

Chapter 55: The Primal Forces' Desire

Raimie

“What do you want to know?” Dim asked me, as mischievous as ever.

“Hmm.”

I had plenty of questions for my splinters, ones that I meant to tackle when I could, but for now, I needed a small number of them, ones that would show us how far we could push our communications boundaries. Given those parameters, deciding what to ask took very little time.

I assume splinters are attracted to a human or Eselan for a reason, one that involves each force's purpose for said person. I have three questions related to this, I said. First, why were you two attracted to me? Second, what do Daevetch and Ele want from me and last...

Rubbing my hands together, I stared at them.

It's obvious that you have something planned for me as well. So, lastly, I want to know what that is.

From the way they'd frozen, I'd have thought Dim and Bright had gotten stuck between this world and wherever Ele and Daevetch existed. They'd even stopped pretending to breathe.

Turning to Bright, Dim said, “He went straight to the heart of it.”

A smile crossed Bright's face, one that managed to look proud and sad at the same time.

“I've always said that he was bright,” they said.

“For *my* sake, now is not the time for puns,” Dim said. “I do rather like that one, though.”

Pulling away from Dim, Bright said, “Ugh. Don't make me sick. What will do about this, though? Those questions...”

Flinging their head back, Dim groaned at the ceiling.

“We answer them, dingbat. *Obviously*,” they said. “Besides, if we didn’t, our human would get pretty pissed at us. He can hear what we’re saying, or haven’t you noticed?”

Bright snapped their gaze to me, and grinning, I fluttered my fingers at them. I hadn’t felt the need to interrupt their discussion. Not only had it been entertaining but in their distraction, my splinters might have dropped information that they’d otherwise keep to themselves.

“Clever tactic,” Dim said, playfully punching my arm. “I approve.”

Sticking my tongue out, I rubbed my arm as if it had actually been hurt.

So? I said. *Do I get answers or not?*

Scowling, Bright said, “I suppose you should. You’ll need... no. You *deserve* to know the answers to these questions.”

Only slightly ominous.

Lifting an eyebrow, I said, *Ok...?*

Bright shifted to their other foot, sighing.

“For your first question, the answer is that we don’t know,” they said. “Most splinters are attracted to a specific quality of their person, gradually drawn in until they’re attached. For example, Perpetuation might be attracted to someone who maintains a strict schedule on a daily basis. With you, we were just... there. No attraction period at all.”

On the bed, Dim clapped and cooed—“Oh, well done”—and taking a step toward them, Bright thrust a finger at their counterpart.

“Don’t you start,” they growled. “I am walking a delicate line here. Don’t make it worse for me.”

Innocently blinking, Dim said, “But isn’t that my job?”

Dim... I sighed.

I didn’t have the patience to deal with more splinter bullshit, not of the squabbling variety at least. Most of the time, I enjoyed it, no matter how irritated I might act, but I was so close to real answers. I couldn’t have anything delaying it.

Wincing, Dim nodded at the unspoken rebuke.

“So, purposes next, right? Ours and the wholes,” they said. “Let’s start with the more difficult one. Ind. Square here and I-”

They waved at Bright.

“We believe that... you... can... do... something more... than what the wholes want from you.”

Those first few words had looked like they'd literally been forced out of Dim, as if each of them had been a tooth extracted from their mouth. After getting as far as they had, they were left panting, barely holding their head up.

The wholes that you're talking about are Ele and Daevetch, right? I asked.

"That's what you lot call them, yes," Bright said, wrinkling their nose.

Can you disagree with them like that?

I hadn't thought that was possible, but if it was, it could make for an interesting dynamic between splinters and their primal forces.

"We shouldn't be able to," Bright said.

Well, there went that idea.

"It's never happened before, not like this at least," they continued, "but things have never been as bad as they are now."

As bad as they-?

No. I couldn't get distracted. First, I needed the questions I'd already asked answered in full. Then, I could consider other mysteries.

So, what SPECIFICALLY do you two want from me? I asked.

As if they hadn't expected me to dig deeper, Bright blanched at the idea of answering me, stumbling away from the bed. Conversely, Dim tried so hard to speak, but when a first noise came from them, their form shivered and shimmered, and they collapsed into the bed's blankets.

Stop! I shouted. *Gods! What-? Can you answer that question without keeling over?*

With a hand pressed over their mouth, Bright vigorously shook their head, and after a long moment, Dim twitched, although they remained face-down on the bed.

"Kid, each of us is an insignificant piece of a whole, trying to defy the rest of it," they said. "Our existence derives from our wholes, and we've decided on a course of action that might break us from them. Yes, we're having trouble with talking about it."

Then, don't! I hissed, pressing my balled fists into the bed. *Hell, in case you haven't noticed, I can live with uncertainty like this. Don't stress yourselves for no reason.*

Chuckling, Dim rolled over before carefully sitting up.

"It's cute that you're worried about us," they said. "Nauseating, but cute."

"Well, I, for one, find it admirable," Bright said. "Thank you for your understanding."

Yes, well, I said, scratching my jaw. *Perhaps- perhaps we should move on?*

Because receiving compliments from these incomprehensible beings made me... uncomfortable. To say the least.

“Right, you had one more question. The wholes’ purpose for you,” Dim said before glancing at Bright. “You want to take this one? I’m still feeling a bit off.”

Making a pathetic face, they rubbed their stomach, nice and slow, but even I could see that their arm was shaking.

“I suppose it’s only fair,” Bright said through their teeth.

Turning to me, they said, “It’s quite simple, really. Each of our wholes wants you to choose a side in our Eternal War, thereby banishing your other piece, before joining the fight.”

...What?

With an eye twitching, I glanced between my splinters, one who was steady and supportive and the other, so fun and mischievous, and I thought I might be sick. Ele and Daevetch wanted me to choose, to pick one so that the other had to leave me. I wasn’t sure when I’d started thinking of my splinters as people, but I had, and the thought of losing one...

“No,” I growled with my jaw clenched.

Leaning toward me, Dim cupped their ear.

“Sorry,” they said. “What was that?”

With no memory of having reached them, I was on my feet, barely keeping my fists at my sides instead of swinging at an unseen enemy, and a red filter had fallen over my view of the world.

“I SAID NO!” I roared. “I’m not doing that. I’m *never* doing that, and if Daevetch and Ele, your *fucking wholes*, think that they can make me choose, they can go *straight to the void*.”

I was breathing hard while the world’s red tinge faded to pink, but before I could think too hard about what I’d done, Dim slipped off of the bed. With tears shimmering in their eyes, Bright joined them, and pressing their hands to their hearts, the two bowed to me.

“Our desperate hopes and never-to-be-realized dreams once more entrusted to the Balancer,” they intoned.

A chill raced up my spine, and with a sip of air, I leaned away. This felt...

Déjà vu. Why did I have such a strong sense of déjà -?

The door to the adjoining room banged open, letting Eledis barrel into the room, half-clothed.

“Raimie!” he shouted. “Where’s the-?”

Rapidly blinking, he froze, glancing around, and his inscrutable eyes soon landed on me.

“Were you just shouting at an empty room?” he asked.

Flushing, I rubbed the back of my neck.

“Sorry. Got a little frustrated while thinking about everything that’s happened,” I said. “I don’t have the luxury of an untamed forest to yell in anymore.”

After a moment more of staring, Eledis slowly nodded.

“Give me some warning the next time you plan on doing that, will you?” he said. “You scared the shit out of me.”

“Of course,” I said.

“Good. That’s-”

Shaking his head, Eledis turned to leave, but he paused before going back through the door.

“Maybe get some sleep?” he said. “You look... We can’t have you acting erratically around the queen.”

Which was as close as he’d ever come to saying he was worried.

“That’s probably wise,” I said.

When I glanced at my splinters, they were sedately standing at my side, as if oblivious to what they’d caused. As he disappeared again, Eledis seemed just as in the dark, and ignoring the carefully blank expressions on Dim and Bright’s faces, I dove into bed. I could demand more answers from them when I woke up.

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