

Chapter 7: Is Torture Ever Acceptable?

Raimie

Eventually, the two of us found the tower's cell block, and spying Rhylix up ahead, I motioned for Oswin to stay back. For once, he didn't protest this, probably because he had clear lines of sight down the hallway.

I meandered toward my friend, but once I'd gotten closer, I frowned, hastening my pace. Rocking in place, Rhylix was huddled on himself, and I could barely make out what he was saying.

"-hate it! Can't do this anymore. Why do I keep having to be the bad guy?"

Shit. I'd known asking him to do the interrogation was a bad idea.

I slowed down, speaking as softly as I could.

"Rhy? Are you ok?"

For a breath, Rhylix tensed into a stiff statue, but then, he lurched to his feet, jerking his head across the hallway, and I froze. Fortunately, the panic I'd spotted in him was quickly buried, and he cleared his throat.

"I..." he said, rapidly blinking. "Yes. Yes, I'm fine."

He is lying, both to us and himself, Nylion said.

I know, I replied.

But I didn't know what to do about it. Calling him out didn't seem like a good idea, but neither did leaving him here. Clearly, he couldn't finish this interrogation right now.

"Having trouble with Nessaira?" I said. "Why did you volunteer to handle her if it was going to be such a problem?"

As Rhylix winced, Nylion said, *Heart of my heart, please say you are not considering what I think you are.*

I couldn't answer him honestly, so I held my tongue.

"What can I say?" Rhylix said, rubbing the back of his neck. "Sometimes, I don't know what I'm thinking."

Clearly.

"I see," I said.

Do you, really? Nylion said. *Please. We cannot take this task on for him. I know you want to, but... please, Raimie. It would not be wise. Let us wait-*

Can we afford to do that? I said. *As you've said multiple times, we need this information, and we need it now. Besides, if Rhy can't do this, who else would we ask? I was already uncomfortable enough with giving him this task. I couldn't do it to another person.*

Raimie, I am begging you-

"Why don't I give it a try?" I said over Nylion.

I couldn't let him continue with that thought. If he did, I'd be stuck here for who knew how long, trying to reconcile his feelings with our required task.

"I probably won't get anywhere, but it couldn't hurt, right?" I made myself say.

And ignored the panic that Nylion was spilling forth.

Rhylix seemed almost as repulsed by the idea as my other half.

"I don't know..." he said.

Gods, why were these two being so resistant with this? Couldn't they see it was the only way?

"Come on, Rhy. It needs doing, yes?" I said, half to him and half to Nylion.

But- my other half started.

"Well... yes," Rhylix said, interrupting him. "We need to know what she knows, but-

Oh. my. gods.

"Then, let me try," I said.

Pushing past Rhylix, I forced myself to smile at him.

"I promise I won't do something I'll regret."

Or I hoped I wouldn't.

After all, I wasn't an idiot. I knew that nothing pleasant was waiting for me in Nessaira's cell, but I was hoping its necessity would erase my guilt over it.

That is naïve, Nylion whispered.

But he'd sounded so resigned.

You are my everything, Raimie, but sometimes, you are too optimistic for our own good.

I couldn't identify what had pulsed from him with those words, but it made me pause in the cell's threshold, not really seeing what it contained. Something took hold of my body, and almost without my consent, it twitched backward enough for me to poke my head back into the hallway.

Seeking out Rhylix, I said, "Stay there, would you? If I need help..."

Ha. Given how I'd found him, how could Rhylix help me with this?

But he smiled and said, "I'm not going anywhere."

And I relaxed.

"Thanks!" I said.

Now, it was time to do something I'd rather never try my hand at.

When I turned back into the room, though, I stopped short, nailed in place by what I saw. Nessaira was slouched in a chair, tied to it by the arms and legs. Her fingers had obviously been broken, dangling as they were from her hands at odd angles, and- and some of her fingernails were gone. Her hair was disheveled and grimy and her face... gods.

And yet, when she saw I'd placed my attention on her, she grinned, displaying her bloodied teeth and all.

"Aww... has the cute Eselan whelp sent his lapdog to finish the job?" she said. "Here's hoping you can do a better job than him."

What... what had Rhylix done? Hell. What would I have to do?

My hands were shaking as I moved into the room, and when I reached the table beside Nessaira with a host of tools on top of it, I flexed my fingers before slowly playing them over sharp edges and pincers and...

Oh, gods.

I couldn't do this.

But I had to. Rhylix certainly couldn't, and we needed... something from this. Right? Nessaira knew something we needed.

Where was this fog in my head coming from?

Snorting, Nessaira said, "You'll be as much of a disappointment as him, won't you?"

Ok. I needed to slow down. I needed to- to *think*.

Gods... her face... so many bruises.

I looked at that, and suddenly, I felt like I was gasping for air, much as I wasn't doing that. Why did her face...?

Nylion. He looked like her.

Didn't he?

"Oh, hell. Nyl... where are you?" I thought I said.

Gods, why was I having such a hard time with something as simple as thinking? That should be instinctive, right? I shouldn't be fighting off a need to run and a head full of fog and *her face-*

Heart of my heart, you cannot do this, came a whisper through my mind. I know it is hard, but you need to let go now. Just... let go. Let me out, like we have done before, and I will keep you safe.

I didn't know what was going on, but right now, I was too muddled to figure it out.

So, I did as the voice had said. I released control of the one thing I desperately clung to and faded into the background.

Slowly. Gradually. Gone.

Rapidly blinking, Nylion took a deep breath, and despite what a bad idea it was, he roughly shook his head. Doing that might indicate distress to this torture session's victim, but he needed it if he was to clear out this all-consuming fog. If he didn't, Raimie's influence might stick around for far too long.

This was what happened every time they unintentionally switched places or rather, every time Raimie unwillingly lost control. Every time something unpleasant drew Nylion to the surface.

But he'd known this would happen as soon as Raimie had gotten this ridiculous idea in his thick head. Gods, much as Nylion would do anything for his other half, sometimes his stubbornness frustrated him.

"Problem?" said the victim with a laugh in her voice. "You know... I get it if you can't hurt me. Not many people are strong enough-"

Huffing, Nylion backhanded her.

“Do shut up,” he said. “I am trying to think.”

It had been a while since he'd had to do something like this, and while his lessons on torture remained fresh in his mind, even after being abandoned for so long, he still needed a moment to choose which of them to use. There were so many options and he wasn't sure which would work best.

It didn't help that Nylion was still quite disoriented from everything that had happened earlier today.

When Raimie had closed the tear here... gods, it had hurt just as much as the last time, and he still hadn't figured out why that was or why the dissonance it had caused had yet to fade.

Add to that Raimie's near breakdown in the tower's top, and one had an overworked half of a whole. It had been ages since something had so strongly tested the walls between Raimie and Nylion, years since he'd had to battle his own distress while also calming the heart of his heart down. Years since their collective truth had nearly risen above the many lies told to hide it, both by themselves and others.

Somehow, he'd won against this bout, beating memories back below the surface, but it had been a close call. Given the direction Raimie's life was currently taking them, Nylion knew he'd have to make several repeat performances of this in the coming days, and he wasn't sure if he could keep it up for long enough.

Yes, he wanted Raimie to partially breach the walls between them, enough to learn some of their truths, but that shouldn't happen until he was good and ready, which he wasn't now. Even beyond that, there were some truths that Nylion never intended to share with his other half.

Those things should always remain buried.

None of this would help Nylion with his current purpose, though, so he shook his head again, pushing it all to the side. With difficulty, he focused on the real world.

Nessaira had kept silent, thankfully, but she was starting to look restless and bored again. So, Nylion took a knife from a nearby table, twirling it between his fingers, and considered where to begin.

Thank the gods that this victim was a woman. Nylion didn't have anything against such people. He knew, logically, that some of them were good and kind, but his personal experience with them had been anything but that. Said experience made it easier to rest his knife's edge against his victim's skin and lay open a first cut.

She had an unusual reaction to this, fluttering her eyes closed with a sigh, but Nylion wasn't concerned by that. He was too occupied by what he should ask her to care.

Raimie and Rhylix would probably want him to ask logistical questions, like which Enforcers were currently running Auden and where enemy troops had been quartered, but Nylion thought other

topics were of greater concern to their war effort. Topics that the other two might never have considered, fully wrapped in Ele as they were.

So, he said, "Tell me how the Kiraak are made."

Those beings had fascinated Nylion since Raimie had first laid eyes on one. While his other half had fought them during the beach battle, he'd marveled at how little those blank-vined people had paid attention to the wounds they acquired. It had been like they could fully ignore pain, and *that*, Nylion was interested in. He assumed it had something to do with the Daevetch that ran rampant in their bodies, and if so, perhaps he and Raimie could take the Kiraak's near-invincibility for themselves.

Burbling laughter interrupted Nylion's thoughts, and he fought to keep from scowling as the victim got control of herself. At the moment, only a blank face would do.

Still hiccupping on giggles, Nessaira said, "Is that all you've got, little one? If you want me to risk betraying my Dark Lord, especially about something sensitive like that, you'll have to make it worth my while."

She hungrily leered at Nylion, and he shuddered despite himself. Gods, he hated expressions like that.

How was he going to break this woman? If she'd had such an atypical response to a relatively tame torture technique, then she'd probably put up greater resistance than most. So, how...?

Nylion knew of only one other person who might claim such stubbornness, one man who might show as much indifference to pain, and in the past, only one thing had easily surmounted the heart of his heart's defenses against it.

Sighing, Nylion rubbed his forehead, releasing his typically enforced ignorance of the constant shadow at his side.

"All right, Chaos," he said. "You know what I want. How do I do it?"

Wincing, Chaos said, "Are you sure this is a good idea? Raimie wouldn't approve."

Which was exactly the point.

"At the moment, what Raimie would or would not want does not matter," Nylion said. "He is not here right now. I am, and it is my duty to handle all of the dark things that he should never have to conceive of. So, tell me what I need to know, Chaos, or so help me, I may end up doing something much worse than what I already have planned."

He truly hoped Chaos would go along with the plan for once. That other thing he'd threatened? It would require quite a lot of Daevetch use, and with how much of it Raimie had been using lately, Nylion wasn't sure how much more this body and brain could take without experiencing adverse side effects.

Squeezing their eyes closed, Chaos said, "Direct my whole into the cut on your victim's cheek. Then, send it through her body to the squishy mass at the base of her skull."

Nylion obliged, ignoring his victim's confused protestations, before raising an eyebrow at Chaos.

"Activate the pain node that you'll find there," the splinter said. "It's that simple."

So it was.

For as long as he could stand it, Nylion listened to his victim scream before releasing his hold on her. Once he had, Nessaira slumped in her bonds, panting, but when she lifted her eyes to him, they were shining.

"A Vice?" she purred. "Not only a rogue Daevetch primeancer, but one who can employ that delightful torture. Oh, how I've missed-"

With his stomach twisting into a knot, Nylion used his Vice on the victim to shut her up. Hell, the tone of her voice. It had made him want to throw up.

"Tell me what I want to know," he snapped.

When he released her, his victim licked her lips.

"Certainly," she said. "Keep hurting me like that, and I'll tell you everything."

"Just!"

Pinching his nose, Nylion rubbed one of his temples.

"Just tell me about the Kiraak for now," he said.

"Well, for starters, that process begins in the Birthing Grounds. This is where, as the name implies, the Kiraak are born," Nessaira said. "My Dark Lord attaches Corruption, his flavor of Daevetch, to key points in each prisoner from a Harvested population, after which he gives them to his Enforcers. Those lieutenants add the last attachment point-"

"Hang on," Nylion interrupted, lifting a hand. "Are you saying that Doldimar's entire, near-undefeatable army is made up of people controlled by Daevetch alone?"

With a frown, Nessaira said, "It's Corruption, actually, but besides that... yes."

She shrugged, and for a moment, Nylion could only stare at her.

Had- had Doldimar never considered that a Daevetch primeancer, free of his influence, might challenge him for his power?

"Huh," he said. "Maybe our enemy is not as smart as we thought."

Bristling, Nessaira made to speak, but Nylion was too caught on an idea to listen.

Forcing her mouth closed, he said, “If Kiraak are made from Corruption, then what would happen if I removed it?”

Blood drained from Nessaira’s face at the rate of Nylion’s lifted hand. He reached for every trace of Daevetch in her body and with a thought, called it to him.

This, of course, removed the Vice he’d placed on her as well, so as a tangled web of dark energy converged on Nylion from her cut, he was forced to listen to her desperate shrieks, consumed with singular conviction.

He’d caused this pain. Only him.

As the last of Daevetch’s traces flowed out of Nessaira, she limply slumped in her chair, nearly knocking it over, and biting his lip, Nylion reached to check her pulse, hoping she was still alive. He didn’t need another death on his conscience.

Before he could touch her, however, a commotion of scuffling shoes and slapping footsteps jerked him toward the doorway. Almost, he sprinted through it, ready to throw a Daevetch bolt at the noise’s source, before remembering that Rhylix had probably made it.

Wait. Rhylix had been here the whole time, meaning he’d heard everything that had happened here.

Including everything Nylion had said.

“Oh, shit,” he whispered to no one.

What Rhylix had heard... he could extrapolate so many things from it, things he couldn’t know. No one could know that Raimie was actually Raimie and Nylion, not when the last time...

Gritting his teeth, Nylion sprinted out of the cell, leaving an unconscious woman behind.

Revision #1

Created 6 September 2024 07:54:49 by FatalisticFable

Updated 29 August 2025 18:29:44 by FatalisticFable