

Chapter 40: The Truth of the Well

Raimie

Daira's streets race beneath my feet as I flee from my pursuer. Beyond, Nylion urges me to move faster, to sprint on and on and on.

The sea wall prevents my escape. Frantically, I search for somewhere to hide, an obstacle to slip through, or something to climb.

When my pursuer's furious cries reach my ears, I grimace. I tricked mama into thinking that I took my medicine this morning because that stuff is awful. I don't like it, and Nylion HATES it, disappearing for hours afterward. When my other half returns from these vanishings, he's... changed. Skipping the medicine for one day was a secret relief, but mama found out, and she wasn't happy. Why is my tiny deceit getting this big of a reaction?

The sound of her pounding feet gets louder, and I bolt to the left.

"Up here, Raimie!" Nylion calls.

Perched atop an isolated pile of crates along the sea wall's edge, he furiously waves his arms above his head with such desperate panic in him.

"She is a terrible climber."

That's truth if I've ever heard it. Many have been the hours that we've listened to her frustrated shouting while on rooftops. Maybe we can once more wait, out of reach, until her temper cools down.

Leaping for the lowest box, I pull myself halfway onto it, but a hand grabs my dangling leg, and the added weight knocks me off-balance. When my fingers lose tension, the hold on my ankle lasts long enough for my chin to hit the sea wall, making my teeth gnash through my lip, before I'm released. Stars accompany me on my tumble into the sea.

Before I can think to breathe, water closes over my head. My arm uselessly drifts, and when I try to swim, pain nearly makes me faint. Honestly, though, I'm lucky that only my arm was hurt. I could just as easily have been splattered on the rocks at the base of the wall.

Blinking stars away, I see a murky, underwater world with a spike of terror, and flailing my legs, I manage to surface.

The towering sea wall—safety—is much further away than it should be, and atop it, a face is staring at me from the dozens of people nearby.

“Mama! I can’t-” I cry.

Water claims me for a third time, and when I fight free of it, I cough and splutter, sobbing.

“Mama, help!”

I lose her among the ships crowding the harbor’s piers. The ocean’s current is dragging me toward this, and animal panic has me thrashing my legs in a vain attempt to keep water from dashing me on those pilings.

“Raimie!” mama shouts. “Use the light, and grab my hand!”

Kneeling on the pier, she’s stretched dangerously far over the ocean, reaching for me. Gods, I thought she’d left me to drown.

Grasping at the light, I shoot it into the ocean, desperate to reach her, but I’ve never used it while swimming before. I don’t account for water’s drag against my body once I’ve burst free of its surface. What I’ve expelled doesn’t gain me nearly enough height, but even still, I reach for rescue.

The tips of our fingers touch, and at that contact, I clench mine, but my momentum has pulled me further than I expected. The counterweight above me tilts before I smash into wood.

When I break free of darkness, I’m muddled for a split-second before agony rips through me, and I scream.

“Do not let her go!” Nylion shouts above me. “I did not save her worthless life for you to end it.”

I struggle to get clear of the haze in my mind, but when it fades, I find Nylion floating across from me with both of us clinging to something buoyant. I’m not sure what it is, but that doesn’t much matter.

My mouth and throat are dry, so when I try to speak, only a croak emerges, which has Nylion’s face pinching. Reaching around me, he cups the back of my neck, leaning forward to form a cave between us. Our place of safety, always pulled forth when the world becomes too much.

“It is ok,” Nylion says. “Take it slowly.”

So, I do, clearing my throat until my voice is freed.

“What happened?” I ask.

Turning away, Nylion rests the side of his head on my forehead.

“Mother offered up the first act of love that she has ever given m... us, and as is typical for her, it backfired. She fell, hit her head, and flopped on top of us right as I took over. Almost dragged us into the depths with her, that-”

With my other half’s voice strangled, he’s left swallowing several times before he can speak again.

“I had the good sense to snatch a batch of passing driftwood before the tide swept us out to sea, and here we are.”

Leaning back, Nylion waves a hand over the horizon. As I follow the sweep of his hand, nothing but ocean greets me, but our peril falls out of my awareness when I see what’s hanging from my arm.

Mama.

As if to remind me that it exists, pain blasts through me, turning my vision white, and desperately, I shift my burden onto our tiny raft. She only sinks, though, helpless to stay aloft while unconscious.

“What do we-?” I gasp.

“It will be dark soon,” Nylion says. “Use the light. Perhaps luck will shine on us, sending a ship our way.”

My other half always has the best suggestions. Gulping down more light than I ever have before, I hold it in my body and pray to Alouin that it will be enough.

I keep mama above water with my broken arm, clinging to driftwood. To Nylion. The clumsy curses I mutter help drive pain away, letting me stay conscious. I should thank Bryruned for teaching them to me, if I see the weapons master again. If he lets me and Nylion near him again.

“Help!” I shout, taking a break from cursing. “Mama, please wake up.”

Over the quiet slosh of water, my whisper loudly carries.

As time passes, the sky turns orange and purple. Once the stars have emerged, though, cursing can’t hold pain at bay anymore, and I lazily float in the water, holding to consciousness for the sole purpose of maintaining my grip.

“Mama, why were you chasing us?” I ask. “Is it really that important for me to take your medicine? Even when it makes Nyl go away?”

“She hates me, heart of my heart,” Nylion says with his voice floating through the haze. “I am the source of her shame.”

Mama says nothing, and I swallow the lump in my throat. As something obstructs my view of the stars above, voices shout in the dark, but I can’t summon the energy to call for help. I’m forced to

rely on the light that's blazing from my body, willfully ignoring how little it's helped me so far. Instead, I hum a lullaby, indulging in the illusion that I'm putting mama to bed for once.

Her weight is lifted off of my arm, and it screams at that release of pressure. Mumbling my own protests, I slap at the water, searching for her.

From behind, something gets wrapped around my stomach. I twist, flailing at what's holding me, but even still, it lifts me out of the ocean and into the air until I'm pulled over a ship's railing, and when I'm released, I flop to its deck.

"Raimie!"

A rough hand caresses my face, and I grab it.

"Mama?" I ask.

When my eyes clear, my father's worried face crystalizes for me.

"She's fine. Waking up now," he says. "What happened?"

"My fault," I mumble. "Misjudged propulsion. Clung too hard, and mama fell."

"It wasn't his fault," mama snaps with a cough. "It was the OTHER."

"Oh, NOW she wakes up," Nylion says while my father frantically says.

"Samantha! You should be resting."

"No, Aramar. We need to address this."

Mama coughs again.

"Contact the witch in Allanovian. This other in him needs to be erased."

I give up on consciousness, but before I drift away, I catch a sudden spillover of terror from Nylion as he angrily grumbles to himself.

Four days later, my mother and I fall ill. We travel to Allanovian, and both she and Nylion are stolen from me in that awful place.

Someone had replaced my heart with a hollow, throbbing wound. I'd forgotten how to breathe, how to speak, how to think.

"Raimie?" two figures that I should know asked.

"...why?" I managed to rasp.

"Why, what?" the dark one of the two asked.

Recoiling, I said, "How... could...?"

Striding between those familiar figures, Nylion crouched in front of me. As he took my hands, his horribly beaten and bruised face was creased with concern.

"I am sorry," was all he said.

"You... knew..."

"Everything except who cursed us," Nylion said. "I knew our scheming bitch of a mother was involved, but as for the others... I did not know how deep the betrayal went. Eledis, Gistrick, your father... and that was your Uncle's flagship at the end. We should assume that Marcuset was at least privy to the decision as well."

Pulling my hands free, I clutched at my head, struggling to force two versions of my past into some sense of order. How was I supposed to reconcile the two lives I'd led? One of happiness. One of truth. Which was real? Or were they both...? No.

My life in Daira explained so many inconsistencies that I'd never thought to question. If tutors had been working with me from the time that I was a toddler, it was no wonder I'd breezed through my lessons with Ferin and Rhylix. I'd already studied what Ferin had meant to teach me and learned the skills that Rhylix had imparted.

As for how quickly I'd mastered my friend's lessons, my ability to replicate a skill after observing it only once would certainly help with gaining knowledge, but it couldn't replace muscle memory, something that only repetitive practice could develop. I'd had an abundance of that when training with weapons masters, though.

The tutors also explained my oscillation between total ignorance of foreign relations to a somewhat skilled diplomat. Mediation had been drilled into me since birth.

But my happy childhood in the forest... it had all been a lie?

"Yes. Every part of it until we turned nine," Nylion said. "At least you get to keep that half."

Small consolation.

"Are you quite well, Raimie?" someone asked. "Your fall didn't look that bad."

As I let my hands slip off of my head, my ability to speak logically lurched into working order.

Without looking up, I asked, "How long have you two been with me? I know that I accessed Ele and Daevetch before finding Shadowsteal."

Only silence answered me for a time, but I was content to stay in this quiet. It was a direct contrast to my current turmoil, and besides that, I didn't think I could move right now. Curious whether this was true, I asked for my legs to straighten, and they twitched instead.

Great. When would this wear off?

In answer to my question, Bright said, "Since you were born."

"Can you imagine?" Dim said with a nervous laugh. "You caused so much trouble as a toddler primeancer, running circles around your parents."

And the blow of this knowledge knocked me back into partial reticence.

"Why didn't you tell me... when you came back?" I dragged forth. "You hinted at it... constantly but said *nothing* after... Shadowsteal."

"Would you have believed us?" Bright asked.

"And Eselan magic like what you suffered is unpredictable," Dim added. "If we'd told you, our revelation might have broken the spell, or it might have stomped down harder on you instead."

I nodded, satisfied, if not pleased, with their answer. On attempting to move my legs again, they did more than twitch, so I tried to stand, a little unnerved when Nylion, a *very visible* Nylion, steadied me. Even if it did nothing to actually stop my wobble, the gesture was... appreciated.

Seeing him while awake would take some getting used to. And at one point, it had been our natural state.

When I pulled Ele through my source, it quelled the burgeoning of something dark and violent with its peace, and I released a breath that I could swear I'd held since the barrage of memories had stopped.

"What will you do?" asked one of the three unseen but very real beings behind me.

I didn't stop to check which of them it had been.

"My family has much to answer for," I said. "I'm going to have a chat with them."

Revision #1

Created 26 October 2024 00:58:42 by FatalisticFable

Updated 29 August 2025 18:29:44 by FatalisticFable