

DRUID - EXCERPT

THE DEATH WAVE CHRONICLES
BOOK 2

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“RHYLL?”

Rhyll woke up from her doze to the sound of thunder and rain.

“Rhyll?” She heard Nala’s voice. “Are you alright? Answer me.”

“Hey, Nala.” She stood up and stretched, then moved to the cell door. The distant windows gave no indication of the time of day. “I’m fine now. Any idea what time it is?”

“No, they took everything.”

“How long have you been calling me? I dozed off.”

“About forty-five minutes, I guess. What were you thinking? You need to keep your mouth shut.”

“It was necessary.”

“Necessary to get beaten up? This isn’t the girl I knew in Brazil.” Nala sounded distant, perhaps several cells away.

“A lot has happened since then,” Rhyll sighed. The corridor beyond was empty and silent. She reached through the bars, inserted the keys several times until she found the right one and the lock turned. Before she stepped out, Rhyll carefully checked the corridor. Sure enough, at each end was a security camera.

She’d only have a few minutes before the movement was noticed. As she passed the next cell, she saw a robed woman sliding off her bunk. One look at Rhyll and she dropped to her knees, forehead to the floor and arms stretched in front. The same with the next two cells: each time there was a robed woman kneeling and praying. Nala was in the last one.

“Hey you.” Rhyll surprised her friend sitting on her bunk.

“Rhyll? How ...?” Nala came quickly to the door as Rhyll worked at unlocking it.

"If you get them angry, they lose concentration. The dumber they are, the easier it is."

"You also get beaten up." Nala gave her a quick hug of relief when Rhyll pulled open the cell door. "How are you feeling?"

"Fine now. There are others in here." Rhyll moved back to the other cells and began unlocking them, Nala following.

"I thought I heard someone earlier. They must have been here before Dan and I arrived, but they didn't respond to my calls," Nala said.

In the first cell was a bruised woman, mid-twenties. The moment Rhyll appeared, she dropped back to her knees in obeisance.

"It's okay. We're not going to hurt you," Rhyll said softly.

"You are the blessed spirit of the One." She was looking at Rhyllien. "I see your aura."

"My name is Rhyllien, this is Nala."

"I am Arwen, and I thank you for releasing me." She grabbed Rhyll's hand and kissed it.

Rhyll pulled her hand away gently. "There's no need ... Pleased to meet you, Arwen."

"Did you find my sisters?"

"The two others? I believe so." Rhyll made her way to the next two cells, unlocking the doors. Arwen ran in to hug her sister, then they joined Rhyll and Nala at the last cell as it opened up.

"These are Damiana and Celeste," Arwen introduced them both.

"The blessed spirit of the One," they recited, reaching for her hand like Arwen had. Both of them also showed bruising from the guard's rough treatment.

"We should go before the guard realises I stole her keys." Rhyll turned to leave.

"If it was the blonde-haired one, she did this to us," Arwen stated.

Rhyll ducked across the corridor to the nearby exit. Looking out the nearest window, she could see dark clouds hanging in the sky. Combined with the mist, it made for a very dull and unpleasant day.

The five of them stared out the window. The inclement weather kept the people indoors. Anyone unfortunate enough to be outdoors had their heads down and under umbrellas. Some looked like they were coughing. No one here was in EV suits.

"Are we getting Daniel?" Nala asked.

"Not right away. If he's in a separate building, I doubt these keys will work there. He'll have to wait another hour or so."

"Another hour?"

"Maybe more, maybe less. So you reckon he's in that building over there?" Rhyll was looking directly across the road.

"I'm not sure. All I saw was they took me this way, and him opposite. It was dark."

"See those trees?" Rhyll pointed back along the road, which was lined with evergreens. Beyond, they could see a line of rooftops, obscured by the mist and sprinkling rain. "When it's clear, we'll make a run for those."

They opened the door and kept it ajar, looking out, waiting for an opportunity.

"Are you girls able to run?"

"We will do as you command, Great Spirit."

I'll take that as a yes. Rhyll hoped it was before someone

saw them on the camera. She was surprised no alarm had been raised yet. *Unless they were too ill.*

Moments later, the street was clear of traffic.

“Let’s go.”

Rhyll led, Nala on her heels with the others as they sprinted along the footpath, crossed the road and threw themselves into the shelter of the trees. It wasn’t thick coverage, but there was undergrowth to crouch behind if need be.

They paused to rest against the tree trunks, breathing heavily.

Still no alarm and no sign of anyone spotting them. Further along the road was an entrance gate, and just beyond the shrubbery behind them was a long fence of wooden palings. The rooftops they’d seen earlier were higher pitched and made of a different tile to the barracks.

“Don’t the army like everything uniform? These will be civilian houses, then?” Rhyll asked.

“This is England. I’m not familiar with their customs other than afternoon tea, fish and chips, and warm beer.”

“Pretty sad, a whole culture coming down to that,” Rhyll chuckled.

“And it rains a lot too, but I can’t blame them for the weather, and now that you mentioned food, I admit to being hungry.”

“These homes are not part of this base,” Arwen answered Rhyll.

They spied a house without a smoking chimney, apparently deserted, and edged along the fence until they found a spot where they could clamber over to sneak down a side path toward the street.

They were on a suburban street: red-bricked houses sitting shoulder to shoulder along both side of the street, all

with small garden plots in front. Jack-o'-lanterns and other decorations were in some of the windows.

Hearing traffic and a car horn, they walked until they found the main street. A block later they reached the outskirts of the town centre with its shops, pubs and cafés.

"We must join our coven," Arwen said. "Will you join with us in preparing for Samhain?"

"As honoured as I am, not at this time. We have another friend to help."

"But how will—"

"Arwen, enough questions," Damiana spoke forcefully. "The blessed spirit of the One will do as she desires. Sacred One, forgive her. Have we your blessings to leave for the gathering?"

"Gathering? Um, yes. Sure. Will you be alright?"

"With your blessing, we will endure."

"Oh. That's good—"

The three girls dropped to their knees, heads bowed.

Nala mouthed the words, "Bless them."

Rhyll took a deep breath, touching each of their foreheads as she spoke. "Beannacht ort féin agus ar do shinsir. Beidh grá ag máthair an Domhain duit go léir."

"So be it." The three women intoned. They got up after each kissed her hand and walked briskly down the road.

"That was ... interesting." Nala watched them go. "Was that the same as what you said in Amarete?"

Rhyll nodded. "But in Irish this time. No doubt they were the wiccans the commandant mentioned caught beyond the boundary."

"That's what I thought. And still living."

"It might be too soon, or they could be survivors like you and Dan." She wiped her face. "This standing around in the rain is going to get attention."

"And you can speak Irish now?" Nala asked, as the pair briskly strode into town. They could still see some movement, though it was subdued by the rain.

"Nope." Rhyll shrugged. "Though my grandfather is Welsh. Maybe I should have said 'Bendithion arnoch chi a'ch hynafiaid. Bydd mam y Ddaear yn caru chi i gyd.'"

"Now you're just showing off."

Closer to the shops they saw the tables and awnings of a café.

"Hey, show-off, tell me what you got up to last night and I'll shout breakfast," Nala offered.

"Deal."

They stepped inside the nearest café — the bell chimed as the door opened — and found a table against the wall and near the fire. There were eight tables, all empty.

A plump woman came from the back, wiping her hands on her apron.

"Hello, loves. What can I bring yer? Got caught in the rain did yer, pet? You'd be wantin' somethin' warm then. We got pies of all sorts."

"Anything vegetarian?" Rhyll asked.

The lady's smile wavered slightly. "We got vegie pasties, or ricotta and spinach rolls. We got nothin' *vegan*."

"That's fine, the pasties and rolls sound great." Nala nodded. "Could we both have two of each, and perhaps two black coffees?"

"Comin' right up." She turned and headed back to the kitchen.

"So ... about last night?" Nala encouraged Rhyll.

Rhyll described her cross-country camel ride towards Stonehenge and ending up in the barrow instead, what she did with the green diamond, and her text messages when she climbed out.

"I don't know if I could handle crawling in and around a grave," Nala admitted afterwards. "Good work on finding the other chamber."

"It was more of an accident." Rhyll nodded her thanks. "Tell me what happened after I left you two?"

"We were interviewed by the reporters and the police. We told them we didn't know who the thieves were or what they were after."

"And the reporter?"

"Brody just wanted to know about you and where you got to. Who you were, how you helped the lion and why it didn't attack. Then DIC came through and moved everyone on because of the quarantine. They were expanding the roadblocks anyway. I think the police mentioned you, or they saw the news vid ... That's why DIC started scouring the countryside for you specifically."

"Well, the commandant broke into the case and has everything in it. The cow." Rhyll stopped as their food arrived with two mugs of coffee.

"Don't know how yer can stand that muck," the lady said, placing the mugs down. "Hideous, but I guess yer not from around here. Ghastly business this quarantinin'."

"Are they going to empty Winchester?" Rhyll asked.

"Aye. They says they'll begin the push in a couple o' days. Nowt but trouble is wot's goin' ta happen."

"I think you should get out sooner," Rhyll advised her earnestly, but the woman chuckled.

"Me fam been 'ere for centuries. We be stayin'." She took the tray back to the kitchen.

The pair got stuck into the food quickly, neither having much to eat since their arrival, and Rhyll also had an appetite from her healing.

"You going to tell me why the beating?"

Rhyll swallowed. "You probably worked out this death wave turns up when I'm stressed, angry or injured. It happened at the mine, in São Lucas, and Manaus. So, unless you know how to defeat a bunch of armed soldiers ... We need them to be incapacitated first."

"Incapaci— You mean dead? That's ... harsh." Nala gave her a serious look.

"I'm being delayed out of sheer greed or ignorance. Under Lake Titicaca, I learned if I don't get to all the chakra points, *everyone* will die. And I do mean every man, woman and child — including you and me. But if I *do* succeed then those who can resonate with nature will survive. Any delay is going to cost many more lives that otherwise could be saved. The one saving grace about this is the diamonds are here; that means their healing influence will save anyone who is attuned to them."

"Like the natives in São Lucas." Nala sipped her coffee and made a face, almost gagging. "Instant coffee!"

Rhyll chewed more of the pasty, trying not to laugh. "The commandant spoke to me via vid-link. Did she speak with you?"

"No, not a word except from the soldiers. Why through the vid?"

"In case I was contaminated, I guess. She didn't seem too concerned for her people, though."

Nala shrugged. "When they become a high rank, the subordinates are nothing to them."

"Or they could be just natural arseholes."

"How long before we go back for Dan?"

"It usually happens within an hour or so after the lightning starts."

"Assuming this lightning is you and not just a storm. This is England in autumn."

“Had the lights been flickering before my beating?”

“I don’t think so.”

“We’ll have to wait and see. You and I aren’t able to free Dan and get the case back while the armed troops are breathing.”

She cocked her head at a strange noise over the thunder and rain. She sipped some coffee and swallowed, sharing Nala’s distaste for it. “Was that gunfire?” She looked at the clock on the wall. It had been well-over an hour since her beating.

Nala listened. “I can’t hear anything.”

“No ... it’s stopped. I think we should head back after this.”

When they finished, the lady didn’t respond to their call. Nala left some cash on the counter and they made their way outside. Looking in one direction, there were some people seen going into or out of the shops, but they were at the other end of the village and little detail could be made out.

As they walked along the street, retracing their steps to the barracks, a car veered around a nearby corner and ploughed through a brick fence, coming to rest against the front wall of the house.

They both ran over to help. There was just the driver, a civilian, and it was clear from the blood and vomit he had already succumbed to the death wave.

Surprisingly, no one emerged from any of the nearby houses to assist or investigate the noise.

“Just like in Brazil,” Nala observed.

Rhyll nodded. She was responsible for the deaths of these citizens. “I think the effect is happening faster.”

Silently, they both made their way back to the army base. Just in case there were soldiers still aware enough to fire a weapon, they climbed the fence behind the house and

hid in the bushes until they confirmed the area was safe. After several minutes of inactivity, they crept to the building where they believed Dan was being held.

It was a reversed layout to the building they were held in. They quickly found his cell.

“Good. I’ll go and find some keys.”

“Wake up, sleepy head,” Nala called out to Dan as Rhyll jogged to the door at the end of the passage.

Dan sat bolt upright, looking dazed and surprised. He wiped his face, then slid off the bunk. “What are you doing here? How’d you get out?”

“As usual, the girls are here to help. Rhyll’s getting the keys now.” Nala filled him in on the recent developments. Shortly after, Rhyll returned.

“Hey, Dan.” Rhyll waved through the bars, then proceeded to try the keys.

“Good to see you too. Where are the guards?” he asked.

“Most are dead, but some are lingering with other things on their mind.”

“That’s ... unfortunate.”

“It’s the way it is. If they left us alone ... maybe it would have been different. I’m coming to terms with it, harsh as it is.”

“If it’s like the other places, they would have died anyway.” The cell door swung open. “Thanks,” he said. “Where to now?”

A deep voice called along the corridor: “You would be doing me a kindness if you freed me from my cell also.”

“There’s someone else? I didn’t hear him,” Dan said in surprise as he followed the girls to the voice.

A tall man with long, wavy hair stood and approached; he had a tanned and weathered face. He bowed his head when he saw Rhyll. “My Lady, it is an honour to cast my eyes

upon the spirit of The Divine One. I am humbled before your presence.”

“Thank you, but no need. I’ll get you out as soon as I find the bloody key.” Rhyll flicked through them, eventually unlocking the door. “I’m Rhyllien, this is Nala and Daniel.”

“Honoured to meet the companions of the Spirit.” He nodded to them briefly. “Rhyllien, there is a power about you I have not seen before, only dreamt.”

“I hear that a lot.” Rhyll studied him for a moment. He had a wild look to his eyes and smelled ... earthy, but she sensed his calm. There was also a medallion around his neck — a triquetra in a Celtic ring, tied with a woven leather strip; she’d seen the design in her father’s notes. “You’re a druid, aren’t you?”

“A druid?” Dan asked. “Are they real?”

The man stood straighter. “I certainly am.” He inclined his head. “I am Keagan Thatcher. Young sir, I’m as much a druid as my predecessors, part of an ancient order devoted to the love of the land, sky and sea.”

“Much like the shamans in Brazil,” Nala added.

“They are involved at a deep level with the world around them and follow a path that respects and protects the natural world and its unseen power. They hold trees as sacred, especially oak. It’s in my father’s notes,” Rhyll finished, then turned back to the druid. “We released three women earlier. I believe they are wiccans. Anyone you know?”

“Ah, good. I’m glad they are well. We were nabbed on our way to Stonehenge early last night,” Keagan said. “But many more were successful.”

“This would be for the preparations for Samhain? I nearly forgot the date.” Rhyll turned to the others. “Other-

wise known as Halloween; hence the decorations we saw in the town."

"You went into town?" Dan looked surprised.

"And a good festival it will be," Keagan continued. "You would do us all a great honour to attend with us."

"I have to get to Glastonbury Tor as soon as possible. Will you be alright from here?" Rhyll stood at the threshold of the opened door.

"These soldiers ..."

"Are no longer a concern to anyone, at least not between here and Stonehenge."

"Ah. Then yes. I will be alright. I was born and bred in the area." He stepped outside, unperturbed by the rain.

Rhyll put a hand on his arm. "Before you go, I should warn you ... Have you heard of this death wave?"

"Death wave?" Keagan turned back.

"This supposed infection — the reason for the quarantine."

"Ah. Yes, I am aware of it."

"And it obviously doesn't bother you. What's your understanding of it?"

Keagan considered his words. "This 'death wave' is but another cycle of the Great Spirit. All living things including mankind are at *your* mercy. Some will survive, some will not. For those that pass beyond the veil, their spirit, their essence will continue in another cycle sometime in the future."

"Well, it's here now. You'll be pleased to know you're immune. I can't say how it will affect anyone you know."

"I understand, and it is a tragedy no doubt, yet a necessity. The cycle must continue." With that, Keagan bowed once more and left, striding boldly down the centre of the road towards the gate.

"I think I like him," Nala announced.

“Yeah. I’m sure he’s the life of the party. When were you in town?” Dan asked from the shelter of the doorway.

“Having a bit of fomo?” Nala teased.



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