Elding Diaries (aka my second gen series) will be about and who it will be about. I thought this would be little something something while yall wait for me to kick start it. There will be more details and further introduction into the backstories of some of these characters in Eren's and Cai's book, but I will leave the rest a mystery for now. I have so many ideas and so much material from Numengarth to utilise for their stories, much that has not been explored in The Auran Chronicles will definitely be explored in The Elding Diaries. Though I will write The Elding Diaries to stand as a series on its own, this is very much a second gen series and will feature all your TAC faves. I hope yall will stick along for this journey!

Hope you have enjoyed this tiny chapter.

Love yall.