

Chapter 48: A Friend's Revelation

Ryvolim

The view while balancing atop Tiro's concealing lattice was, as always, terrifying, much too far above solid ground as it was. I refused to look down as I crossed the length of the beam that Raimie had chosen for his perch.

Finding my friend had taken far too long. I'd checked some of his other favorite spots around the city, but this one, the one he always went to when he was truly upset, hadn't even crossed my mind as a possible hiding place, which proved once again how off-balance I was right now.

Once I was hovering over my friend, he cracked an eye open, scrunching his face up on seeing me.

"Did you already talk to Ren?" he asked.

"Couldn't find her," I said. "What do you need from me?"

Which was abrupt and to the point, but I couldn't have this conversation go any other way right now.

Raising an eyebrow, Raimie said, "You're certainly eager to help. This can't wait until morning?"

"No. Please, just tell me what you want."

My friend must have sensed an inkling of the mess lurking under my mask because he sat up, folding his legs under one another.

"I... need you to heal my father," he said.

He met my gaze as if it were a challenge, but then, it was. I'd explained the reasons that I avoided using my special, little curse to him before.

"Why would you ask this of me?" I asked.

Something had to be wrong. Raimie wouldn't challenge another person's beliefs like this unless he thought doing so was absolutely necessary.

"I need to get him into as physically fit of a condition as I can," he said. "He'll need every advantage he can get."

For a second, he flicked his gaze to the side, unfocusing while subtly waving a hand, but he quickly returned his focus to me, if with greater conviction.

"Please, Rhy," he said.

"You know I can't do this," I said. "My reasoning—"

"Is tenuous at best. I'm sorry. I really am. But it is," Raimie said. "Even if you're right about the consequences that the people you heal face, I've explained the possibility to my father. He understands that something worse may come along to hurt him later, but the idea didn't change his mind about you healing him."

What... the hell? Raimie knew how much I didn't like having my secrets shared.

"You told your father about what I can do?" I asked, barely keeping from shouting.

With his jaw set, Raimie said, "It was *necessary*."

Closing his eyes, he clenched and unclenched his hands before looking up at me.

"You don't need to worry, Rhy. My father won't put you in danger," he continued. "Once he can walk without the device from the tear, he'll leave us, at least for a time."

"He's leaving?" I asked with a frown. "Why would he do that?"

"Because I asked him to!" Raimie snapped.

Puffing out a breath, he looked away, shifting uncomfortably, but I could understand that. Family was the ultimate connection, the people you protected and loved no matter what. So, why would Raimie, who sacrificed so much for the soldiers he'd adopted as his family, want his father to leave him?

"You're going to have to explain that," I said with an empty voice.

Grinding his teeth together, Raimie turned his focus inward, and after a solid minute of silence, he growled.

"I'm telling him, Nyl! He's my best friend. He deserves to know."

But I didn't understand what he'd said. Was he talking to me or...?

Why did this situation feel so familiar? What-?

"Nyl, where are you?" "At the moment, what Raimie would or would not want does not matter. He is not here right now." "My name is NOT Raimie."

And I stopped breathing. The talking to seeming no one. Referring to himself by different names. The incident outside Sanc. How he was acting now. I thought I knew what was going on, and if I was right, oh... how it would hurt my heart.

Slowly, I sank to sit on the beam in front of Raimie, no matter how terrifying I might find it.

"Nyl," I said, licking my lips. "I've heard you say that word before. When we were in Da'kul."

Cocking his head, Raimie slowly said, "You did?"

I nodded.

"Does it mean something... special to you?" I asked.

"It does," Raimie said.

But then, he sealed his lips shut, which was understandable. Focusing on my friend and not the ground, I scooted forward until our knees were touching, leaning forward to rest my forehead on his.

"You don't have to fear me. I am your friend, and now, you know how sacred I find that bond. You're safe here."

The repetition of the first time I'd gotten Raimie to tell me about something most would find unusual or dangerous slowly had tension draining from him. His shoulders lowered from his ears, and when he glanced up at me, nodding, I pulled back a bit.

"Nyl is... Nylion. My other half. The only person in my life that I would give my all for, minus dying of course," Raimie said, "because if I died, so would he. He lives... in here."

He tapped a finger against his temple.

"And he's connected to why I want some space from my father, among many other things."

When he bit his lip, drawing away, I rested my fingers on the beam in front of his knee.

"You are safe here," I repeated. "I will never intentionally hurt you. That extends to anything that goes on in your head."

"Ok," Raimie said, relaxing once more. "Ok."

We sat in silence for a moment, but soon enough, he laughed, as if to fill the quiet.

"How are you so calm about this?" he asked. "Any time I've talked about Nylion with anyone before, it's always followed by... I don't know... fear. Or hatred."

Rejection. I knew, more than he could possibly understand.

Rubbing the back of my neck, I sheepishly smiled.

“I’ve had a lot of experience with this sort of thing. Lived for way too many years, remember?” I said. “So, this whole ‘multiple entities in one head’ thing? It’s been a common experience. Sometimes, I’ve seen it in cultures where the predominant spiritual practice encouraged belief in possession or similar phenomena. Sometimes, it’s been children who’ve been left alone for so long that their practice of imagining a friend for company continued throughout their lives. Sometimes, a person has become ‘many’ simply because they wanted to!”

I softly chuckled, remembering several past relationships with such grouped individuals. People who I might have called friends, if I’d allowed myself the luxury at the time.

“But as you might imagine, I don’t often get to spend my life in times of peace. So, most of the time, I’ve seen what you’re describing in people who’ve had to deal with certain... things when they were young. Usually, these people also experience issues like what you did in Sanc.”

Pausing, I hoped to the gods that I wasn’t about to start an unnecessary, agonizing process in my friend, and if he answered me in the negative, I wasn’t going to push it.

Still.

“Raimie, I have to know,” I said. “Considering what you’re saying and some of the things I’ve seen while around you, do you think there may be some ‘splinter’ of memory still stuck in your brain, like we’ve talked about before?”

Snorting, Raimie started laughing uproariously, rocking back and forth so wildly that I was afraid he might fall.

“A *splinter* of the past? Oh, gods. Oh, *gods*, that’s funny,” he said. “Would that it was something so small! *Fuck*.”

Hell, his reaction had been unnerving, but I tried to keep any trace of that emotion off of my face. It wouldn’t be helpful right now.

Wiping at his eyes, Raimie said, “Do you remember when so long ago, you said I had a secret too, whether I knew about it or not? I think we were outside of Sev at the time. Well, it turns out you were right, more than I would have ever thought possible.”

And then, he told me everything. The long process of being reunited with Nylion again. The chest of memories they’d both struggled to unlock. And everything he’d remembered.

Once he was finished, all I could say was, “Well. That explains a lot.”

“*Right?*” Raimie said, leaning forward. “For how crazy it all sounds, it also makes a whole lot of godsdamned sense.”

Alouin above. My poor friend. He'd already been through so much, all before he'd met me, and here we both were, in a land primed to wreck us both. A land that his past had, in part, prepared him to thrive in. Which was so messed up.

"No wonder you want some space from your father," I said under my breath.

"Yes," Raimie said. "No wonder."

After a pause, one where I tried and partially failed to collect my thoughts, I said, "And your Nylion wants this too?"

"Nyl wants..."

Narrowing his eyes, Raimie cocked his head, as if listening.

"Nyl wants retribution. For my father and everyone else who separated us to pay for what they've done," he eventually said. "But right now, that can't happen. We need Marcuset and Gistrick to maintain the army. We need Eledis around because... because he's too powerful to alienate, at least at this stage. And I... can't hurt my father like Nyl might wish.

"So, we—the both of us—have taken our best option right now. We give ourselves time and space to figure out how to resolve what's happened between us and the people we're closest to. And during that time, we remove the one person in our life that we can, the one who'd be the biggest distraction for us both."

"Your father," I said.

Raimie nodded.

"He wasn't especially pleased when I told him about this earlier tonight," he said. "It took me a while to find him because he didn't want to hear what I needed to say, but... after I managed to corner him and speak every word on my mind, he agreed to respect my wishes, for a time. Not sure how long 'for a time' is, but still, I thought that was a good sign. He's at least willing to meet me *somewhere* on this issue."

Wincing, I said, "Maybe."

I hoped Raimie was right. I hoped Aramar had seen the damage he'd done to his son and was willing to work on repairing it. In the past, he'd seemed like the sort of person who could do that, but I was also aware of how much people didn't want to face their mistakes.

They'd avoid and cajole and victim blame and do everything in their power to convince themselves and everyone around them that the 'mistake' had in fact been no mistake at all. Only time would tell what type of person Aramar would be about this.

"But that's why you've asked me to heal him," I said. "He's going out into greater Auden, and he'll have a difficult time with surviving, considering the physical condition he's currently in."

“Like I said before,” Raimie said. “Does it make sense now? I’m sorry if this is too big of a favor to ask for. You can always say no, of course, but I had to at least bring it up.”

“I understand,” I said.

But could I grant this favor? Yes, my reasons for refusing to use this part of my curse might be shaky, but in the past, the possibility of accidentally causing harm to a person, further down the line, had always been too much for me.

Surprisingly, that wasn’t the case for Aramar, though. I might like the man well enough. In many ways, he’d been decent and incredibly honorable toward me and many other people, but in this case, the mistakes he’d made had been... large. He’d killed Ferin over a misunderstanding. He’d tried to force Raimie into his version of ‘normal’, suppressing an essential part of who the kid was. Something that could have been avoided if he’d actually *listened* to his son.

He'd hurt my friend. Badly. That was what it boiled down to. I'd always been willing to bend my value system when it came to anything that harmed my friends.

“I’ll risk the consequences,” I said. “Your father won’t walk through Auden, paralyzed if it wasn’t for a tear-gained ring.”

Slumping, Raimie said, “Thank you, Rhy. Really.”

I patted his knee.

“It’s no trouble at all,” I said. “Now. Do you have any idea of where I can find your father? I should get this done as quickly as possible.”

Get a possible source of contention as far from my friend and ally as possible.

“He mentioned something about getting drunk at Sigemond’s,” Raimie said. “He *really* wasn’t happy when I last saw him.”

Of course he hadn’t been. Who would be after hearing that their son didn’t want them around?

“Then, I’ll get going,” I said, clapping my knees.

Once I’d reached my feet, Raimie cleared his throat.

“One more thing,” he said. “My father knows you’re Rhylix now. So you won’t have to pretend to be someone else around him tonight.”

Hmm. That was actually... a good thing. Maybe I could resolve some of my own issues with him when we met.

“Good to know,” I said, “and Raimie? I want you to know that nothing’s changed between us, all right? I’m glad you have someone like Nylion watching out for you. Maybe he can help me with

keeping you safe.”

Raimie’s mouth dropped open, and he squeaked. Chuckling, I hurried away toward a place I could climb down to the ground. Gods, I *loved* startling my friend like that.

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