

# Chapter 31: What's Wrong?

## Raimie

Should I sit beside Hadrion? Should I let this roiling pot of grief and guilt in my gut boil over? Did I dare shove a lid on top of it, hoping that it would cool on its own?

I didn't want to speak the words that would unburden my weakness on an empty barrack and the vacant remains found here. Better, I thought, to keep them packed into a kernel-sized box at the bottom of my essence's pit.

But what if future circumstances discovered the clasp needed to open that box?

Folding to the ground beside Hadrion, I covered my face with my hands, hoping it would make this painful task easier.

"I don't understand why you did it," I whispered. "We barely knew one another, only held a few passing conversations and shared two nights of revelry together, but I could sense the potential for a great friendship between us. Why did you have to ruin it?"

I had to take a moment, searching for my voice in the swirling maelstrom it had disappeared into.

"Your decision in that house was incredibly selfish and stupid. Nyl and I had control of the situation, despite how it might have looked," I said, forcing the words out. "That's not what you saw, though, is it? To you, the person foretold to destroy your lifelong enemy was about to willingly throw himself on that foe's mercy. The situation must have seemed like it was your fault, like you'd begun a tragedy that would only end in suffering and death. I've been there. I know exactly what that feels like."

Blinking, I swallowed hard.

"You only did what you thought was needed to fix the problem, and I can understand the reasoning that led to such a desperate conclusion, but did you have to leave me with the burden of explaining your death to Ren?"

I broke off. More words clamored to be unleashed, but indulging in that urge wouldn't help me any more than what I'd already spoken had. Sighing, I dropped my hands, fixing my eyes on a cloth-wrapped body.

"Goodbye, Hadrion," I said.

Oswin followed me away from the barrack without a word, thank Alouin. I wasn't sure what I'd have done if the spymaster had tried to comfort me. It was bad enough that he'd witnessed my moment of weakness. I couldn't take his pity on top of that.

When we entered the caves, Oswin gently guided me into a secluded cavern.

"Will you *please* rest now?" he asked.

"Seeing as how my body needs it, yes."

Unbuckling Silverblade from around my waist, I leaned it against a wall.

"Please make sure nothing disturbs me unless it's of dire consequence."

"I will, sir," Oswin said.

When he drifted out of view, I collapsed into a conveniently placed cot. My whirling thoughts, however, wouldn't let my brain slide into slumber. I lay motionless, staring at the ceiling, for what seemed like hours before giving up. When I stirred with the intention of returning to my duties, however, Oswin stuck his hand around the corner, tossing something my way.

"From Ryvolim," he said.

This glass bottle, filled with my friend's sleeping tincture, was the most beautiful sight I'd beheld all day. Even still, I only downed half of it before settling beneath the sheets once more. I had something to handle in my dreams, after all.

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*"Raimie. Raimie, please do not hate me. I only did what-"*

*Having only recently arrived in my nightmare realm, the only place where Nylion and I could talk, I tried to sit up, getting halfway there before running into an obstacle. Sitting on my lap, my other half was pawing at my shirt, in tears, and I... was not equipped to deal with this right now.*

*I was going to try anyway.*

*"Hey, hey. I'm not mad at you, Nyl," I said. "It's ok. We're ok."*

*As best I could at this awkward angle, I gathered him into a hug, feeling his body slowly relax against mine. Once he seemed calm enough, I cleared my throat.*

*"Now again, I'm not mad," I said, "but I would like a little room, please. I just got here, and I'm... very disoriented. Can you let me breathe for a moment?"*

*"Oh. Of course."*

*Nylion backed off, and I scrunched over on myself. Oh, everything hurt here, even if that hurt wasn't in my body. So much whirling ENERGY was rattling along my nerves, and ignoring it was*

*taking far too much of my focus. What was that? Was it simply our emotions, let free from the bottle and left to jangle between us? Or was there something else going on?*

*I wasn't here to address that, though. I didn't know why I was wasting time considering it.*

*Once I'd caught my breath, I sat back up and winced at the look on Nylion's face.*

*"Do I have to remind you of what I said in the real world?" I said. "Hadrion wasn't your fault. Neither of us were at fault for that. I DO NOT blame you. Ok? I'm just... very sad."*

*Hanging his head, Nylion nodded.*

*"I am too," he whispered. "He seemed nice, and now, he is not here. And that hurts."*

*"Of course it does," I said, "but I'm here. Ok? So, can we talk about whatever's been bothering you for the last few months?"*

*Stiffening up, Nylion stared at me for a few heartbeats before getting to his feet. He paced back and forth, glancing at me every so often, but I wouldn't move. Right now, I only had enough energy to listen, if my other half wanted to tell me about his troubles. I didn't have anything extra for encouraging him to talk.*

*After several pacing repeats, Nylion huffed.*

*"You have been avoiding me," he said. "Why?"*

*I had? I'd thought we'd been talking fairly regularly, but if he felt that way...*

*"I've been a little busy with directing a war effort," I said. "Unfortunately, with so many people begging for my time, I haven't had much leftover to deal with personal things."*

*Stopping short, Nylion glared at me before ducking and jabbing a finger into my chest.*

*"Do NOT lie to me," he said. "We are one and the same. I can tell when you are skirting the truth."*

*I didn't know what he was talking...*

*But then, everything hit me in the face. The battle, the aftermath, what was waiting for me back home.*

*And I exploded.*

*"If you know that, then you should also know why I've been avoiding you," I snapped. "Why can't you simply tell me why you're angry? Ever since we've gotten established in Auden, you've been irritable with me. Why?"*

*"BECAUSE YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN OUR GOAL!" Nylion shouted with his face scant inches away. "Our memories lie in this barren landscape, locked beyond our grasp, and you have done NOTHING*

*to help us access them while I have been stuck here, trying to keep their effects from KILLING us.”*

*“Wha-? How could something in our head kill us?” I snapped before shaking my head. “No, that doesn’t matter. Look, I learned how to pick a lock, right? That was my job in the real world.”*

*“Which you learned after months with a spy trailing you everywhere you went!” Nylion said.*

*He jerked his body upright, and for the first time on this visit, I noticed the abrupt absence of something as vital to me as breathing. It made me wince, almost whining out loud, but I couldn’t do that, couldn’t-*

*Practically shaking with fury, Nylion said, “Yes, you have learned how to lock pick again. Congratulations. So, with that skill in hand, when were you planning on following through with opening our treasure vault of memories?”*

*And I was left stunned. I... REALLY couldn’t deal with this. Not my other half, the one as close to me as my essence, angry with me.*

*So, I got to my feet and walked away. After the day I’d had, why should I put up with another complication, even if I’d asked for it?*

*Now normally, I’d do absolutely anything to get my other half to smile. Not only did I owe Nylion, but... I only wanted that part of my essence to be happy. Curiously, however, I turned my back on this interaction, which wasn’t like me. In fact, it was the OPPOSITE of my every inclination, but today, a breaking point had been met. I couldn’t, WOULDN’T do this.*

*No more conflict. No more disappointed friends or broken promises. I’d abandoned those in the waking world, coming here to rest.*

*Something spun me around until Nylion’s face, caught between anxiety and fury, was all I could see.*

*Flicking his eyes back and forth, he said, “What is wrong with you? Are- are you ok, Raimie?”*

*And gods, all I wanted was to give in. All I wanted was to lean against him and close my eyes.*

*But I said, “I’m tired, Nyl. You, better than most, know the wounds today has inflicted. Do you think I can endure anything more than that right now?”*

*I couldn’t tell how Nylion reacted to my confession because our nightmare realm chose that moment to blur. My other half’s worried features briefly turned to fuzzy mush before snapping back into focus.*

*“Someone is trying to wake us up. That is unfortunate,” Nylion said, as if the words were coming from his mouth with effort. “Just... think about what I said, heart of my heart. Please. And please, have an explanation for your delay the next time you visit. I do not know how much longer I can wait for you to be ready.”*

*“What are you talking—?”*

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Revision #1

Created 15 September 2024 20:25:14 by FatalisticFable

Updated 29 August 2025 18:29:44 by FatalisticFable