

# Chapter 41: Why Would You Do This to Me?

## Raimie

The five days after the return of my memories followed in an unchanging sequence. Every morning, Nylion was there, opening his eyes at the same time as me and giving me a small smile on coming fully awake, and somehow, our hands had found a way to curl around one another over the course of the night.

But also, every morning, a restless, inner fire greeted me, a blaze that twitched me down my path. As I ran, Ele barely restrained a veneer of red over my vision, and that white light followed my race down the road like a dog would with a bone, driving my travel ever faster until a journey that should have taken a week would only take days.

In the late afternoon, I leapt into the forest's canopy, hiding among the leaves from the Kiraak patrolling below.

Out of everything, though, the evenings were the hardest part of my days. Because I refused to call on it once the sun had gone down, Ele couldn't hold that restive fire at bay, and so, it burned through my resolve instead. Long were the hours where I fought for sleep rather than indulging in a tumble out of the trees to slaughter and dismember Kiraak to my heart's content. The fire even followed me into my dreams, lighting my mind with visions of death until I woke up with an aching jaw, all to begin the day again.

On one such evening, I was drowsily laying in the crook of my tree branch, waiting for sleep to finish coming, when I heard my splinters murmuring somewhere nearby. When I glanced around, I failed to see them, but after focusing, I could still make out their words from wherever they'd hidden themselves.

"So, he's back in full, then," one said. "Is that good or bad for the plan?"

"I don't know about the 'in full' part," the other retorted. "From what I can tell, the base layer of his life has gotten through the artificial wall keeping it contained, but everything behind the ones that those two raised themselves? Not so much."

With a frustrated sigh, the first one said, "Regardless. He has access to his memories of Hand training in Daira again. Do you think his skills from that time will return as well, now that his mind

doesn't have to hide that training from him? And if so, will that affect our plan?"

"How am I supposed to know? By *me*, you can't rely on me for reassurance about this stuff, Order. It takes a lot out of me to support you *in any way*, and you keep doing it. I get it. You died and came back. That's not something we're supposed to deal with, and during that impossible event, we formed a weirdly gross and uncomfortable bond. But you *have* to give me a break every so often, ya bore. I will do my best to keep you stable but hell! The effort of it is already starting to wear at my... everything, including how firm my hold here is."

There was some silence, but then, the first voice—presumably Bright's—softly said.

"I know. I'm doing my best too."

With a loud and long sigh, Dim said, "Yeah, yeah. Maybe you can find another form of support elsewhere. I know Raimie gets worried about you sometimes. He could—"

"Don't even suggest it. He cannot, I repeat, *cannot* know how fallible we are. He relies on us too much for that."

"...Whatever you say, stick in the mud."

"Chaotic fool."

"Stuck in your... no. You know what? Instead of arguing, let's take the time to rest, yes?"

"Fine."

They fell silent, and I was left wondering what I'd overheard before falling to nightmares again. As usual, that unconscious state placed its spell upon me, fuzzing over the moments right before it had come to visit. So, when I woke up, I knew a significant exchange had occurred between my splinters the night before, and I could vaguely remember what it had been about, but the details had disappeared into an unreachable part of my mind.

And so, the journey continued.

On the morning before we reached Tiro, something new came along to make an already difficult journey even more impossible. As I hovered in the unnerving space between dreams and waking, I heard an unknown and yet familiar voice roaring through my head.

*COME HERE, YOU STUPID PIECE OF SHIT!*

And Nylion, who'd been slowly blinking at me to that point, went absolutely white in the face before disappearing.

The next thing I knew I was far away from where I'd been resting with a knife drawn, digging at the ivy hanging over a hollow. I kept jerking my head between my work and the space behind me, where I'd been pointing the knife, but... there was nothing there. I had nothing to fear here...

And yet, I did. *Someone* was coming after me. I knew it. I didn't know who it was or what, but they were coming. They were coming!

And- and- and I knew how to fight now. If someone tried to hurt me, I could hurt them right back. I could keep myself safe.

This thought was enough to stop me from digging for a place of safety, but even as I turned back toward where I thought the road might be, I couldn't return my knife to its sheath. Gradually, I got it to a hanging spot beside my leg, but I couldn't get further than that for the rest of the morning, always *sure* that someone was going to jump me if I relaxed my guard for a single moment.

Even if I also knew that probably wouldn't happen.

It was strange and contradictory and completely out of proportion to what was happening around me, just like that weird thing that had happened in Sanc, and I hated it.

...Given the context of what I'd remembered, Ryvolim's explanation from that day made a lot more sense.

Around midday, Nylion popped back into being. Giving the knife a strange look, he half-smiled at me before nudging my shoulder, saying not a word, and slowly, I put the weapon away.

When we eventually reached Tiro, I skipped going through the gate, leaping and clambering up the vines covering it until I was perched at the top. Without checking what was lying below me, I jumped into the abyss, landing with a shower of light into the midst of shouting people. Hands reached for me, and I retreated only to smooch into a wall of flesh from behind. Was Tiro under attack? Gods, had I somehow been *right* this morning?

Then, I heard the chanting.

"Our king! Our liberator! Auden's hope!"

And I peeled my hands away from my weapons. How had these people known...?

On the fringe of the crowd, one of Ren's underlings nodded a cloth-swaddled head toward me, and I sighed. Someone must have spotted me as I'd approached the city. Given the reception I'd received, it must have been after my little... fit.

So. Tiro wanted to honor me for my victory at the Birthing Grounds, but if that was truly what they wanted, they were going about it the wrong way. I'd rather have them greeting my soldiers when they returned. They were the ones who deserved this celebration, but if the city insisted on honoring me, I wished it had come in the form of support for my next endeavor, not as a party.

As I pushed my way out of the crowd, I plastered a pleased grin on my face for their benefit, but I refused to stop. Soon enough, I broke through the crowd's fringe and into an empty space, finally allowed to pick up the pace.

The celebration continued unabated behind me, which was good. I didn't want to interrupt the crowd's joy just because I didn't agree with it.

Eledis was waiting for me outside of Tanwadur's house, probably wanting a personal report of the battle, and at his presumption, I nearly stopped short while Nylion broke off to circle the old man. Somehow, I found the strength to keep moving despite the desire to draw Silverblade and run the old man through. Violence—*murder*—would be frowned upon in such a public place, and besides that and it being *wrong*, Eledis would handily defeat me. My grandfather was stronger, more powerful, and more conniving than my ignorant, former self could have comprehended.

Of all my targets, Eledis was the most dangerous. When it came to getting justice, I shouldn't start with him but with the weakest instead.

Hissing, Nylion said, "Soon enough."

And I nodded.

*The moment we have an opportunity*, I said.

In the house, I flung open the door to my family's borrowed room, and my father looked up from the book he'd been reading.

"Raimie!" he said with a smile. "I didn't expect you back for a few more days. How did you...?"

He continued rambling, which I half-listened to as I closed and latched the door behind me, and at my side, Nylion crossed his arms.

"So?" he asked. "How do we start?"

*Like this.*

"Nylion says hello," I said, interrupting our father's prattle.

Stiffening, he glanced toward mama's bow, leaning at the foot of his bed, and Nylion burst into laughter.

"Oh my gods, that was perfect," he said. "Even I am a little scared of you right now."

*No, you're not.*

"Don't do it," I said in warning to my father. "I'd fill you with holes before you reached it, even if you are my father.

No need to mention that the damage would come from the pistol resting at the small of my back, not the dark energy that I usually had on hand. Even days after my overuse, the thought of touching Daevetch made me feel shaky.

Watching my father nervously shift in place, I couldn't help the little pulse of hurt that rose above the red haze that had been surrounding me for the last few days.

"So, it's true," I said. "You do know about him."

Jerking his head toward me, Nylion said, "You doubted that?"

No, I hadn't. But I also hadn't wanted to believe it because... because I loved my father. He'd been so good to me, especially since I'd found Shadowsteal, and learning that he, specifically him, had done something so terrible to me hurt worse than I could say.

Why had I figured that out *right now*?

I condensed these complicated feelings down to one word for Nylion.

*No.*

But I thought he understood regardless, given how much he winced. Maybe some of what was coursing through me right now had flowed to him over our bond.

Slumping, my father said, "I've been waiting to have this conversation for years."

He was quiet for a moment before setting his jaw.

"Your mother told me about that aberration in your head when you were three," he continued, "but I didn't believe it was real at first. Thought it was my imaginative boy having fun until... until after we took you to Allanovian."

Allanovian? Was he talking about when he and the others had stolen Nylion from me or-?

"And that is supposed to excuse what you did?" Nylion hissed, advancing toward my father. "I have *only ever* done what was needed to keep us alive, and you... *you!*"

Gods... so much hatred! Alarmed, I reached for my other half, hoping it would calm him down, and only remembered that I was being watched halfway through lifting my arm.

Eyeing me, my father said, "He's here right now, isn't he? What's he doing? Threatening to kill me?"

With a shriek, Nylion lifted his hands, strangling the air instead of the man he couldn't touch.

*"I do not want that!* I have never wanted to kill people, you quick-to-judge, ignorant *ass!*" he hissed. *"You made us this way. You! We'd never- never..."*

Apparently unable to form more words, he simply stood there for a moment, tensed all to hell, so I did what I could to translate for the man who couldn't hear any of that.

“Neither of us want you dead. This anger, however... it’s making it difficult to be around you. Still, I’m here because I want to know why Nylion was taken from me. Why did you let that happen?”

I wasn’t sure if my father believed my claim. He still looked ready to bolt, no matter how much he’d tried to relax. Getting up, he started toward me, and as he came closer, a wave of prickles rolled over my skin. I took several steps away, which made my father wince.

Stopping beside the door, he rested his hand on his hips with his head hanging.

Sighing, he said, “It needed to be done. There are things that... happened, things I’m pretty sure you don’t know about. Nylion was becoming... harmful. So, trust me, son, when I tell you that separating you two was for your own good.”

*For my own good?*

With familiar heat flashing through me, I barely kept from reaching for a weapon.

“How can you say that?” I forced through my clenched teeth. “Losing Nylion was the worst thing that’s ever happened to me, and *you* caused it. You made me *forget* him. That’s like if I made you forget about mama. Worse, because he’s a *part* of me. And that’s not even touching on your total manipulation of my memories. Why would you take our years in Daira from me? Stealing Nylion wasn’t good enough? *How can you argue that something so destructive was ‘for my own good’?*”

My father had gone still, leaving the room quiet except for my gasping, and with a growl, Nylion ate the distance to the man, stepping toe-to-toe with him.

“I was alone for nine years,” he hissed. “*Nine fucking years* that felt like hundreds. I *will* have retribution for that.”

Of course, my father had heard none of this, and breaking free of his shock, he opened his mouth to retort with his face turning ruddy.

That was when the door banged open, whipping all three of us toward it.

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