

## DELETED SCENE #5

ALLARA BEGS THE GAROWAI FOR HELP  
*(Prior to Chapter 39, before joining Chris is Ballion,  
Allara stopped in Réon Couteau in hopes of seeking guidance  
from the Garowai.)*

**O**N A GOOD day, the royal skycar could get all the way up to Réon Couteau, one hundred twenty leagues to the north, in twelve hours, not including the stopover at Thyra Junction. But thanks to Allara and Quinnon's unmarked car, they couldn't take advantage of royal precedence. Between that and the Nateros riots at every stop, they didn't arrive until the middle of the night.

As the car glided above the torch-lit cobblestones of Rialla Street in Vesper, Quinnon gnashed his teeth. "Bloody *dartartes*. Mactalde won't have to break down our gates if he can just waltz on through them."

Allara looked up from the maps she had been working on. Frustration boiled over. Did he really think he was telling her something she didn't already know?

"What am I supposed to do about it? What do you think I *can* do? If I show my face to them, they'll kill me. They never listened to me before, and they're certainly not going to now. The only person they'll listen to is Chris. And they'll only listen to him until he starts telling them what they don't want to hear."

He didn't turn away from leaning against the window. "I know it."

She spent the night huddled beneath the massive wooden canopy of her bed. She called it precaution when she left the bed curtains open so she could see into the room, but it was probably closer to

paranoia. The wind and the rain lashed the windows all night and carried muted rumbles of the restless city. Beneath it all, the artillery in Ballion pounded on, a percussion felt more than heard.

What she planned to do in the morning, she still hadn't figured out. The Garowai lived one hundred fifty leagues up the Eastern Mistgloom River to the south, with no skycar stations between it and Réon Couteau. On horseback, it would take four days to get there, and she didn't have four days, much less the four more it would take to get back. Anything could happen at the front during that time. Her only chance was if the Garowai chose to come to her.

The creak of her door opening brought her rolling off the bed. She'd slept with her straitquin at her side, and she had it in her hand, hydraulics buzzing, finger tight around the trigger before her knees hit the parqueted step that raised her bed.

A woman squealed, and Allara blinked hard enough to recognize one of her maids. She lowered the pistol and flicked off the power.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, my lady." The maid hid herself behind the door. "I'm sorry to wake you and even more to startle you, but I think you should get up. The Garowai is here. Captain Quinnon told me to fetch you to the throne room balcony."

Allara breathed out hard, blinked back a dull ribbon of pain in her forehead, and rose to her feet. "Thank you." The words were more a prayer than a response to the maid.

Straitquin still in her hand, she threw a hooded robe over her nightgown and hurried through the back passages to the throne room.

At the far end of the balconies that hugged the vaulted ceiling, Quinnon stood in the speckled light of a circular stained glass window. Not until she rounded the corner of the railing could she see the Garowai. He sat on his haunches, in miniature form, and used his forked tongue to clean between the horny pads of a hind foot. His green eyes followed her approach, but not until she stood before him and saluted did he raise his head and shake out his mane.

Quinnon stepped back against the wall to let her stand before the Garowai.

"You came." She could have thrown herself onto his neck, but she wouldn't let herself show that kind of weakness, even with him.

"Of course I did." He curled his tail around his front feet and

flicked the spiked tip back and forth. "And because no one saw me arrive, you need not fear your enemies will guess your presence here. So what is it, dearheart?" His eyes were both gentle and intent.

"I need your help."

"You don't have to ask for that."

With the straitquin in her hand, she couldn't rub her crooked finger, so she rubbed her thumb against the etching on the pistol's grip. "I need a kind of help you've never given me before."

"Ah." His inner eyelids closed slowly. "In other words, you want intervention."

She had known, even before she asked, what he would say. She had known, in her heart, that asking at all was a coward's plea. But where else had she to turn?

"Please. Mactalde's returned, at the hand of my own Gifted, even if he didn't know any better. We're already at war with Koraud. And Nateros is tearing us apart from the inside." She gestured to the rain plinking against the large window. "And you said yourself that the worlds are out of balance."

"And what do you expect me to do?"

Her heart nearly broke. She shouldn't have asked. She should have accepted the inevitable and at least retained his respect. "Kill Mactalde. Scatter the Koraudian army back across their border."

His eyebrow ridge canted above one eye. "You give a lot of credit to one Garowai. Do you really think I have the power to disperse whole armies?"

She didn't respond. Ever since she had first gone to him for tutoring as a child, her trust in him had been complete. He could do anything. He could save her from even the most terrible of her mistakes. That he would choose not to had never been a possibility in which she had truly believed.

She made herself speak slowly in order to keep her voice level. "Ever since I knew a second Gifted was coming, you've refused to talk to me, to help me. Why? Why don't you want to help us?"

He swished his tail. "My dear, I helped you when you needed help."

"Nateros wants to kill me! You don't care about that?"

"Of course, I care. I have always cared, and I always will. But I have no power over Nateros."

He might as well have smashed his spiked tail into her stomach. “When I was a little girl, you taught me. About life. About everything that matters. I’ve loved and trusted you more than I have my own father.”

Gravel pitted his voice. “You honor me with your love, my darling. But you forget I was meant to be your teacher only for a time. And that time has now passed.”

“You are the Garowai.” Desperation trembled in her chest. Did she really depend so much on him to bear her up? “You’re here to teach the Searchers.”

“In the overall purpose of my existence, the training of the Searchers is a very small task indeed.”

She took a step back. “I’ve disappointed you, haven’t I?”

“Everyone disappoints me sooner or later. I’m allowed to see the flaws you mortals overlook, you know.” The black skin of his nostrils tremored. For an instant, he seemed very old and very weary.

She should stop now. She was adding to his burden without easing hers in the least. But she couldn’t help the tears that cramped her throat. “I thought you cared what happened to me.”

“I do.” His eyelids came all the way open, and his green irises glowed. “Indeed, I do.”

“Then why won’t you help me?”

He rose to his feet and hobbled a few steps until he found his balance. “Because it is time you helped yourself.”

She watched as he shook himself gingerly but thoroughly. “How?”

“Stop fretting, stop worrying. Who can tell what purpose you were born for? Certainly not you.”

“I’m trying.”

“Yes, indeed. Trying too hard.” He craned his head to look up at her. Fine white hairs whorled the steel-blue fur of his sloping muzzle. “You must stop trying to control your world. You can’t stop the pain and you can’t stop the sadness. Not your own and not that of anyone else. That is not your responsibility, dearheart. So open yourself to the hurt. Accept it, absorb it, and move on. You will never find peace until you accept the world’s darkness as well as its light.”

The tears faded away, and desolation too deep for tears gripped her. “Life shouldn’t be that way.”

“But it is. So accept it. A wiser power than you ordained it so.”  
The corner of his muzzle wrinkled in the slightest of smiles.

She hugged herself, the straitquin under her elbow. “What if Nateros kills me? What if they kill the Gifted? You don’t care if that happens?”

His wings arched away from his back. “As I say, this is not about what I care for and what I do not. If I’m to fulfill my duty, I must look beyond what I care about. And so must you. We can’t go back, we can only move on.”

She found herself trembling. “And now you’re leaving me.”

“And now I’m leaving.” His wings spread all the way open. “But not for long. Have faith, my love.” He turned toward the window.

Quinnon moved into the corner of her vision. “I want to know something.”

The Garowai stopped and cocked his head toward Quinnon. His forked tongue flicked once between his fangs. “So, after all these years, you’ve deigned to say a word to the Garowai. What is it then?”

Quinnon crossed his arms. “There’s something you’re not telling us about the Gifted.”

A chuckle rumbled in the Garowai’s throat. “This war would be over by the time I finished telling you everything I know that you don’t.”

“Then tell me one thing. He can’t fix what he did, can he? Even if he kills Mactalde.” His one eye stared levelly.

The Garowai’s eyebrow ridge lifted higher. He looked, not at Quinnon, but at Allara. “Perhaps not.” He blinked his filmy underlids once, then turned away. His hindquarters gathered under him, and he leapt onto the railing. Wings spread, he launched himself into the vast emptiness of the throne room and sailed through the still air to an open window at the far end.

Allara shivered. Just like that, he was gone. And just like that she was more alone than ever before.