

Prologue: Brenhines yn sefyll (A Queen Stands)

“Marw yn dda chwaer, oherwydd buoch fyw yn ddewr. (Die well sister, for you have lived with courage.)”

-Trefn Cyfiawnder Farewell

17 years ago...

Isolde stared out of the large throne room's balcony windows sadly. Brynn was burning, her beloved city, her people's capital, and with it the kingdom. Though a storm had begun as evening fell it was too late to save them. Lightning and thunder crashed as rain fell over the flaming debris of her home that she had known since childhood. Isolde spoke in the old tongue, her people's language, even though there was no one to hear it. She needed to say farewell to them in her heart, and wish them safe passage into the next world. “Marw yn dda fy mhobl, oherwydd buoch fyw yn ddewr, ffarwel.” *Die well my people, for you have lived with courage, farewell.* There was not much left now, but a few things she could still do. As many of her sisters in Trefn Cyfiawnder, or “Order of Justice,” and her son would survive, she would see to that before death. A queen stood, it was the Cathyoran way. She would take as many of them with her as she could, into the next world, there would be no mercy for their souls.

Isolde turned around as she heard them coming for her, the main throne room didn't have doors and the invaders were loud with the lust for destruction. It had taken some argument to make her husband Cormac, their king, to leave her here alone. But he also had a duty to fulfill and she was a warrior, he knew better than to deny her this. She said a silent prayer to their goddess Rhiannon and drew Cynddaredd, or “Fury,” into her hand, dropping its scabbard to the side as they entered the large throne room. The blade seethed with the crackling



dark amber lightning of its hunger, wanting to devour her enemies as she raised it in challenge. "Vermin! Come, meet your end!"

There was an inquisitor with them, there always was when they were spreading the "word" of Jhoras. He stepped forward from the knights and soldiers with him, as their archers ran upstairs to the upper balconies. She didn't know this one's name, but he obviously thought himself clever, and believed that he knew how to deal with her. He looked around the throne room, in an almost leisurely manner and smiled, before speaking. "Is that any way to address those anointed by Jhoras?"

Her face took on a grim countenance, she could feel her anger boiling deep inside, like heartbreak turned into a sword blade. "You call yourselves anointed and speak of faith? How many women and children have died at your people's hands today Inquisitor? You are nothing but common thugs, murderers!"

He gently touched the three-quarter cross hanging around his neck and smiled almost kindly; the contrast to his words was sickening. "I am Inquisitor Durand. Though you may see things differently, Innatraeans who live in sin must be granted the Lord's Mercy, it is just." He met her eyes, and all she saw there was madness. "You however were a queen and I will be kind, you may surrender now and your mercy will be painless."

She smiled wickedly and raised Cynddaredd a touch higher. "Your death shall not be a quiet or merciful one. Come Inquisitor, face your end."

His fingers twitched ever so slightly. "Very well godless witch, I gave you the chance for mercy. May Jhoras forgive you." The archers on both sides of the balcony fired.



Isolde swept Cynddaredd through the air, the sword could feel the threat to her life, and its magic reacted. The dark amber lightning lashed out, burning the arrows to cinders and seeking those who had sent them. The archers screamed in pain, almost as one while they died burning. She made eye contact with Inquisitor Durand and took a step forward. "I am no easy prey, you sanctimonious bastard. Come, I have my own version of mercy in mind for you."

Durand rubbed his chin thoughtfully for a brief moment. "I heard you Trefn Cyfiawnder witches were powerful, how interesting." Then he nodded calmly to his men. "Kill the godless witch."

They came for her, cruel faces lit by the storm outside as it increased in rage, seeming to feel her people's loss and anger. That raging hatred and sadness echoed itself in her Cynddaredd, as the lightning on its blade grew more erratic and sparked in hunger. Isolde swept forward, not waiting for them to come any longer, but going to meet their crazed destruction with the anger of her despair. Where her blade arced lightning flowed behind it, looking for its prey. When she blocked or struck it sparked along the metal of their weapons and armor burning those inside with magical flame. They weren't ready for her, had not expected this, and it was over quickly; but the ending was not one she had expected. As the last one screamed in dying pain instinct told her to strike to her left, and there Cynddaredd's blade met the twin daggers wielded by Inquisitor Durand. The lightning did not arc along those blades to his flesh, but instead sprang away from him as he spun around her and sliced her side. The pain and blood shocked her, the magic of her blade failing struck fear into her already fragile heart, and she felt a shadow move across her life as they both paused; looking each other in the eyes from a few feet away.



He smiled wickedly. "Your magic does not work against me, witch. For one truly anointed by the light of Jhoras you are nothing!"

Isolde lifted her blade purposefully in front of her, trying to make the motion of defiance banish her fear and doubt. "I will still kill you, mongrel dog." His eyes lit with the cold fury of madness and they closed with each other again. After another whirlwind of blows the two paused, eyeing one another, new wounds bleeding. She stepped back away from him, carefully over one of the corpses she had left earlier, and smiled with satisfaction. There was a deep bloody gash along the inquisitor's collarbone, and his pretty white robes were now drenched in red. "How can you be so callous with destruction? Even your own men were fed to that insanity."

His mouth cracked into that same wicked grin, blood dripping down his face and chest. "Every great light has its fodder, some lives must be given for that light to spread." He took a slow measured step towards her, grin widening. "Your magic is stronger than the others, I needed you to use it first, to tire."

Their blades met again as he lunged forward, screaming that last word, as if the words themselves were his weapons and not the cruel knives he pushed towards her. He was right, she was tiring, she could feel it as she blocked him and retreated again. She was wounded, cuts bleeding all over her bruised and beaten body. Worse without the lightning of her magic this was a normal fight and he had the edge. As they separated again, both panting, more Aedonian forces entered the large throne room. She watched them cautiously, while holding Cynddaredd in front of her protectively. Then, behind those enemies she saw him, Gregoire D'Arganse, their king. It was almost time, Isolde blinked her eyes and took another step backwards, banishing her fear for one final act.



His majesty king of Aedonia, Gregoire, stepped forward to join the Inquisitor. "Queen Isolde, it is good to see you again." He looked around the room noting the corpses, the debris, and the flames. "Though I must say it was under nicer circumstances last time. The Daphshire Grand Ball wasn't it?" He saw the resolve, the anger, and the grief in her eyes as she lifted Cynddaredd higher. "You have fought so hard. Surrender and your death will be painless, I give you my word." More men flooded into the room, surrounding her, the king, and the Inquisitor.

She raised Cynddaredd higher and turned the blade down. "Your word means nothing to me, traitorous charlton." The words came easier than she had expected as she spoke the old tongue one last time. An ending to this life, and the beginning of her journey into the next world. Isolde silently prayed to Rhiannon for her husband Cormac, her son Cian, and those of her sisters that would survive; then she spoke. "Dydd Dial a Marwolaeth yn dod." She shoved Cynddaredd into the floor. "Brenhines yn sefyll!" *The day of vengeance and death is coming. A queen stands!* Her magic would release, going to her sisters, and taking these bastards with her into the next world.

As the explosion began, shaking the large throne room and obliterating everything in its path to dust, Inquisitor Durand leapt forward holding something in his hand. "Majesty!"



Cormac shoved the drawbar into place and put the palm of his hand on the door for a moment in silent prayer. His wife was still put there, his beautiful Isolde, has chosen to stay behind and delay their enemy. Some may have called it foolish pride, or even a failure on his part as a man, but he knew her. She was powerful, and had the heart of a knight, arguing with her was like screaming at a mountain to move from your path. He smiled and turned to go, he had a duty, to save their son Cian, and he would not fail. As he strode down the long hallway Cormac could already hear them outside, hanging on the door and calling for a battering ram. He looked at his men. "Owain, Dylan stay here and slow them down as much as you can. May Rhiannon have mercy on your souls and guide you into the next world." He kissed his fingers and touched each man's chest.

"Yes, majesty!" They drew their blades and turned back as he swept onward, followed by the remaining few of his men. They all knew their duty and loved Cian as their own.

Cormac looked at the man next to him, there was a sergeant's mark on his breastplate. "What's your name, soldier?" Normally he would know every man near him and his family, but today had been chaotic and it was impossible for a king to know every man in his service.

The man nodded stolidly, matching his pace. "Sergeant Archibald Stallwood, your majesty."

He nodded in return, recognizing the man's calm, even in crisis a soldier was owed his due. "Have they found Brianna?"

Archibald glanced back briefly as a new round of pounding began on the far doorway, but there were other men there. "Yes majesty, she is waiting in the royal nursery with prince Cian."



"Good man. Any word from the Trefn Cyfiawnder coming back from their mission?" He knew those in the city were already overwhelmed, somehow the Aedonians had disabled much of their order's magic.

Archibald's eyes grew saddened. "No word your majesty, they must have been waylaid."

"How convenient. What about those still in the city or Gwarchodlu Brenhinol?" He already knew the answer, he'd sent his royal guard to help evacuate civilians and every woman of Trefn Cyfiawnder still in the city was a target, but it was good to keep his men talking and thinking.

His new companion sighed, obviously tired and distraught. "They are bogged down by invading Aedonians majesty. Almost as though they were targeted, and their magic isn't working."

"Damn them all." He turned back down the hallway towards his son's nursery, and the small throne room, with its escape passage. They finally arrived outside the nursery and Brianna was indeed already inside. He smiled to himself and said a silent prayer to Rhiannon. Entering the room he looked down at his crying infant son, Cian, the last Ahearne. He touched his son's cheek and allowed a tear to fall. Brianna looked at him, eyes full of love and sorrow. "Brianna. You must take Cian, and Dygwr Tynged, to safety."

Tears welled up in her eyes. "Majesty..."

He put his hand on the side of her face. "Please Brianna. They're going to break through. Our family, my son, must survive. Do this last thing for your king."



She nodded and turned around. She'd been with his family for almost several generations and knew what to do. He gently strapped Dygwr Tynged or "Fate Bringer," his sword around her back. Then picked up his son, and kissed him one last time, before handing him to her. "May Rhiannon have mercy on your soul old friend. Be well and thank you." He kissed his fingers and touched her chest. She nodded, still crying, and fled down the hallway towards the small throne room, with Archibald Stallwood and another man named Gethin as escorts. Carrying his son and their family legacy to safety. His son's crying seemed to echo louder than the armored footfalls of the hurrying soldiers.

Cormac stepped back into the hallway and towards the far doorway on his way to join the men he'd left there. His beautiful Isolde has made her stand, now it was his turn. Then the whole castle shook with a far away resounding boom, and he fell to his knees as the doorway broke open flooding the hallway with Aedonian soldiers. Cormac stood up and pulled a sword off the nearby weapons rack, it wasn't Dygwr Tynged but would have to do, because it was time to look fate in the eyes.



