

# Chapter 54: Kaedesa's Hospitality

## Raimie

Thinking back on my meeting with her, I wasn't sure why people thought Kaedesa was a violent queen. She'd been more than accommodating with me, considering who we each were, and when I'd flown to pieces after learning what Teron had done, she'd been quick to give me comfort. She'd even made sure that Eledis and I had better sleeping arrangements.

"This is nice."

As I stepped into my new room, Dim flashed ahead of me to inspect windows with panes in them, fresh straw strewn over the floor, and the tapestry on one wall. A desk and two beds were the only furniture in the room, although another door in a corner might lead to a washroom.

Maybe I could clean my clothes in there. Alouin knew I could use that.

"What do you think?" Dim asked.

Before I could answer, the door's lock thunked into place behind me.

Making a face, I said, "It's a nice prison cell."

Wandering inside, I circled the room, looking for anything I could use. When I reached the windows, I pushed on their panes, smiling when their frames swung out.

Once I was finished, I picked a bed and threw myself onto it before turning to my splinters.

"So?" I asked. "Did touching Shadowsteal-?"

Again, the lock thunked, and I slammed my mouth closed right as Eledis stumbled into the room. Righting himself, he brushed off his filthy clothes while finding me.

"Not dead, I see," he said, lifting an eyebrow.

He pursed his lips while examining our surroundings.

“And you got us out of the dungeons too,” he said. “What on earth did you say to the queen?”

Still focused on my splinters, I huffed.

“I did nothing special, just answered her questions as politely and honestly as I could,” I said. “She seemed to like me. Found me interesting.”

“Ah, that would do it,” Eledis said. “Kaedesa’s always looking for new sources of entertainment.”

Apparently satisfied with that explanation, he strolled to the windows, looking out over Daira below.

Glancing at Bright and Dim, I winced to see them watching me with their fingers tapping. Considering how long we’d been restrained from speaking without barriers in place, I knew that my splinters wanted to share everything with me *right now*, but I needed to address a few problems with Eledis first.

Also, speaking with them while he was in the room didn’t seem feasible.

“We should talk about how we’re getting out of here,” I said. “Sure, we haven’t been able to yet-”

“Because you have a weak stomach when it comes to sailing?” Eledis said, crooking an eyebrow.

Scowling, I said, “Yes. That. I’m sorry about...”

I waved a hand over the length of Eledis’ body, and he barked a laugh.

“Oh, it wasn’t so bad. Kept my mind off a few old memories,” he said. “Plus, I’ll get to bathe soon enough, I’m sure.”

Well, wasn’t that a relief? I’d been convinced that I’d have to deal with a cranky grandfather while being held captive.

“So... escape?” I said.

Chuckling, Eledis said, “Oh, I’ve got something in the works, don’t you worry. It’s a plan I started when I arrived in Allanovian, but our circumstances have changed drastically since then. It might be a while before it’s ready, and that’s where you come in.”

He glanced at me while I kept a blank face in place. I was happy to hand the task of saving our lives off to my grandfather, but at the least, Eledis could acknowledge how stressful the last day of my life had been.

Not that I was ever telling him about getting out of my cell last night, especially not how I’d done it.

“What do you want me to do?” I asked.

“Keep Kaedesa entertained,” Eledis said. “Without you as a factor, who knows what she might decide about us? If she’s taken a shine to you, though, she’s more likely to think we aren’t rebels. She’ll also put her decision off for a while, using it to keep you around.”

“Great...” I drawled. “I don’t suppose you’ll give me a hint as to what the escape plan is, will you?”

Eledis shook his head.

“You can’t accidentally share its details if you don’t know anything about it,” he said.

Did he really think I’d go anywhere near that subject with people I didn’t trust?

Still, if I looked at Eledis’ point without emotion, I understood it. Why take the risk, no matter how minimal, of me spilling the secret of our salvation to the queen?

“If that’s what you think is best,” I said with a shrug.

Eledis eyed me like I was a stranger, which made me snort. He’d thought I’d protest, hadn’t he?

“I’m glad we agree,” he said. “If you’ll excuse me, I mean to ask how I can get cleaned up.”

Striding across the room, he knocked, but when the door opened, he wasn’t allowed outside. Fighting to keep still, I waited for him to go, shooting glances at my splinters the whole time, and when Eledis was told to wait in the adjoining room, I fell sideways onto my bed’s blanket.

Even now, I didn’t feel safe enough to talk to my *invisible* splinters. Eledis could return at any moment, and besides that, the door between these rooms didn’t look heavy. If I started talking, my grandfather would probably hear it, even if he wouldn’t understand the specifics of what I said.

It was too bad, really. I was more than eager to learn the many things that Bright and Dim couldn’t say before. Admittedly, they were probably things that would change my life again. Rhylix hadn’t been able to explain much about primeancy before our ‘fight’ had driven us apart.

Gods, I wished I could just ask my splinters my questions.

A set of legs stepped into view, and when I glanced up at Dim, they had a look of disdainful accommodation on their face.

A face that at some point, had changed from a copy of mine. The shift was subtle, so I wasn’t surprised it had taken me so long to notice, and on raising myself onto an elbow, I saw Bright had done the same thing. Why would they change like this?

“Because you asked for it, dimwit,” Dim said, rolling their eyes.

That was disconcerting. Had Dim gotten so accustomed to my facial expressions that they could tell what I was thinking?

“For the love of-”

Breaking off, Dim slapped their face.

“When will you learn what being pieces of an all-powerful force of nature means?” they groaned.

What the hell was Dim talking about? Were they trying to shove their superiority in my face again? They seemed to enjoy doing that.

“Nope! Nope, nope,” Dim said.

They strode away, pointing at Bright as they passed.

“You explain it,” they growled. “Dealing with this ignorant version of him makes me want to rip him to shreds sometimes.”

Without a word, Bright replaced Dim, although they crouched so I didn’t have to crane my neck when looking at them. It was an improvement, but I still had a splinter staring at me. If I couldn’t talk to them, now might be a good time for me to catch up on sleep. Gods knew I’d missed a lot of it recently.

With Bright *right there*, though, falling asleep would be close to impossible. Maybe if they moved the teensiest bit, I could ignore-

Without provocation, Bright shifted to their left, moving themselves out of my field of view.

“Is that better?” they asked. “You said you wanted to talk, but if you’ve changed your mind... if you’d rather sleep, we can wait a little longer.”

I shot upright, scooting away until my back had hit the wall. What... the... ? What the hell had that been? What-?

Wincing, Dim said, “Would you please calm down? By *me*, you’re annoying when you’re panicked.”

Holding perfectly still, I glanced between my splinters.

*You can read my mind?* I cautiously thought.

Shifting in place, Bright said. “Ah... not exactly.”

While, with a mischievous grin, Dim said, “Yes.”

That had *not* helped. After a moment with me expectantly staring at them, Dim made a face.

“Ok, fine. They’re right. We can read your mind *of a sort*,” they said before poking Bright. “You’re no fun.”

Bright flinched away from the Daevetch splinter, making Dim’s grin turn malicious.

“What is it, oh most predictable of bores?” they asked. “Afraid I’ll hurt you? I promised I wouldn’t. Don’t you trust me?”

They gave Bright the biggest of puppy dog eyes, and the Ele splinter looked right back with thinly veiled disgust.

“Considering that your whole includes Deception and Manipulation, no. I don’t trust you,” they said through gritted teeth.

Throwing a hand over their heart, Dim said, “I’m hurt.”

They then proceeded to poke Bright again, and desperately in need of answers, I’d had enough.

*Would you two godsdamn SHUT UP and EXPLAIN yourselves?* I shouted internally.

Spinning toward me, both splinters clamped their mouths closed while simultaneously trying to speak, and I watched this with narrowed eyes. What were they playing at?

Wait. If they could hear my thoughts, they would have heard me shouting, and considering how they looked now...

Had something forced them to do as I’d commanded? What...? No, better question. *Why?*

But why was I focusing on that when my splinters were in distress?

*Stop! I didn’t mean it,* I said.

Slumping, Bright coughed into an elbow.

After a moment, they rasped, “Thank you.”

Meanwhile, Dim was bent double, heavily leaning on my bed.

With my eyes pinned on them, I said, *I’m so sorry. I wasn’t trying to... Can- can I make you do things, even unintentionally like that?*

Dim jerked upright with a vitriolic comment on their tongue, but the look on their face softened when they locked eyes with me.

“Of course you can, you absolutely dense human. To a degree,” they said instead. “How have you survived as a primeancer for so long without knowing basic information like that?”

Narrowing my eyes, I said, *I haven’t had many chances to learn these things, have I?*

For some reason, this quelled Dim’s anger even further.

“No, *you* haven’t,” they quietly said.

...What did that mean?

Before I could ask, Bright said, "Can we return to the question at hand, please?"

Right. How my splinters knew what I was thinking.

"You needn't worry, Raimie. We can't read your mind in its entirety," Bright said. "We only catch thoughts that are related to the wholes or that you direct at us."

Relaxing, I scooted forward a bit.

*Well, that's a relief,* I said. *No offense, but I wouldn't want either of you in my head that deeply.*

"Oh, trust me. We wouldn't want it either. Or I wouldn't, at least," Dim said. "Humans are so... complicated."

Cocking my head, I said, *And you aren't?*

Dim drew themselves up.

*"I obey my nature,"* they said. *"You fight it at every turn."*

"Again! We're getting away from the point," Bright said before a fight could break out.

*Yes. The point,* I said. *Why didn't either of you tell me about this before now? It could have been so useful over the last few weeks.*

Indulgently smiling, Bright play-ruffled my hair, which I endured with a glare.

"You, most wonderful human of ours, are unusual," they said. "Most people find speaking with their thoughts uncomfortable."

Plopping on the bed, Dim kicked at the air while leaning back to stare at me.

"It's because humans like the sound of their own voices," they said. "Most of the time."

Snorting, I said, *I can think of one human in particular.*

Eledis had been in that other room for a long time. Should I check on him?

Humming to myself, I shook my head. He was more than capable of taking care of himself.

*Talking like this will take some getting used to, but under certain circumstances, it'll be worth it,* I said. *Like right now.*

Flashing a smile, I leaned my elbows on my knees while pressing my palms flat against one another.

*Did it work? I asked. You've been mentioning new things like 'the wholes', but that doesn't necessarily mean anything. So, can we talk without that annoying buzz getting in the way?*

Exchanging a glance with Dim, Bright said, "I... think... so."

"I hope so," Dim said. "You, most unique of people, are a horrible primeancer. We need to fix that."

*And we will. Hopefully, I said. But first, let's test what we can talk about.*

While Bright crossed their arms, Dim rolled onto their stomach, cupping their chin.

Lazily swinging their legs in the air, they asked, "What do you want to know?"

## **TTS Chapter Fifty-Four**

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