

# Chapter 11: Victorious Return

## Raimie

The great stone doors of Tiro cracked open loudly in the forest's quiet, and on seeing the city peeking from in between them, I grinned at Rhylix... or Ryvolim, I supposed. He smiled back before heading toward the opening, but I couldn't blame him for his rush. My friend had a difficult task to accomplish today: reaching Ren before she heard about his death, and I wished him luck with it.

I was surprised that she wasn't here to greet us. Ren had put up *such* a fuss about us capturing Da'kul without her, so I'd expected that she'd be waiting when we returned, eager to chew us out again. Honestly, I'd kind of been looking forward to it.

Not to her berating me, of course. That sort of thing was never fun, but I did like watching her face when she was exasperated. She got so *expressive* sometimes, a fascinating picture to watch.

Besides, her exasperation this time hadn't been coming from a place of spite or hate. It had been born out of worry, both for her brother and for me.

That last fact still surprised me at times.

*Why should it?* came from the depths of me. *You two have been NAUSEATING over the last few months, despite Oswin's warnings. By now, it should be obvious that she cares for you.*

Chuckling, I hurried after... Ryvolim with said spy trailing me.

*Yes, I said. Doesn't change the fact that it surprises me.*

As I passed through the doors, they creaked closed behind me, which made me wince. Tiro looked the same as always: cramped, worn-down and yet, oh-so-wonderful. True, I'd learned how much I disliked close-quarters over the last two months, spent in this city, but even now, the ingenuity that had created this place helped to alleviate my crawling skin while here.

Still. It wouldn't be long before I was itching to climb the lattice that hid this city from view, there to feel the free air and spend a few moments watching the stars. I'd spent enough time there over the winter, clearing off the snow gathered on it, and while completing that chore for Tiro hadn't helped much when it came to its citizens' disposition toward me, it had made them slightly less...

antagonistic.

My victory on the beach earlier in the fall had probably helped with that as well.

None of that was to say that Tiro's citizens *hated* me, not anymore. For the moment, they'd settled into neutral indifference and honestly? I was fine with that.

For now, I had other things to do than enjoy a moment of solitude on the terrace above or struggle through social interactions with barely amicable semi-strangers. As quickly as possible, I made my way to Tiro's main square, where my people had been camping over the winter. While walking among them, soldiers occasionally called out greetings to me or Oswin, all of which we returned.

They looked all right. I'd been worried that Tanwadur, Tiro's leader, would renege on our agreement about feeding my people while I was away, but everyone here looked well-fed, if cold. Winter's chill had yet to break, even with the snow slowly melting, so everywhere I looked, people were heavily bundled up, and many fires had been built between the tents in the square.

*I am glad to see our big family so healthy and content, Nylion whispered in my head, although if Tanwadur had broken his promise, it would have shocked me. Much as I do not like him, I have to admit that he seems too caught up in maintaining his reputation to do such a thing. It is good to see that my assessment was not wrong.*

Mmm, was all I said back.

I didn't know why Nylion was so confident about Tanwadur staying in line. To me, that man had always read as shifty, but still, I trusted my other half. He'd always been better than me at noticing danger, especially when it came from other people, so if he said Tanwadur could be trusted, I did my best to believe him.

Still, I hadn't left myself open for him to stab me in the back. That possibility was one of the reasons I'd asked Ren to stay here, rather than having her join us in Da'kul. I'd needed someone I trusted in place, watching a possible source of danger for me.

*You probably should have told her that. She may love Tanwadur like a father, but even she will admit that he does not like you very much, Nylion said. I am not criticizing you about that, mind you! I am merely... commenting.*

With a snort, I shook my head because he was right. I *should* have told Ren why I was leaving her behind, but with how hectic things had gotten before we'd left for Da'kul, it had slipped my mind.

Oh, well. Maybe I could explain it to her when I saw her later.

*You will have to get through the next hour before doing that, Nylion said. Have you decided what you will tell... them?*

As always, a pinch of heated dislike splashed from my other half when he mentioned Eledis and my father, but in the last few months, I'd learned to ignore the sensation, if only because Nylion

insisted that I do so. While I'd love to know why he didn't like my family, respecting his wishes had *always*, in everything, come first for me.

*Not sure yet*, I said. *I'd like to see what they know about... things first.*

I was trying not to think about said 'things'. With me having gone elsewhere at the time—which was a worrying incident all around—Nylion might have been the one to find Rhylix after he'd been attacked, but if I thought too hard about those events, flashes of images from those horrible moments leaked through to me, no matter how much Nylion resisted it. I knew he wanted to shield me from what had happened, but apparently, something about it had badly distressed him too, which had me reluctant to remind him of it.

And of course, I didn't want to remember it for myself as well.

Unfortunately, I wouldn't be able to keep avoiding this for long. As I approached Tanwadur's home, where he'd given my family a room to share, I tried to figure out how I'd explain... things without *saying* anything.

*You know that will not be possible*, Nylion said. *I will be fine, heart of my heart. Do not use me to avoid the problem.*

*Yeah, I know.*

Shaking my head, I rested my hand on the house's front door, but I couldn't make myself push it open. For what felt like forever, I was stuck there, struggling with *what the hell* I should do, but soon enough, someone laid their hand on my shoulder.

"Whatever you tell your family, I'll back you up, sir. You have an ally in this."

Oswin. That was right.

Glancing back at him, I smiled, even if it felt crooked.

"Thanks," I said. "Let's get this over with."

When I walked into my family's room, my father and Eledis were there, thank the gods, and to my great surprise, so was Marcuset, sitting on a stool in the corner. His presence might be a good thing, though. Maybe I'd only have to go through one unavoidably awkward conversation today.

"Raimie! You're back," my father said.

After fighting to get off of his bed, he shuffled to me, and as he wrapped me in a hug, I ignored the faint surge of curdled heat coming from Nylion. Pulling away from me, my father grinned, keeping a tight grip on my arms.

"We heard all about your success from the returning soldiers!" he said. "Taking Da'kul with only two hundred. Who'd have thought it was possible?"

*Us. We did,* Nylion grumbled inside.

With a half-smile, I ducked my head.

“I wasn’t so sure about it myself,” I said. “Thank you, all of you, for trusting me enough to let me try it.”

In his corner, Marcuset shrugged.

“It wasn’t that hard to do. You have yet to steer us wrong,” he said.

At that, I fought to keep my face neutral. Sure, Marcuset might say such encouraging things, but I knew how shaky our relationship had been since the battle on the beach. The risk I’d taken in ‘throwing away our soldiers’ lives’—as the commander had once put it—had been hovering over us in the months since.

Given that, I was grateful for Oswin’s silent presence at my shoulder.

*Yes, he is our ally, like he said,* Nylion whispered. *Always remember that. With him here, we are safe.*

*That’s right,* I said.

No matter how much I hated having a bodyguard, I knew Oswin wouldn’t let anything happen to me.

To this point, Eledis had remained silent, focused on the paper in his hands, and I briefly wondered if it was the report I’d had drafted about our efforts at Da’kul. His lack of even the simplest of greetings didn’t surprise me, though. Much as I might love my grandfather, he’d never been the most affectionate of people.

But I should get into the issue I’d come here to address. Hopefully, I could bring up this subject as delicately as it would require.

Clearing my throat, I said, “There’s something we should-”

As if waiting for that exact moment, Eledis grunted, lowering the report to glance at me.

“What’s this I’m reading about you killing three of the soldiers under your command?” he asked.

...Or he could come right out and say it.

Stiffening, my father dropped his hold on me while Marcuset reared back on his stool.

“You did *what?*” he said in a strangled voice.

Squeezing my eyes closed, I took a moment to rub my face.

“It was a bit more complicated than just ‘killing them’,” I said through my hands. “Maybe you should finish reading about that incident before making any judgments, Eledis.”

Since he’d brought it up so abruptly, I’d let my grandfather take over with explaining what had happened. Right now, I was fighting too much against a need to *throw up* to do the same.

I knew Nylion had only done what he must when it came to protecting Rhylix. He’d never have killed those men if he’d had another choice, and I certainly didn’t blame him for it, but still, I hated having more deaths on my conscience.

One would think that after a battle, where I’d ended far too many lives, I’d be used to this sort of violence, but... I wasn’t. I really, *really* wasn’t.

After only a few tense moments, Eledis said, “Ah.”

Lowering the report, he eyed me appraisingly, and when nothing else came from him, Marcuset clicked his tongue.

“Let me see that,” he said, snatching the paper out of Eledis’ hands.

As he read over what my grandfather had finished, I did my best to ignore how still my father had gone. At my side, he was watching me like I was a monster.

Or no. That wasn’t disgust in his eyes. It was... fear, maybe? Wariness? I wasn’t sure of the best word to describe it.

Marcuset soon finished, choking out a cough as he did, and in his distraction, Eledis took the chance to steal the report back.

“Raimie...” the commander said. “I’m so sorry.”

Well, that didn’t feel good. Why did his sympathy feel like acid, burning through me?

“Would someone please tell me *what the hell* happened?” my father snapped.

Right. I should do that. At the least, it looked like no one else would tackle the task.

“The incident in question occurred after the fight to take Da’kul. That night, I ran across three soldiers attacking another person,” I said. “From what I could tell, they had every intention of beating this man to death, and I couldn’t let that happen. Unfortunately, by the time I arrived, the three soldiers had already been at it for quite a while, and I wasn’t sure how much time their victim had left. I- I badly wanted to save him, so with little time for anything else, I... killed them. That’s what happened.”

“I... see,” my father said.

He took a deep breath, letting tension leak from him, before shaking his head.

“Well, while I can understand what you did, you should have taken those men alive,” he said. “If you had, we could have held a tribunal, getting justice for the victim-”

“That wouldn’t have worked,” Eledis said. “In this incident, justice would never have been served.”

My father cocked his head at Eledis.

“What are you talking about?” he said. “You’ve always insisted that a military’s legal system was fair and just, and I’ve seen proof of that over the years. So, why would holding a tribunal for this incident have been any different?”

Carefully watching me, Marcuset said, “It wouldn’t have worked because of who the victim was.”

Gods, they were trying so hard to keep from saying his name. Was that meant for my benefit?

Even as my father’s eyebrows drew together in confusion, I said, “Rhylix, dad. The victim was Rhylix.”

My father jerked his head toward me with horror painted in his eyes.

“Oh, Raimie...” he said. “I- hell. I’m-”

“It’s fine,” I said, chopping a hand in front of my body.

I couldn’t take their sympathy, not when it was for something that hadn’t actually happened.

*You are right. That part is disconcerting, to say the least, Nylion said. Still, I am enjoying this. It is nice to watch them squirm for once, even if that pleasure is small. I am not sure if it is a good look on the commander, though.*

“In any case,” I said over my other half, “I didn’t kill those soldiers for sentimental reasons alone. Yes, anger was driving me, in part, because Rhylix is...was my friend. Of course I wanted to *hurt* the people killing him.”

For a heartbeat, I couldn’t continue, struggling with the simple task of breathing. Fire had closed my throat, stinging my eyes, and it took me a moment to swallow that heat.

*You see why I did what I did, Nylion whispered. Even if it was in part, like you said.*

Of course I did. I didn’t think I could see it any other way.

*Then, tell them the other reason for my violence.*

“But I also acted out of concern for my own safety,” I made myself continue. “I’m already facing the threat of death from Doldimar and the many Enforcers under his command. I couldn’t add the possibility of people attacking me for my primeancy on top of that. Yes, people may only partially believe the tales of my magic at the moment, but that could change any day now. With such a

great threat presented, I had to shower quick and terrible retribution on the soldiers who would harm my fellow primeancer, lest I face the same threat someday.”

For a moment, Marcuset, my father, and Eledis could only blink at me before the commander released a forced chuckle.

“An eminently practical reason for your actions, right alongside the sentimental,” he said. “That’s very you.”

I didn’t know about that.

“Yes, well. As I said, that’s what happened,” I said, badly wanting to move on, “and it’s why I came here first after arriving. I figured each of you would want an explanation, but unless you have other questions for me about our takeover of Da’kul, I’d like to take care of a few personal matters. May I go or...?”

“Please,” Marcuset said. “I’m sure you need time-”

Never looking up from his continued perusal of the report, Eledis said, “I’m curious about why you left Da’kul’s Overseer alive. Mind explaining that before you go traipsing off elsewhere?”

Oh, gods. Seriously? Eledis might *definitely* be where I’d gotten my lack of social graces from, but even he had to see what a mistake he’d made in delaying someone who was ‘grieving’ from handling their shit.

Or had it been a mistake? I wasn’t really grieving, *and* I should probably finish explaining myself to these people, right? They might need the knowledge I possessed to make further plans, and they were certainly better at seeing the logistics of the things I’d done. I could use the feedback.

Right?

*Raimie. That is patently-* Nylion started.

“If you find it acceptable, sir, I’d be more than happy to finish our story for the last few days,” Oswin said. “As soon as I found you after the battle, I was by your side for the rest of our time in Da’kul. So, I can answer any questions your father or the commander may have, and one of my subordinates should be nearby. She can take over my bodyguard duties while I’m indisposed.”

Right. Oswin. How had I forgotten he was here? Granted, being forgettable was part of his job at times...

But still.

Slowly, I let myself relax, turning to the spy as I did.

“Thank you,” I whispered before raising my voice. “Oswin will take it from here.”

And I left.

---

Revision #1

Created 6 September 2024 21:07:18 by FatalisticFable

Updated 29 August 2025 18:29:44 by FatalisticFable