

# Chapter 47: I Love You But...

## Raimie

I was getting extremely annoyed by how long it was taking to find my father. I'd expected it might take a while but close to an hour? After so many reliable years, were my tracking skills finally failing me? This wouldn't bother me so much if I were in an unfamiliar setting or if it were completely dark, but neither of those things were happening right now and-

Clearly visible and walking at my side, Nylion huffed.

"Remember, heart of my heart, he was once a spymaster," he said.

And the tracking skills I'd relied on for my whole life, skills I'd thought I'd learned while hunting in the forest, were in reality, part of the Hand training that I'd gone through as my father's successor.

Wincing, I stopped short, passing a hand over my face. So many things that I'd always taken for granted as fact kept getting dislodged by my new truth, and it was... bothering me.

I actually didn't know how I felt about the situation. A 'bother' was simply the best word I'd come up with to describe the sensation.

"It will get easier," Nylion said.

I skeptically glanced at him.

*Will it?* I asked.

He made a face.

"I think so. I hope so," he said. "I knew that this change would be hard for you to swallow. You are handling it much better than I thought you might, but I can feel how difficult it has been. My only wish is that somehow, my presence has been helping you with it."

*You've more than helped, Nyl,* I said. *It's strange, you know? At first, it was all anger and outrage at what they did. Now, it's so much STUFF that I don't know how to handle. I don't even know what most of it is.*

"So... it is complicated."

I huffed a laugh.

*I'm beginning to think that everything about us will be complicated.*

Shaking my head, I forced myself to open my eyes and move on. I had to find my father. I *needed* to speak with him one more time tonight. I *needed* to know why.

He'd said everything he'd done had been for my own good. My protection. I didn't understand why he thought that, and it... bothered me. I needed him to explain one more time. Maybe if he did, I could figure out what he'd been thinking at the time. Maybe he'd give me an excuse I could use to forgive him.

As soon as that thought had crossed my mind, I hid it somewhere far away, in a rarely touched corner of my mind. I wasn't sure why I was doing that, but it had something to do with Nylion. I wasn't sure how accepting he'd be of that desire.

I was glad Oswin wasn't here to watch me fumbling through the task of finding my father, not to mention any emotional reactions I might have in our coming conversation. He wouldn't say a word about my failings in the moment, but they were sure to come up later, in the form of a snarky comment.

Oswin...

He'd been the spymaster of Kaedesa's Hand instead of me. Did that mean we'd known each other back then? Is that why I'd always had such a strong sense of recognition when around him?

Did that mean he'd been hiding my past from me, along with everyone else I'd once trusted?

Watching me with worry, Nylion said, "What are you thinking about?"

My mouth twisted.

*Oswin, I said. I'm wondering what, if anything, he had to do with this. And whether anyone else in the Hand was involved.*

That comment made Nylion's eyebrows shoot up into his scruffy hairline.

"You do not remember him yet?" he said.

When I shook my head, he frowned.

"I am sure it will come to you eventually, much like the rest has been," he said. "Until then, I would not make assumptions about him or the others yet. From what I remember, they have always been our allies, but it is unclear whether any of my memories were locked in that chest alongside yours. So far, that has not been the case, but we cannot be sure. Just... take it as it comes. Operate on what you know of him."

And that? That was why I was glad Nylion had been hanging around as much as he had since we'd unlocked the chest in our mindspace. He'd been keeping me grounded in my current reality, in

more ways than one, and I was so damn grateful for that.

It had been so easy to get stuck in the past and the memories I'd lost of it.

"There!" Nylion said, pointing toward the edge of the dwindling crowd we'd joined.

At the corner of an intersection, a familiar head of hair briefly paused before vanishing around it, and I sped up. When I turned onto the smaller street, I found no one walking down it, and this momentarily confused me. Then, I noted a patch of scuffed dirt at the base of one of the nearby walls and rolled my eyes.

I stood in that spot, jumping to grab the eave of the roof above, and pulled myself on top of it. Once on my feet, I scanned my sightlines, quickly spotting the same head of hair I'd spied earlier. I took off after it.

He led me on a lengthy chase, which only made me more annoyed with every extra footfall he made me take. Eventually, I stopped short and let my exasperation ring out over the rooftops.

"Stop! Come on, dad. You can't avoid this conversation forever! What are you going to do? Never speak to me again?"

That made him pause. Even with a rooftop between us, I could see my father's shoulders slump as he put his hands on his hips. He shook his head once before turning to me and gesturing toward the street below.

I followed his lead, but on clambering down to the ground, something strange passed over me. Sure, I may *need* to have this conversation, but at the same time, I didn't want to. I didn't want to take the chance that my father might hurt me again.

Because oh, how it had hurt to have the first part of this conversation earlier! Hearing the proof that what I'd remembered was real, coming from my father's own mouth, had sunk a jagged knife into the heart of me. I was still figuring out how deep it had gone.

Still, I had to do this. For Nylion's sake, if for nothing else.

I found my father leaning against a wall with his arms crossed and one foot propped up behind him. He wouldn't look at me as I approached.

When I was close enough, he said, "What else is there to say besides what's already been spoken?"

I wanted to shout at him for that.

Taking a deep breath, I said, "I think there's plenty we still need to say. I don't understand why you did what you did. I need you to explain it to me so I can try to move on."

Startled, my father glanced at me before flicking his eyes away again.

“Move on?” he said.

I rolled my eyes.

“What? Do you want me to stay mad at you for forever?”

At my side, Nylion was staring at me almost as hard as my father had, for that brief moment he'd graced me with his gaze. I hoped he could trust me to do what was best for us right now. Yes, we needed justice for what had happened to us, for the soul desolation we'd gone through, but I wasn't sure who deserved what punishment and how far that punishment should go.

“No,” his father said. “No, I don't want that.”

He hung his head in silence for several uncomfortable moments.

“You want to know why we took Nylion away?” he eventually told the ground. “Because he had started getting out of control. He was influencing your behavior in completely unacceptable ways, and we... couldn't have that.”

Almost beneath my notice, my fingers curled into my hands, biting into my palms.

“So, your solution to the problem was to *lock him away*?” I said. “Did any of you think to maybe, I don't know, talk to him?”

“We tried! Marcuset was the only one he'd speak to, and even that communication was sparse,” my father said. “But you don't understand, Raimie. This wasn't a minor issue. Sometimes, when he was the one maneuvering your body, he would become unexpectedly violent-”

Throwing my hands to either side, I snapped, “What did you expect would happen after throwing him into training for the Hand? He used to cry for *hours* after we finished with that for the day. What human wouldn't lash out in a such situation?”

Granted, Nylion's initial reaction to our training had only lasted for the first year. After that, he'd become more cold. Analytical. Precise. But neither of us had wanted to learn how to fight, him more so than me. Any form of violence had made everything within us rebel, and when we were the ones dealing the violence...

The thought of it had me shuddering, even now.

Blinking rapidly, my father met my eyes.

“I... didn't know about that,” he said.

I waved his concession away.

“How could you? You were away for your job more often than not.”

Making a face, my father said, "And that, I am sorry for. I tried to make up for my absence once we moved away from Daira."

He truly had. Now that I understood what it was like to have him gone most of the time, I could appreciate how attentive of a father I'd had during our nine years of peace in the woods.

"It's fine," I said. "Nylion was there for me."

Like a shutter, my father's face closed down.

"I thought I was doing the right thing by taking him away, son," he said. "I still think it was the best we could do. There's so much you don't know about that time..."

He trailed off, and it took me a moment to realize that I'd caused that. It took me a moment to realize that pure venom had taken residence on my face, enough of it to shut him up.

It was probably for the best. If he'd continued spouting justifications for the harm he'd caused me, I wasn't sure how much longer I could stay... rational.

As it was, I was barely holding onto said rationality. I took a few deep breaths before cutting my hand in front of me.

"Let's forget about your reasoning for now. It's getting us nowhere," I said. "Can we focus on the present? On how what you did has affected me? Because it *has* done that, dad. Whether it was right or not, it *hurt* me, more than you can know, and I need you to hear me about that. I need you to understand."

"I... can do that," my father said.

Meanwhile, Nylion turned to fully face me.

"You're letting it go?" he said. "Just like that?"

I could feel anger starting to swell from him, which made me glance at him from the corner of my eye.

*Of course not,* I said. *But we have to start somewhere. We have to get him to see why everything he did was so harmful to us. This is the best way to achieve that goal. Once he understands, we can go back. And after we've destroyed every carefully laid justification he's crafted for himself to excuse his actions, we can get what we truly want from him.*

My explanation didn't seem to mollify Nylion as much as I thought it might, but he jerked his head once in a nod. It would have to do for now.

"So, let's discuss the results of your actions. Regardless of your intentions at the time, I feel betrayed by you, dad," I said. "Growing up, I had this one thing, one person who was truly mine. I had a state of being that I considered sacred, and you took it away from me. In some ways, I feel

like I made it happen because I trusted you when you led me into that circle, dad. Maybe that makes me the fool, getting blindsided by a loved one like that.”

“Heart of my heart, I never-”

“You’ve never been a fool to-”

I held up a hand to stop both of them.

“I know it’s not my fault. That’s just how it is. How I feel,” I said, “and I can’t even begin to describe the confusion and chaos I’m dealing with now. I had this life, one I thought I knew. One that made sense to me. And then, I find out that half of it is a lie? Half of it, I was someone else, doing something else entirely? I’ve got a war going on inside, dad. I don’t know what’s real anymore. How am I supposed to deal with a near entire rewrite of my history when I’m also supposed to be leading a real, honest-to-gods war?”

This part of the problem between us left my father speechless. He stared at me with his mouth hanging open, and when it became clear I wouldn’t get a response from him, I shook my head.

“But that’s not the worst of it for me,” I said. “The worst part is that you kept something from me again. Not even a piece of heritage, like our royal lineage, but some of my history. Some of my actual lived experience. You lied about half of my life *for* half of my life, hiding it away in the hopes that I wouldn’t, what? Remember someday? Have the fucking mind magic spell that you had placed on me broken? Gods damn it, dad! You *messed with my mind*. Of course I’m angry with you!”

Out of breath, I panted, watching my dad wince and open his mouth, close it and open it again. He was taking far too long with trying to figure out something to say, so long that I almost started yelling again. Before I could, though, his whole body caved in on itself.

“You’re right. By hiding what happened from you, I badly hurt you, and I’m sorry for it.”

I couldn’t believe it. I was actually getting an apology from him, if only for part of what he’d done. When I’d considered having this conversation with my father before, I’d thought I had the most remote of chances at gaining even this small of a concession, and having heard the remorse in my father’s voice, I knew he meant what he’d said.

It wasn’t enough.

“That is not *nearly* enough,” Nylion breathed, as if in agreement. “Does he think we would take a single, paltry apology for all the horror he put us through and what? Forgive him? Forget what happened? Forget the pain of my forced isolation, pushed down into the depths of our mind?”

*Did you expect something more from him?* I said.

“I.. I do not...”

I half-listened as Nylion sputtered to a stop with a confused look on his face, putting most of my focus on my father.

“I accept your apology,” I said. “It changes nothing about what I’m dealing with, though.”

My father nodded.

“I didn’t think it would,” he said. “How do you propose we address those problems, though? They won’t just go away.”

I knew that. These issues, clouding up the waters all around me right now, weren’t something I could ignore, not like I apparently had with so many other things in my life.

Unfortunately, I didn’t know how to fix the problem. Not right now. I only had one answer for my father’s question, for the moment at least, and he wasn’t going to like it.

“We do the only thing we can,” I said. “Come on. We should find somewhere comfortable to discuss it.”

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