

THE BALANCE BRINGER CHRONICLES
A SPECIAL CHARACTER-VIEW FEATURE



BECOMING

THE BALANCE BRINGER



FIRST SIGHT
THE MARKETPLACE SCENE

JADEN'S POINT OF VIEW

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The Marketplace

All the years of expecting, perceiving, and preparing and still... My stomach burns and churns. A war of swords and axes beat and batter the inside of my chest.

What if I'm not ready? What if I'm not good enough—Good enough for her?

Her.

The mere thought of her warms my core like melted wax. Soft, soothing, and ceaseless. Soon I will be able to look upon her brilliant smile, not with my mind's eye but, with my actual eyes. True and touchable.

I have waited a lifetime for this moment. I had almost allowed fear to creep inside my head. Fear that this time would never come. Fear that my connection to her was a figment of my imagination, an anomaly born out of a need to be like the others. But thanks be to Gaea, our connection is real, and the time is finally here. We finally both walk in the same world. Strange as it may be—the world, that is. This place lacks in color and depth but is rich in aroma and objectionable clamor.

People haggle on my left in a square crammed with faded colored glass. The strong smell of butter and corn lingers on my left, and next to that, the salty tang of dried meats. This marketplace is truly peculiar while holding similarities to the bazaars of home. So many times, I have watched her come to the place, work at this place, and now, I am here too. Somewhere among all these pushy, ignorant, rude subjects I will find the princess, utterly oblivious to her status and calling.

Princess.

What if I'm not what she needs or wants?

“Stop it.” Intended for my ears only, the words seethe through clenched teeth.

I push my way past an arguing couple and a group of overly excited children. There are more people shoving through the street of this market than the number of souls residing in my home village.

“Hey, you there, sir,” a man calls out. I pause, turn, and give him my attention. He holds up a bundle of dried meat. It's wrapped in something clear. Something I believe I've heard called plastic. We have something similar back home, except it's

clearer, more resilient and not called plastic. “Can I interest you in some of the finest beef jerky around?”

Food. My body will require some soon. I will need to find a trader soon. Someplace where I can trade goods for currency fit for this world. I will have need for food and lodging and she may have needs, as well, when the time comes.

My gaze wanders from the meat trader’s eager face to the food held in his hand. My stomach constricts, as if a rope has been tightened around my waist. My spine tingles, tugs back. It’s not hunger that I feel, but something different, something new to me. I spin around, search my surroundings, and stop stunned-still.

She’s there, mere feet from where I stand. The princess Anala.

The air leaves my lungs. All my thoughts, my careful plans, abandoned me. I feel stripped of my wit and bravery.

I am not ready.

I rack my hand through my hair, shake my head, and look away. Look to the side as if I expect to find my strength standing beside me, waiting to be ceased.

“Don’t be a spineless fool. You’re better than this,” I mumble to myself, then inhale deep. When I exhale, I expel all weak and reluctant thoughts. With the next breath, I let Gaea’s energy surge through me and ground me in this unfamiliar world.

I take one reluctant step after another, each one pulling me closer to her. I travel as far as the bread peddler then I stop cold in my tracks. Ryland Norde Sorlonte Raine stands a mere arm length from her reach.

Ryland Raine, her half-brother, reluctant royal, and without question, her devote protector.

Over the last two years, I have watched him work his way back into her life. It didn’t take me long to realize Anala didn’t remember him, or maybe it would be more accurate to say she has yet to fit the pieces of her history together. He has always been in her life, watching over her, guiding her.

I shift my weight and will myself to move but my feet refuse to obey. I need time, a moment or two, to ready myself. For it is no longer only the princess to whom I must introduce myself, but the trained warrior working along side her.

She smiles while she works, her fingers busy creating art out of another maiden’s hair. And when she’s done, she’s giving directions and conversing with her sister. For a single heartbeat I miss my brother, and then the feeling is gone. I will see him again and I shall not let him taint this moment for which I have waited and waited.

The instant Anala looks up and across the crowd, locking eyes with mine, it's like being slammed in the chest with a five-hundred-pound shield. The sensation burns my skin, vibrates through my blood, and rattles my teeth. If I live to be a million years old, I never want the feeling to end.

Recognition trickles off her and reaches for me in long spindly threads.

She takes a tentative step toward me and I instinctively smile. Yet I wonder...

Her recognition of me was a trickle, not a wave or even a stream. We had shared so much when we were young. We had essentially grown up together. She was there when I had learned to ride a horse—fell off, actually. And I had been there when she had seen her first pixie. She had been only three at the time and I had been six. But pixies are rare in this world and back then she had a tendency to forget. Forget the magic. Forget to believe. Later, after years had passed and we were deeply engaged in maneuvering our paths through the pains of growth, I had blocked her from seeing my life. I know I should not have done so, but shame had controlled my conduct.

That had been several years ago and now I sense, by the weakness in her recognition, that my actions had been a mistake. A huge, terrible mistake. But one I hope to find fixable.

Without a thought of hesitation, I wish her to remember our connection. The memories of our time together spin forward, pull together, and shoot straight toward her like a blow dart. Invisible to everyone around us but if her mind is open and receptive she will see.

She freezes yet continues to stare at me.

My chest warms. She is receptive, I can feel her acceptance. I also sense her...fear, anxiety, confusion.

My heart quickens. This is not how things were supposed to happen.

She blinks, starts shaking her head, and dread that I have destroyed our first encounter wallops me in the gut. I shift awkwardly and shove my hands in my pockets. A ridiculous, uncontrollable smile crowds my face. It is a smile of embarrassment. A smile that likely makes me look like a fool. I could have done *this* far better than I have. And now, there is no undoing what has been done.

She spins away, turning her back on me, her hair flaring out like a thousand strands of gold.

My heart drops to my toes. *I messed up*. I should go to her. Explain everything, if I can.

She trips.

I grit my teeth, make move to go to her aid.

She almost falls to the ground, but Ryland Raine is quick to step in and restore her balance.

At the sight of Ryland's quick save and the concern etched on his face, I hesitate.

"O.M.G. Would you look at her? It's like she was put on this earth wholly to entertain us with her absurdity."

My head snaps in the direction of the winey insult and my search finds the dark-haired girl that has given the princess more heartache over the years than I care to count. She giggles and points at Anala.

"Yeah," her companion says. "Such an idiot."

My eyes sting, head and belly burns, as if I have fallen victim to an ale illness. I don't want to hear the negativity directed at Anala, nor do I want her to be the object of anyone's bitterness.

The maidens are on a direct path to Anala and in that split second, I see what will come to past should they cross the distance currently standing between them and their target. Both insults and flowers will be thrown at the princess. Anala will hide, not wanting anyone to see her cry. And her sister will jump in defensively, at which the hint of an oncoming fight will spark, drawing Ryland into the involved circle. It will turn into an ugly scene and everyone will end up upset, even if they choose not to admit as such.

I can't let what I have seen become a reality. I have been given my ability for a reason. I'd be best suited to heed the warning my gift has created. With a sigh, I analyze the situation.

The maidens fail to watch where they are walking. They are making tracks for Anala but are too busy ogling and laughing at her to notice their path is not completely clear. The dark-haired maiden, the one I know as Skylar, bumps into me. The fault is mine. I moved forward and made sure we collided. My body stiffens, but I do not recoil. An opportunity has presented itself and I aim to take advantage of the chance provided.

Startled, the Skylar maiden jerks and looks up. "Oh," the word escapes her lips in a tiny whiff of air. She does not avert her stare but continues to gaze up at me.

I appear to have knocked her vocal cords loose. I return her ogle with the most pleasing of smiles I can muster. "My apologies," I say, with a tight bow of my head. "I should watch where I am going."

The sound of my voice appears to animate her. She quickly exchanges a strange and curious look with the other maiden before turning and addressing me.

“You are simply too gorgeous. I must have mistaken you for a mirage or something. The collision is completely my fault.” Her eyes bat a multitude of times and her palm curves to my bicep, lingering a moment before glide excruciatingly slow down my arm. “Let me make it up to you.”

I raise a brow and quickly take stock of the options. Standing here busying the maidens in conversation may keep them away from Anala but I am not ready for her to witness my sorry attempt at sparing her possible humiliation. “You make an interesting suggestion,” I say, turning away from Anala’s flower stand and motioning for the maidens to join me. “What did you have in mind?”

“Oh, I’m sure I could think of something.” Skylar follows my lead without a single qualm. Within a few moments, she has wrapped her arm around mine and is attempting to meld her body to the side of my own. The maiden lacks decency.

I stifle a groan and glance over my shoulder to the princess. From her stature, I suspect she is looking for me, searching the spot in which I stood a few short moments ago. The knowledge alone, that she chooses to seek me out, creates a warm buzz in my chest. At her side is where I want to be, not here, entertaining rude, catty maidens. But from everything I have learned, sometimes small events hold more weight than expected and push us in directions we fail to understand. At this time and place, I suspect this is what I am meant to do—keep the princesses oppressor at bay and allow room for the Balance Bringer’s strength to grow.

The Skylar maiden continues to babble, leaving me little to no need to engage in the art of conversation.

Although I already know Anala’s every expression and every tendency, I stare at her, casting her image to memory. *You now have more than one protector looking out for you in this world. I promise I’ll see you soon, Anala.*

I sigh and return my attention to the jabbering Skylar. Nothing but meaningless dribble drips from her lips. Trying not to be terribly conspicuous, I close my eyes and use my inner eye to try and determine when I will see the princess next.

“You were staring at her freaky birthmark, weren’t you?” Skylar asks, yanking my thoughts into the present.

“What?” For a moment, I am confused by her question and then I realize to what she is referring.

“It’s an ugly thing,” she continues. “Most people stare the first time they see her. People can’t help it, you know. It’s just there, on her face.” She fans her hand out and makes an odd motion as if to reference the princess’s warrior marking.

The mark is one of strength and commitment. I find it rather exquisite and alluring. I can't imagine anyone other than the weak thinking otherwise. I heave deep and press my lips together tight.

I don't like it, but I suspect...no...I know this deception I have started with Anala's oppressor will require more time than I had intended. I hope, when this is all over, the princess will be able to find a way to forgive me.

My shoulders droop. I pat Skylar's hand, hold her at my side, and continue to walk away from my reason for being here, in this world—the princess Anala.

The End.



Dear reader,

*I hope you thoroughly enjoyed reading this scene from Jaden's point of view. Maybe seeing things as he does, helped shed some light on a few things...like how the heck did he end up with Skylar! Am I right? If you are having trouble remembering the scene at the Market Place, you can find Ana's version of the event in chapter three of *Becoming: The Balance Bringer*.*

*Are you interested in reading other scenes from the point of view of other characters? Feel free to drop me a message and let me know your thoughts. I will happily consider creating other scenes for future projects. You can message me on Facebook or email me at debra@debrakristi.com and, of course, you can always watch my website www.debrakristi.com for updates on *The Balance Bringer Chronicles*.*

Have a beautiful and most magical day!

Debra Kristi