
Episode 7: The Charm Dis- solves Apace

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From set *Lorwyn Eclipsed*

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A belling cry echoed through the cascading night, sweet and strange. It sounded like a dawn chorus compressed into a single, echoing column of sound, all the minutia of a morning distilled until they became a long, clear, utterly inescapable note. Kirol, Lluwen, and Sanar stopped where they were, the body of Isilu still between them and the rest of their allies. All around the field, the battles between kithkin and elves ground to a halt, some combatants freezing while others dropped their weapons and fell to their knees, turning toward the daylight cry.

Oko dropped out of the air, shifting shapes and sizes as he fell, so that what had been a plummeting faerie no larger than a hand landed as a man the size of an elf or human, his face streaked with green and his bare chest framed by the tatters of his vest. He turned toward the sound, hope and grief mingled in his expression.

“Now?” he said. “You would come to us now?”

On the other side of Isilu, Rhys looked up from where he knelt beside the unmoving form of Maralen, whose breath had grown ever shallower and weaker as the minutes slipped away from her. Ajani still knelt nearby next to Tam, his hands glowing a lambent white like his bones were filled with fireflies. Their gleam was second only to Ashling’s, who clutched her stolen spear and watched the horizon, her flames flickering blue and red as the belling sound washed over her.

And Isilu, great beast of the night, lifted its head.

A golden glow appeared on the horizon, growing brighter and brighter before rising like the sun, and Eirdu appeared. The day elemental loped into view with the long, unhurried stride of an unthreatened animal, moving easily on its six legs, the sun above its head gleaming through the depths of Isilu’s night. Where the rays fell, the pooling shadows were beaten back, replaced by the brilliant sun of Lorwyn. Its long, thorny tail lacked its counterpart’s weight, but it still dragged daylight in its wake. It passed, and the balance between night and day swung back toward the sunlit hours.

Oko danced back from the light, seeking sanctuary in the pooling shadows that still remained and dotted the field like petals fallen from a blackened rose.

A small figure flew alongside Eirdu, brown wings spread wide as it circled the day elemental’s head. The shape of this second creature was unfamiliar to those of Lorwyn-Shadowmoor, but Kirol brightened and straightened, waving their arms over their head like they were trying to flag down a flying carriage.

“Abigale!” they shouted. “Abigale! Over here!”

“She can’t hear you, you know,” said Sanar.

“Yeah,” said Kirol, joy overflowing their tone. “But she’s *alive* ! She’ll see me waving her down!”

That seemed less than certain, given the brilliance of the light coming off of the slowly approaching Eirdu. Abigale’s eyes were amber, marking her as a crepuscular owlin, adapted to the light of morning and evenings, not the bright clean light of day. But she flew closer and closer, and Eirdu approached, ponderous and inevitable.

The light reached the trio. Sanar grabbed Kirol’s arm, causing them to jump, and nodded meaningfully toward the vial of dawnglow in their hand. Kirol followed his gaze, then blinked.

“We have to go,” they said.

“Yes,” agreed Sanar.

“Where are we going?” asked Lluwen.

“To save the queen,” said Kirol.

Lluwen looked utterly bemused. “I thought we were going to *see* the queen,” he said.

“We can do both,” said Kirol, turning away from the sight of Abigale and Eirdu and heading back the way they had initially come.

Oko stepped out of the shadows as they ran. “Did you get it?” he demanded.

“We did,” said Kirol, holding up the vial.

Oko barely seemed to move as he snatched it away. He simply held the precious poison, fingers wrapped tight around the glass. He bowed to the trio, almost mockingly, and threw himself back into the air, wings keeping his suddenly diminutive form aloft. The vial of dawnglow was almost larger than he was as he spun in the air and zipped away, quickly disappearing into the shadows around Isilu.

The three of them stared for a moment.

“Who was that?” asked Lluwen.

“A long story,” said Kirol. “Come on.”

They continued on their way, moving with less urgency now that hope was lost—or stolen, as it were.

Ajani tensed but didn’t flinch as Oko dropped out of the air in front of him, once more human in size as he landed on the heels of his leather-clad feet. He barely spared a glance for Tam as he thrust the vial he carried toward the leonin Planeswalker.

“My sister,” he said, voice imperious and cold. “Save her.”

“I’m busy trying to save the girl,” said Ajani. “It shouldn’t be so hard. It’s like the natural patterns of healing can’t catch hold of her injuries. It was just an arrow. I’ve unmade the damage an arrow can do ten times over, and yet she keeps bleeding. See to your sister yourself.”

“The magic of Lorwyn-Shadowmoor is fed by story,” said Oko. “The story we’re in right now is one of death and damage and terrible sacrifice. If you want her to live, you have to save the queen.”

“I fear the queen may be past saving,” said Rhys.

Oko’s head snapped around, eyes widening for an instant before he threw himself across the gulf between them, dropping to his knees next to Maralen. “No,” he said. “No. I refuse. This isn’t how my little sister’s story ends. She’s *mine* now that I’ve found her, and I won’t let her slip away from me. I

won't fail her. I remember ... Creatures of Shadowmoor aren't meant to remember who we are by day, but I do, and I know the other me failed his son. He had a son, and he failed him. He's failed every lover he's ever taken. We both failed our mother-maker when we ran away. Night or day, I refuse to fail my sister. She, alone, shall hold the whole of my success."

He moved closer, easing one hand under the motionless Maralen's head, and uncapped the vial of dawnglow with a flick of his thumb as he leaned toward her. Rhys leaned back, making no move to stop him, and Oko shot him a narrow-eyed glance.

"What a cruel world, to force one such as I to play the hero," Oko said and brought the vial to her lips, tilting it with the utmost care so that only a few drops fell into her mouth.



Art by: Quintin Gleim

Maralen was past swallowing, but the liquid rolled down her tongue to drop into her throat, trickling onward until she coughed, the sound small and weak and audible only because she had been so silent until that point; when set against her previous silence, it was the loudest thing in the world.

"Good girl," said Oko. He tilted the vial a little farther up, dripping more dawnglow into her mouth.

This time Maralen swallowed under her own power, and her eyes fluttered open, filled with a bright, golden greed. She raised one hand, moving it as if to force the vial closer to her mouth, and Oko pushed it gently down again. She didn't have the strength to fight him.

"Quiet," he said and kept dripping dawnglow into her mouth. She kept swallowing, the gold in her eyes dimming as it swirled with twilight purples and blues. "You're hurt. You need to go slowly."

Maralen swallowed, frowning, and made no further attempts at the vial. Her eyes fluttered shut again. The cut on her arm still wept petals, but they were slowing, and in their place the wound began to leak a thick golden sap, laced with lines of bloody red. Oko looked at this and nodded, content, before he turned his attention to Rhys.

"She's not our mother-maker. She's not Oona reborn. She's not the sister I left behind, either. She's Maralen of the Mornsong, always and ever, and everything that means. No matter how she changes,

she'll never be fully fae again, any more than I will. I'm only sorry she didn't have the same choice in the matter that I did. I'm only sorry she never got to run."

"Are you going to transform me into something I'm not supposed to be now?" asked Rhys, who had seen what Oko made of the elf hunter that had tried to attack them all before.

Oko shook his head. "You're already something you're not supposed to be, betrayer of my sister," he said. "You're alive. That should have changed long ago, but I'm not going to be the one who changes it now. You thought you were destroying a tyrant, and that, at least, I can respect."

There was a thunderous drumming of feet as Kirol, Lluwen, and Sanar ran around the flank of the night elemental and came skidding to a halt, panting and staring at the scene in front of them. Maralen had raised her hand again, cupping it around Oko's and pulling the vial closer to her lips. This time he let her, although he looked at her face and chuckled.

"Greedy," he half-chided and tipped the vial to make it easier. More than half the dawnglow was gone, and still she drank.

Apparently, deciding that Oko had things well in hand, Kirol and Sanar turned to Ajani and Tam, moving to kneel beside Ajani as he continued struggling to heal her. Lluwen, meanwhile, continued staring at Oko.

Oko lifted an eyebrow. "Yes?" he asked.

"I don't know you," said Lluwen.

"Of course you don't," said Oko. "You're an elf."

"But I feel like I should know you."

Oko smirked. "Everyone should know me," he said. "I'm the most important person this plane has ever produced."

"If you say so," said Lluwen. "Is the lady going to be all right?"

"The 'lady' is my sister, Maralen of the Mornsong, queen of the faeries of Lorwyn-Shadowmoor, an elf in image only," said Oko. "And yes, she's going to be all right, if the way she's trying to break my wrist is any indication."

He shot Maralen a sour look. She crossed her eyes at him and kept drinking. The dawnglow was almost gone, and the wound on her arm was simply bleeding now, red as garnets or rubies, all traces of flower petals washed away.

"That's enough," he said and pulled the vial away, the last few drops of dawnglow glimmering in the bottom. She squeaked displeasure but let him go, and he straightened, turning to Ajani.

"The girl's magic fights you," he said. "She was wounded in the night, and I can hear the day approaching. Would the essence of dawn help?"

"It might," said Ajani, sounding haggard.

Oko moved toward him. "I offer this only because Maralen doesn't need it and it's better not to let the night's gifts go to waste," he said. "Don't mistake practicality for kindness."

"I would never," said Ajani. He took the vial, tipping its contents out over Tam's wound, and placed his hands atop the injury once again, the glow brightening.

Sanar and Kirol watched, eyes wide.

“I feel so helpless,” said Sanar.

“It’s better than making Tam explode,” replied Kirol.

In the distance, Eirdu belled again, and the first rays of daylight brushed across their faces.

Isilu raised its head and chuffed, the sound soft as a winter wind. Then, laboriously, it stood, looming over them all, and Rhys winced.

“If the elementals fight, we’ll be crushed,” he said.

Ashling, who had been quiet for too long, turned her face toward the approaching day, shoulders relaxing slightly. “The battle ends; the morning comes,” she said. “The Mornsong will be sung again.”

Eirdu belled, and Isilu answered, the calls of the two elementals forming a shivering liminal harmony, dawn and dusk, daybreak and twilight.

And Eirdu came ever closer.

Eirdu approached, and Isilu rose, tail flicking. The night elemental didn’t move as Abigale flew down and landed by Kirol and Sanar, signing a quick hello. It didn’t move as Eirdu bowed, paws splayed out before it and head low to the ground, the sun at its crown dazzling them all.

Then Isilu returned the bow and pounced. The two elementals began to wrestle, moving away from the smaller bipeds, play-fighting with exquisite care. Maralen, pulling herself unsteadily to her feet, gasped.



Art by: Justin Gerard

“The balance is here,” she said.

Oko put an arm around her shoulders, holding her up. “The balance has always been here,” he said. “People like our maker are just too small to see it.”

The two elementals broke apart from one another and began to circle for all the world to see, like big cats trying to find the advantage over one another. Eirdu paused and leaned down to put its head very

near to Tam, then breathed on her, a great gust of summer afternoon, filled with the warm smells of sunbaked grass and blooming wildflowers. The drops of dawnglow fed into her wound flared purple and gold, eclipsing the glow from Ajani's hands, and she sat up, coughing, only to fall down again as Sanar flung himself at her, arms wrapped tight around her neck. Her hair writhed as she hit the ground, echoing her surprise, but in the end she closed her eyes and hugged him back.

Eirdu and Isilu continued to circle, one of them occasionally feinting forward, the other stepping mockingly back. Kirol straightened and focused on Abigale.

"What happened?" they asked.

Abigale flattened her facial feathers in acknowledgment, signing, *I fell into the river, and the water pulled me away before I could get out again. It was very frightening, but I was able to make a bubble so I could breathe. I relaxed and let the water take me. It took me to the merfolk. The day elemental—Eirdu—was with them, sleeping, and they were guarding it. As long as they stayed close, they didn't change, however hard the night fell around them. They stayed the same. That seemed to matter to them. They have no continuity of memory between night and day, and it shatters their stories so.*

"But what *happened*?" asked Kirol.

She looked at them, the feathers atop her head rising to show her irritation and kept signing. *That's what I'm trying to tell you. Can you just listen?*

"Sorry," said Kirol.

Abigale gestured to where the elementals continued to circle and play-fight with one another. *Eirdu was sleeping. They brought me to it, and it smelled Isilu on my clothing. It woke, then began to follow me as I moved to leave the waters. The merfolk realized it was moving to fix the imbalances, and they traveled with us as we made our way back up the river toward where I had been lost. From there, Eirdu left the water, and it was my turn to follow it, all the way to this battlefield. What happened here?*

"The elves tried to poison Isilu to bring about an eternal day," said Kirol. "They made me help them get the poison, but my new friend Lulu helped me get it back."

Ah, signed Abigale.

Tam, meanwhile, had stopped embracing Sanar and was getting to her feet, the smaller goblin staying close as she did, like he was ready to catch her if she fell. Ajani also rose, looking thoroughly exhausted. He swayed as he moved to stand near Ashling, who offered him a polite, ever-burning nod.

"Is the battle ended?" she asked.

"It seems to be," said Ajani, looking around them. The elves had retreated, some still of Lorwyn, others gone to Shadowmoor, and now the two types of kithkin eyed one another with unending suspicion, pacing their boundary lines and staring at each other but making no efforts to attack. Most eyes were on the two elementals as they circled, their feints tearing divots in the ground but never striking the wounded or the fallen. They moved with purpose, seeming to respect their surroundings in some indefinable way. It was beautiful. It was impossible.

It was a dance, and as they danced, Eirdu nuzzled Isilu's face. Isilu responded by yawning enormously and pawing at the ground before turning and beginning to move back the way it had come, toward the kithkin village and the woods beyond, where the dolmen gate to its cavern could be found. Oko smiled, watching the spilled darkness on the ground unfurl like ribbons and trail behind the night elemental, leaving twilight.

As the ribbons of night unwound, the transformed kithkin returned to their original states. The fallen remained on the ground, but changed all the same, only to be gathered close by their weeping kinfolk. The elves who had gone to their thorn-topped Shadowmoor selves transformed back and looked with confusion at the scene around them.

The elk standing at the edge of the battlefield remained exactly as it was, ears twitching anxiously as it watched the former combatants looking around themselves. One of the elves picked up a fallen bow and took aim at the elk, which turned and raced away, leaving the scene behind.

Maralen stepped away from Oko, eyes still streaked with dawn as she turned to face him. “You came back,” she said in a very small voice. “I didn’t think you were ever coming back.”

“I don’t apologize,” cautioned Oko.

“I didn’t ask you to,” she said. “I’m just glad you’re here.” She turned to the bruised, bewildered others and said, “I was made with morning in my veins. Now, I have twilight and dawn intermingled there as well, and I can see it all so clearly. The night elemental awoke because your strange dreams hurt it. It intended no harm. The elves ... They fight the balance because it’s their nature. Because everything must be opposed on some level. We can’t punish them for following their natures.”

“You could punish me,” said Rhys, voice small. Maralen turned to face him. His illusions had failed when the day replaced the night; his broken horns were clearly visible, the reminder of what he had paid to save the world, when heroism had been so much easier to see and understand, as straightforward as a season, as inevitable as the dawn.

“I don’t want to punish you,” said Maralen. “You’re my friend. You’ve always been there for me. I don’t—you only did what I asked you to do.”

“I kept my word,” said Rhys. “It killed me to strike you, but I kept my word.”

“Yes,” said Maralen with sudden alarm. “You need to make me a new promise, Rhys. Your old one—I can’t feel it anymore. You’re no longer bound to my magic.”

“We can be friends without being bound to one another, if you can ever trust me again.”

“She speaks a different truth,” said Ashling, stepping up on Maralen’s other side. “You are an elf, born of Lorwyn, Rhys the hunter. Your season is a short one, your blooming shorter still.”

Rhys looked momentarily confused, then returned his attention to Maralen. “Is she saying that without being bound to your magic, I’ll die?”

“Yes,” said Maralen miserably.

To her enormous surprise, Rhys moved toward her, wrapping his arms tight around her shoulders as he pulled her into an embrace. Oko flinched away. Maralen frowned, but cautiously embraced him back.

“Thank you,” said Rhys. He released her, stepping back. “Thank you. Thank you.”

“Touch her again and learn what it’s like to walk on four legs,” said Oko, voice cool.

“No,” said Maralen.

“It won’t be necessary,” said Rhys. “But thank you for telling me.”

“No,” said Maralen again.

Tam, who had been watching all this unfold, frowned. “What’s going on?” she asked, voice low.

“Her magic has been sustaining Rhys for a long time,” said Sanar. He reached up and took Tam’s hand. “It isn’t doing that anymore.”

“What does that me—” Tam stopped as Eirdu, who had been watching Isilu walk away, sat down behind Rhys and the others, leaning its massive head down toward the elf.

Rhys looked at it, then leaned up onto the tips of his hooves, closing his eyes as he touched his forehead to the elemental’s.

“Thank you, Eirdu, for your warmth and your light,” he said. “Thank you, Maralen, for your friendship and your hand. And thank you, all of you, for saving her.” He opened his eyes as he turned away from the elemental.



Art by: Kai Carpenter

“I’ll be going now,” he said, and the wind began to blow him away. His body came apart in flower petals, dawnglove and moonglove and apple blossom, each one leaving him a little paler and more faded than the last, until he was gone and Eirdu sat alone.

Maralen gave a sharp, disbelieving sob, whirling around to face Oko. He leaned away, as if expecting a strike—but she threw her arms around him instead. “He’s gone because it was time for him to go, and I didn’t need him any longer,” she said, voice thick with tears. “I can rule as myself, unafraid. Unless—you were going to stay and help? You were always meant to rule.”

A sly grin. “They’d like that, wouldn’t they? The poor little populace of this place. But I love my freedom too much to be confined. And *I* get to decide what I’m meant for. Not Oona.”

Maralen nodded. “I understand,” she said. “But no matter what, you’ll always have a home in Glen Elendra.” She looked back toward where Rhys had been. “I don’t like to be alone.”

Though he had looked awkward in their hug, Oko took her hand now, holding it tight.

Maralen turned to look up at him, smiling and sorrowful at the same time, like night and day together. “Now what’s this about your son? What have you done, brother?”

Ajani moved to stand behind the students he'd come to find. "It's time to go," he said, voice pitched low. "Follow me."

And they did.

Lluwen slipped into the trees, unnoticed, breathing hard as he followed the white lion-man and the four students at a safe distance. All of this, turning against his high perfect, and they were just going to leave him behind like he was nothing? Like none of it had mattered? The balance was restored, but the damage its disruption had done was still there. He had to get away. Wherever these strange new people had come from, it was going to be good enough for him.

Tam seemed fully recovered from her wounds. She walked close to Ajani, Sanar at her other side, while Kirol and Abigale brought up the rear of their little assemblage.

"This Omenpath is stable, for now," said Ajani. "It will take us to Shandalar, where there's another Omenpath back to Arcavios. Tam and your classmate Alandra are from there, and Alandra's father will assist us if there's any trouble in the passage. Is this everyone?"

"No," said Lluwen, stepping out of the trees. They turned to look at him, and he had a moment to regret that he wasn't more presentable. He was ruffled and dirty from the fight—but so were all of them. Maybe perfection and beauty could be subjective from time to time. "You're forgetting me."

"You're not one of the students I was sent to find," said Ajani.

"No," said Lluwen. "But I helped one of the students, and if I stay here, they will kill me."

"Yeah, that perfect lady is for sure going to kill him," said Kirol.

"You'd be traveling to a school," said Ajani. "You'd be expected to take classes, and keep an open mind ..."

"The cross-planar student program is still taking admissions," said Tam. "He could probably enroll there. In exchange for everything he knows about this plane, I'm sure they'd grant him a scholarship."

Lluwen looked hopefully at Ajani.

Ajani sighed. "If Liliana kicks you right back through the Omenpath, it's not my problem," he said. "Everyone, come along."

They walked toward a strange geometric outline in the nearby trees, one that clashed with the spiral patterns worked into the landscape around it. From there, they walked through and were gone.

In the distance, Eirdu cried, the sound sweet and wild as it belled across the hills and shadowed forests of Lorwyn.

The journey through the Omenpath was simple enough: they walked through cascades of light, prismatic and strange, until they emerged on a coastal road, the sea stretching out before them in an endless sheet of roiling blue. It was only a few shades darker than the sky. Looking up, Tam gasped audibly.

Ajani's hand settled on her shoulder. "It is wonderful to be home, isn't it?"

She looked up at him, smiling weakly. "It is."

Lluwen was just staring. "This is ..."

“A whole new world,” said Kirol. “Welcome to the Multiverse, Lulu.”

Lluwen shook his head and allowed himself to be pulled along as the group resumed their journey.

The walk to the Arcavios Omenpath was simple enough and took a little over an hour. By the time they got there, Sanar was listing everything he intended to eat when they got home, to everyone else’s tolerant amusement. The Omenpath appeared ahead of them, and Abigale paused, signing something.

The echo of her words penetrated their thoughts a moment later: *Are we in trouble?*

“No,” said Ajani. “Not at all. Now come along.”

Together, they walked into the cascading light, and another world was left behind.

“You are in so much trouble, young lady,” said Liliana, seated behind her desk and glaring at Tam. “I thought endlessly better of you than this.”

“It was an accident,” said Tam, clearly more terrified to be scolded by a professor than she had been by any of the near-death experiences of Lorwyn. “There’s no need to take any academic measures. It won’t happen again, I promise.”

“You’re *certainly* right about that. Because next time, I’m *not* going to ask Goldmane for another favor, I’m just leaving you wherever you end up! There are far more dangerous places in this Multiverse than Lorwyn, and from what I’ve been told, your time there was dangerous enough. Count yourself lucky that all you came back with was a good story and a strange elf. Encounters with that bastard Oko rarely end that well for anyone but him.”

“Yes, Professor Vess. I’ll be more careful.”

“See to it that you are,” said Liliana. “You can go now.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Tam, and she fled.

Liliana sighed and rubbed her temples. All of this *caring* for *others* —it wore on you. She’d meant to scare all of them, but Tam seemed to startle even more than the others had. *She’s a smart one*, Liliana thought. *Bit of a teacher’s pet, though. She’ll have to toughen up, learn to think for herself.*

Someone knocked on the office door, a firm but polite rap that brought Liliana’s head up in surprise. No one knocked like that. Her students tapped anxiously, her peers didn’t knock at all, and her rare guests, like Ajani, knocked more briskly.

Cautious, she rose and moved across the office, straightening her jacket as she went. She opened the door with an easy tug and froze, staring at the woman at her threshold.

She was tall, with broad shoulders and a figure accentuated by the tight fabric of her tailored white gown and corset. Her black hair fell around her shoulders in loose waves too perfect to be anything but calculated, and she was smiling a warm, almost sisterly smile.

Worse yet, she was doing it with Liliana’s own lips.

Liliana could only stare as the white-clad version of herself stepped past her into the office, pausing to lay a hand briefly across Liliana’s own and say, in a soft voice, “Maybe close the door, dear. We need to have a conversation.”

The door swung shut with a sound like a tomb closing, and everything was silence.