

~Chapter 6: A Deal For A Fight (Florias 21st-22nd/ Morim-Narim)

As Cira weaved through the crowd, she turned back to look at Ash, only to find him not there. She tried to glimpse him through the thick wall of bodies, but being mid-day, the streets were packed. Her eyes flicked around, trying to find something she could step on to see over the crowd. Spotting a sturdy crate, she made her way over to the side of the road. But before she could reach her destination, a woman shoved past her, the force pitching Cira forward.

“Whoa!” a voice shouted, a large hand taking hold of her shoulder, helping to steady her. Cira looked up to see the familiar green and bronze of Valis’s colors accompanied by her brother’s tan features.

“Jasper!” she said, looking up at him. His face was a mixture of annoyance and worry as she stepped away from him. “Thank you for catching me,” she said. “What are you doing here? I thought you were still stationed at the gate. Has your shift changed?” A part of her hoped that was not the case. If she was forced to accept his occupation, he might as well stick to her desire for routine. She loved that his schedule had him start the day by the gate. It meant that every morning, if she missed greeting him at the breakfast table, she could see him on her way into the kingdom.

“Schedule’s the same as ever. I’m on my lunch break and wanted to see how you were doing after the incident. I visited the shop and Mother and Father said you were out with Mr. Grayson, but it seems it’s just you.” He frowned, looking about as if to justify Ash’s absence.

Giving a sheepish smile, Cira absentmindedly rubbed the cloth of her sleeve between her fingers. “I was showing him around Iden as thanks for taking me to Violet’s, but I ran ahead and got separated from him.” Her focus switched from her brother as she spotted a pair of amber eyes and a crooked smile.

“There you are,” Ash said, coming up and grasping her hand. She stiffened at the sensation. Normally, Cira disliked being touched. There was no rhyme or reason to it other than it repulsed her. She had practiced over the years hugging and holding her family and Violet which had lessened the urge to pull away from others (not that she normally touched others or let them touch her). With Ash, instinct and surprise told her to yank her hand back, but his touch gave her pause, igniting a buoyancy in her chest. It felt like that time she and her family had taken a trip to Ethral Lake to teach her how to swim. The fear of the water coursing through her before she learned to float in the water’s embrace. It was like that; unfamiliar, though not *unpleasant*. “I guess I’ll have to keep you closer so I don’t lose you.” He beamed at her.

The intense attention caused a blush to streak across Cira's cheeks. She broke eye contact to make Jasper's presence known, but Ash had already shifted her hand to his forearm, holding out his other hand in greeting. "Officer Garren, such a pleasure to see you again."

Jasper was courteous enough and shook Ash's outstretched palm, his frown deepening. "It is," was all he replied, looking at Cira's arm wrapped around Ash's with mild distaste. "I'll see you at home for dinner, Cira," he said, pinning his gaze on Ash as he spoke to her. "I would hate for you to be *late*. Mother is making kale soup."

Cira bristled at the comment. Despite Jasper's passivity, the meaning was clear: she would be home by seven and no later. She schooled her features into a stiff calm. "I assure you, brother, you needn't worry. I'll be on time for dinner. The genuine question is whether you'll be. Who knows, you might pick up *another shift* and leave your soup standing cold. I'll put some to the side if that happens," she said, her voice laced with a chill. Gripping Ash's arm firmly, she pulled him past her brother without so much as a goodbye.

**Commented [1]:** The implications of Jasper's words are clear, but I'm not sure if I understand what Cira is implying back. It seems like she's threatening him, but I don't really understand how.

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The sun's rays glimmered against the forest leaves, bathing them in hues of pinks and oranges as Cira and Ash walked along the dirt path. Darkness would set in soon, releasing the demons from their shadowy prisons, but as Cira gazed at the scenery, her mind washed away the fear of what the night would bring. Ash walked beside her in silence as she twirled a knife between her fingers; the quiet welcomed after a day filled with conversation. The confrontation with her brother had left her put out, but she had shifted gears, pulling Ash to the shop with the Pyros position only to find it had recently been filled. The information did not deter them though, as they spent the rest of their time wandering around the city, picking up a late lunch, and entering shops that piqued their interests.

Ash, noticing Cira had grown tired of walking, suggested that he take her home. Cira did not deny his offer and, with the light fading fast, was glad to have his company. The bubble of silence popped as Ash's voice entered the space. "Do you always carry those with you?" he asked, gesturing to her throwing knife.

The question caused her to still, fingers curling around the blade's grip. "Yes, I always have at least six to eight on me," she indicated, pointing to her two pockets. "I keep a variety in my pockets, but I mainly have throwing knives on me. I also have a larger one on my thigh; the one you saw when we first met, but that's for emergencies."

"I see," he nodded, looking contemplative. Not a proponent of passive attitudes, Cira raised a brow, willing him to continue. His eyes widened in realization. "Not that carrying weapons is frowned

upon. Many do. You seem to rely on them heavily, is all. I was curious as to why. And I also wondered why you lied to your parents about *you* saving me.”

Cira’s eyes sharpened at the question as he fidgeted under her gaze. She was not one to lash out with words, finding that she could easily make someone crumble with her eyes. Her mother had given it the title *the Abyssel glare*. The naming had marginally offended her, but later she discovered it was an accurate description, as it made her victims wish they were anywhere but in front of her.

Sending a lighter version of the glare towards Ash, she approached him, voice gentle but firm as her defensive walls rose, barricading her in. “Ash, I will be honest with you. I’ve enjoyed our time together today and I’m thankful that you helped me back to Iden after the fight. But that does not exclude the fact that I just met you, and so, you are not privy to my private matters. What I will say is that I use weapons as protection because I do not have the magical prowess to do so. As for lying to my parents, they worry enough about me on a daily basis. I didn’t want to worry them more if it wasn’t needed. Now, let’s bury this subject, shall we?” She smiled, tilting her head to the side as he gave her a small nod.

Her careful choice of wording would likely lead him to perceive her as a Sigless. Sigless hated to broadcast their deficiencies, so no one could blame her if the correlating points helped support one another. This cover had served her well on numerous occasions, making it easy to hide the truth of being an Untimely.

They continued on in silence, but not for long as Ash’s voice reached her ears. A small part of Cira wished she had a rag to stuff in his mouth. “You seem mature for your age,” he commented.

Not stopping in her stride, she shifted her gaze, eyeing the man quizzically. Her eyes trailed to Ash’s fingers as they lifted to graze the shell of his pointed ear. Realizing the implications of his words, she mimicked the action, fingers tracing the roundness of her own ear. “I would have never pegged you as a youngling.” He smirked, lacing his fingers behind his head.

“Well, appearances can be deceiving.” She shrugged. “And besides, you don’t appear much older than myself,” she said, studying Ash’s ears once more. They were of average length but wider towards the center.

“How long was it since you turned full-fae?” she asked, resisting the urge to touch them.

“A little over two years,” he answered as they snaked through the trees, coming up on the final trek of their walk.

“I’ll be full-fae this coming Asterin,” she said. “So, in reality, my actions aren’t that odd for my age.”

**Commented [2]:** I'm not sure I understand why she's glaring at him at all. She's the one who pressed him to ask the questions and they are valid questions to ask. She doesn't have to answer them, and she has reason to be defensive, but I don't think she can be offended by them, especially when she expected him to lie to her parents when he met them in the shop without asking him if it was okay.

**Commented [3]:** You may want to say how many months away this is so readers don't have to flip back to the guide at the beginning.

“Trust me, many fae my age, even older, do not conduct themselves with as much decorum as you do.”

Cira blushed at his praise, whispering her thanks. Another moment of silence rested between them before Cira turned to Ash. “I know that the shop didn’t have an open position for you, but while we walked around, did you see any other places that were in need of help?”

“To be honest, no,” Ash sighed, tilting his head back, allowing the fading light to cast a warm glow around him. Cira forced her gaze forward, staring at her boots.

“Well, I’m sure if you go into a few more shops and ask, you might find a position.”

Cira sent him a reassuring look as they rounded the bend, her house coming into view through the trees. It wasn’t big, but it stood at a comfortable two stories constructed of wood and stone; a magical sight to behold in the springtime with its trimmed green grass, stone walkway, and vibrant garden hugging the left side of the house. Inside, on the main floor, was the kitchen, dining room, living room, and guest bedroom with a full bath. Climbing up the stairs, the second floor depicted a simple hallway that connected to her family’s bedrooms, while the end of the hall held the upper bathroom. Overall, it was a quaint structure that housed many dear memories.

**Commented [4]:** I'm not sure you need to detail the house's layout, especially since it seems to be a pretty typical family home.

Pondering Ash’s predicament, the *clang* of metal reverberated over the yard. Cira lifted her head to peer at her father in his smithery, pounding his hammer for what she assumed was another commission. He had been bringing a large amount of work home, much to her mother’s annoyance.

As the hammer struck the metal once more, Cira’s brain ignited with a thought. Turning to Ash, she flashed him a wide grin. “This might sound mad, but how about working for a blacksmith?” She gestured to her father, hunkered over the roaring flames, metal and glass scattered about him. Ash became stone-faced, his eyes staring deeply at her father’s workstation. It took her a moment to realize he was contemplating the offer.

“It sounds like a good idea, Cira, but I’m not sure your father would be willing to have an extra set of hands,” Ash said.

Cira crossed her arms over her chest, raising her brow. “How bad do you want a job, Ash?” she asked, eyeing him.

He chuckled, rubbing the back of his neck. “Pretty bad.”

“Well, then be glad you know me.” Cira swiveled on her heels, stalking across the lawn towards the burning flames.

“Papa!” she called, waving her arms wildly trying to capture his attention. The hammer in his hand landed with a thud as it collided against the stone below. Turning, he flashed her a tired smile, hair

slicked back with sweat and skin blotched with soot. Cira raced over and jumped to place a light kiss against his cheek, tasting the saltiness on her lips.

“Right on time, ~~s~~Sweets. I thought I was going to have to hunt you down. Good to see Ash’s here as well. How was the tour around the city?”

“A pleasant experience, sir,” Ash said, striding up to stand beside Cira. “Your daughter is an exceptional tour guide.”

“I would expect nothing less.” He puffed out his chest in pride then dropped the act to give Cira a knowing look. “Now, do you want to ask me something? You’re giving me that look.”

Cira straightened her back, eyes determined. “Papa, I have a request.” Gesturing to Ash, she took a deep breath. “Ash is looking for work and I thought, would you hire him?”

“No.”

His response was quicker than she’d expected. A frown carved its way across her face. Ash moved to comment, but she held up a hand in silence.

“Why not?” she argued back. “And I need a more solid answer than ‘Because I said so.’” She puffed out her cheeks, waiting.

A spark of mirth flickered in the depths of her father’s blue eyes, the corners crinkling. “Because I don’t need the help. And besides,” he directed his gaze to Ash, “I’m sure you have no experience working in a forge. Am I right?”

“Actually, I worked in one while receiving stamina training in the army,” he spoke up.

Cira took it as the perfect moment to jump back into the conversation, hoping to solidify her case. “See? This is a monumental opportunity, Papa. Having an extra set of hands will help so you won’t have to bring work home, which will make Mama happy, and in doing so will also benefit Ash. It’s a win-win all around,” she said, raising her hands in a show of justification.

The poignant pause that followed weighed heavily in the air as they held each other’s gaze. Cira’s patience was in practice as she studied her father’s broad shoulders. ~~When As~~he relaxed with a sigh, she released an elated cry, clapping her hands. However, the moment was short-lived as he gave a gruff cough.

“On two conditions,” he said, voice deep, tone severe. “First,” he pointed at Cira, “you have to do my dish duty for the next two weeks.” Pointing his finger at Ash, he flashed him a wry smile. “And second, you have to spar with me. Those are my conditions. Do we have a deal?” he asked, holding out his hand.

Cira gave a side glance to Ash. “Cleaning dishes for two weeks is no issue for me. Subjecting you to potential bodily harm is another thing entirely. It’s your call.”

A moment of surprise morphed Ash's features before they hardened with resolve. Outstretching his hand, he grasped her father's in a firm shake. "Deal."

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Cira could feel the nervous butterflies fluttering about in her stomach as her father and Ash entered the expanse of the back lawn, the dawn's rays peeking through the trees. Ash had suggested they have a night's rest before their fight, ensuring equal soundness of body and mind. Now, Cira stood with her mother and Violet on the sidelines, gnawing on her bottom lip. She knew how powerful her father could be, having sparred with him herself, but she'd never witnessed Ash's Pyros magic. It made Violet's presence all the more reassuring that no one would leave the field with any serious wounds.

Cira's mother strode forward, a flag at her side, taking over the role of referee.

"Good morning everyone. We have gathered today to witness this duel between Raymond Garren and Ash Grayson. I will preside over this match and will now explain the rules. First, no weapons are allowed. Second, you may use signature magic, but I'll highly appreciate it if you do not damage the property surrounding the battlefield. And lastly, you may not perform fatal attacks on one another. If you wish to forfeit the fight, you may do so by saying so. Are there any objections?" The men's fists and stances tightened in response. Her father performed a dramatic eye roll, making Cira laugh. No sooner was she silenced by her mother's chastising gaze.

"Who do you think will win?" Violet whispered as Cira's mother raised the flag in the air. The question had plagued Cira all morning, but before she could speak her thoughts, her mother's commanding voice drowned them out.

"Three, two, one . . . fight!" The flag whipped downward as a surge of power coated the air.

"Now, lad, show me what the Ignisian army has been teaching the youth these days!" her father yelled, cracking his knuckles then lunging at Ash.

Cira held her breath as the men surged towards one another. Their speed impressed her, but it was the power radiating off of their bodies that floored her. Gazing at the two men, their auras burned against their forms, the vicinity heating with the strength of their power.

It was uncommon for a fae to show off the strength of their signature magic, usually reserving the action to stop fights before they began. Amidst festivals, Cira had seen a few demonstrations of a fae's aura in the fighting ring. In her eyes, it was a show of dominance, like how an iriacus fans out its tail feathers, hoping to attract a mate. For both fae and the bird, the deeper the color, the stronger the being.

Her father's red aura always reminded Cira of the setting sun as it caressed over the mountains, warm and calming. As for Ash's, it was something she had never witnessed. The red that cloaked his

**Commented [5]:** I wonder why he wants Ash to spar with him

**Commented [6]:** Does Ash have to win this to get the job? Is there anything else at stake (other than their pride)?

form was rich and breathtaking; the garnet color of blood had manifested itself around him and, as his hands birthed flames, the color became even more alluring.

Flashes of fists connected with one another in a rapture of movement. Her father landed a punch to Ash's gut, forcing him to let out a cough of breath as he stumbled backwards. Ash's counter was sneaky as he faked a lunge, then dropped to the ground, sweeping his leg and connecting with her father's, forcing the larger man to land against the earth with a *thud*.

This violent dance between strangers went back and forth as they pummeled one another. After a while, Violet turned her head from the scene as Ash landed a powerful hit to her father's jaw. The sickening sound of bones grinding against one another and a grunt of pain filled the expanse.

Violet was never one for violence, and neither was Cira. However, unlike Violet, Cira had an interest in studying fae while in battle. Moments like these, she knew, upset Violet. So she stood, walked over to her mother, and whispered in her ear, "Mama, could you take Violet inside while I watch the fight. I would take her inside myself, but I feel responsible to stay." Her mother's cocoa-colored eyes turned to study Violet's turned body, giving a slight smile before handing Cira the flag.

"A smart decision, Sweet Pea." Cira gave her an affirmative nod as her mother glided over to Violet, striking up a conversation as they moved into the house, a grateful expression etched on Violet's features.

Turning back around, Cira winced as her father returned a fist, clocking Ash in the head, turning into him, and landing an elbow to the gut. Their flames had enhanced most, if not all, of their attacks, red burns festering on their skin, their clothes charring in places. Thankfully, being a Pyros allowed them to snuff out close flames before they could do too much damage while their signature magic slowly healed the superficial wounds decorating their skin, as was a common occurrence with all fae who had signature magic. Cira's eyes narrowed as she focused on their fight, eyes analyzing Ash's movements. His form was decent, but he left himself open too often, allowing her father to land hits.

Time gradually ticked by as the two men hashed it out against one another. Cira had completely given up on her sparring etiquette, situating herself cross-legged in the grass, head propped up on her arm. The urge for this fight to cease escalated as the smell of her mother's cooking wafted out the open kitchen window. Cira stood to flag them down in a tie but froze as they distanced themselves on the field.

Summer came early; both men erupting in a blaze of fire, a heatwave following their surge in power. They had been going full capacity for around an hour and both looked too spent to throw another punch. They let out roars of determination, charging their opponents like bulls. Cira's eyes never left the

**Commented [7]:** Which of them is doing this part?

**Commented [8]:** I was wondering about how the fire plays into the fight. The paragraphs above mostly describe hand-to-hand fighting, but not their magic, and I wondered if they were using their magic at all, so you may want to point this out when they first start fighting.

scene as their punches simultaneously collided against one another, an explosion of power ripping up a cloud of dust to blanket the area. Sprinting forward, Cira shouted out into the cloud. “Papa! Ash!”

The response was the wind’s whistle as it swept the dust and debris away, giving her a full view of the battlefield. She gasped at the bruised and bloodied bodies lying before her. Ash and her father looked to be passed out on the ground, their faces void of any expression. Cira moved forward shakily to wake them up, but let out a scream of surprise as her father’s booming laughter rushed to her ears.

“Papa!” she chided, as he continued to laugh.

“Sorry, Sweets,” he chuckled, looking at Ash, who was gradually making his way into a sitting position. “I haven’t fought like that in years! Thanks for the exercise, lad.”

“No problem, sir,” Ash cringed, clutching his side.

Cira held out her hand to Ash. “Need a hand?” she offered.

He gave her a crooked smile in return, licking the blood dribbling from his split lip. “Thanks,” he murmured as he grasped her hand, lifting himself up.

“You did a good job,” her father said, slapping Ash on the back, Ash groaning from the blow.

“Papa, be careful!” Cira swatted him away from Ash. “Now come on. Mama made breakfast and Violet can patch up the worst of you two,” she huffed, making her way to the door.

“Thank you again, sir,” Ash said, Cira’s father helping him across the lawn.

“You may call me Raymond,” he said. “I think you’ve earned that right, apprentice.” Cira brightened, turning to see Ash’s eyes widen at those affirming words.

**Commented [9]:** While it was fun to see them use their magic, I'm not sure what the purpose of the fight was. I'd like to know going into it what's at stake so I can feel the tension. As it is now, I had no stake in the fight, not cheering for either of them and not caring who won. It seems Cira felt similarly as she seemed bored toward the end of the fight. If the main character is bored watching something happen, readers likely will be too. It would be nice if she had a reason to cheer for one of them. If Ash's apprenticeship depended on this fight, I think it would add some much-needed conflict in the scene, and Cira would be able to cheer for him because she wants him to get the job. He doesn't have to win. Raymond could decide to give him the job for putting up a good fight.



