

Chapter 74: That Was Unexpected

Raimie

Grabbing Ren's tunic, Rhylix propelled her into a tree, hovering his dagger in front of her eye. Or where openings in cloth strips indicated her eye should be.

"You have one chance to explain yourself before I slit your throat," he hissed.

When he fell quiet, though, the only thing that answered him was a shaky gasp.

At first.

Then, Ren was saying, "Rhy? Is it really you?"

Again, something knocked on the door to my mind, asking for permission to enter, but before I could allow it in, Ren started raining her fists on Rhylix's shoulders.

"I thought you were dead, you asshole," she sobbed.

Recognition clicked, and oh, how I wanted to burst into laughter or shout with joy. If this wasn't providence, I didn't know what was.

When Rhylix glanced at me with befuddlement painted across his face, I pointed at the woman, who was sobbing into his chest.

"Her name's Ren," I said.

At his sister's name, Rhylix became a statue. After a slow blink, he backed away from the woman with his dagger raised, joining it with a hand full of Ele.

"Show me your face," he stiffly said.

Obligingly, Ren unwrapped cloth from around her head, revealing jet black hair and gray eyes, followed by a button nose and full lips. The image would have been quite breathtaking if it weren't for the tears, dribbling over her cheeks, and mucus, dripping from her nose.

Rhylix's dagger hit the forest floor with a thud while his mouth worked, but nothing emerged from it. Meanwhile, Ren took a step toward him, which only had him retreating.

"No," he managed to say. "No, you're dead. That's the way it works. My family never survives, and it's always my fault."

What was that supposed to mean?

But then, a tree stopped Rhylix's backward march, and Ren caught up to him, wrapping her arms around his waist. He stiffened, but ever so slowly, panic receded, and he returned his sister's embrace with his breath hitching. Burying his face in her hair, he took a deep breath before his shoulders started shaking.

As quietly as I could, I backed off, hoping to give the two space. Leaning against a tree trunk, I closed my eyes while tapping my finger on my thigh.

I understood why Rhylix needed a moment. Who wouldn't after reuniting with a sibling you'd thought long dead, one who's death you'd blamed yourself for? Even still, I'd like to get Rhylix to a healer, preferably before he needed one.

Sliding to the forest floor, I cast that thought aside. I'd put this time to good use, even if what I had in mind for filling it was something I'd rather not do.

Dim? I said. *Wherever you're hiding, you can come out now. We should talk.*

On manifesting, the splinter sat cross-legged in front of me, playing with the cuff of their trousers' leg.

Where were you? I said.

"You sent me away when you ran from her," Dim grumbled. "And after that... I know what you want to talk about. I don't want to do it."

Sighing, I crossed my arms.

We'll have to eventually, I said.

"I know," Dim said.

After waiting a moment, I lifted an eyebrow.

So?

"So," Dim said before rubbing their face. "So, your piece of Order doesn't exist anymore, as I'm sure you've surmised. That asshole, Teron, destroyed Bright with Lighteater."

Lighteater's the sword that he had, yes? I asked and when Dim nodded. *How can a sword destroy a splinter?*

"That's... complicated."

Growling, Dim leaned back on their hands, looking up at the barely visible stars.

"Lighteater was forged eons ago," they said. "When this happened, purified tendrils of my whole were folded into the blade. Now, other forms of the whole, like the energy that you can access, can de-summon enemy pieces, but what's in Lighteater can utterly obliterate them. It and Shadowsteal are the only weapons in reality that can kill the enemy's 'splinters', as you call us."

Well, *ok*. Just when I thought I was getting the hang of the primeancy side of my life, something like this came along. There was one problem with what Dim had said, though.

Bright's not completely gone, though, I said. *They showed up when I was fighting Ren. Helped get her off of me, in fact.*

Dim lowered their head so fast that if they'd been in the physical plane, their neck would have snapped.

"What?" they said, although they'd sounded creepily empty.

You didn't see them? I said. *No. I'd sent you away, like you said.*

Shrugging, I spread my hands.

What can I say? They sounded just like Bright, felt like them when I accessed Ele. I don't know what to think, though, because they won't show themselves now. It's like they've been wiped out again.

Between blinks, Dim went from sitting in front of me to standing as far from me as they could get.

"That shouldn't be possible," they said.

Making a face, I opened my mouth to comment on the many impossible things that had happened to me recently when someone stopped at my side, making me jump.

"Rhy, why does your friend have one of *them* hanging around?" Ren asked with a hand on her weapon's hilt.

"Who, Dim?" Rhylix called from behind the tree. "Don't worry about it. It's harmless."

Broken from what had held them captive, Dim bristled, which rocked Ren back a step.

Keeping her eyes on the splinter, she said, "I've never heard of a 'Dim' part of Daevetch."

Glancing between her and the splinter, I frowned at Ren.

“You can see them?” I asked. “Are you a primeancer too?”

Seemed safe to say that taboo word if she could see Dim.

“Ha! No,” Ren said.

But she relaxed minutely.

“My sister can see splinters, but that probably has something to do with growing up around one,” Rhylix said. “And Ren? Dim is what Raimie calls his splinter. I find it an apt description of its affinity and its intelligence.”

Seething now, Dim muttered, “If you weren’t Raimie’s friend, oo...”

They took a calming breath.

“I take offense to that,” they shouted.

“I don’t care,” Rhylix sang.

“Ok. That’s it,” Dim growled, stalking toward Rhylix. “I swear to me, I’m doing what I can to meet you halfway, you prissy little-”

They disappeared, leaving me gaping at where they’d been standing. I’d been wishing that they’d go away, well aware that after getting so riled up, Dim would need time to cool off, but I hadn’t expected anything to come of it.

“Um.”

Glancing at me, Ren pointed at the spot I was fixated on.

“Did you just send it away?” she asked.

“Maybe? I’m not sure,” I said. “Hell, they’ll be pissed when they come back.”

“Then, don’t ask for it to come back,” Rhylix called.

Rolling my eyes, I walked my hands along the tree while getting to my feet.

“If you call it Dim, which aspect is it part of?” Ren asked.

“Raimie, no!”

“Dim’s a Chaos splinter,” I said.

As Rhylix groaned, slapping flesh against flesh, I scowled in his general direction. Why hadn’t he wanted me to share that fact?

I got my answer when Ren retreated from me with her weapons half-drawn.

"It's *what?*" she squeaked. "Isn't Chaos one of the more powerful-?"

"Yes! Yes, it is!" Rhylix growled. "Good gods, stop! Both of you, come help with the fire. Hell, Ren. He's my friend, and besides, now that you know he's not a Kiraak, don't you have something to say?"

Gritting her teeth, Ren released her hold on her weapons before bowing with great exaggeration.

"I'm sorry for attacking you," she said, "although with how you were acting, you were asking for it."

"Did Rhy get a pathetic apology too, or does your relationship with him excuse you from 'shooting him through the heart'?" I snapped.

Sneering at me, Ren turned on her heel to join her brother, and after trying to strangle the air, I joined them, finding Rhylix in the middle of building a fire.

Crossing my arms, I said, "I though you needed a healer."

"Ren took a look at the wound. She said it's not as serious as I thought," Rhylix said while using flint to start a fire. "I'll be fine."

"I did what?" Ren said.

As Rhylix shot her a cautioning glare, a suspicion, buried beneath the drama of the last hour, raised its head again.

"Uh-huh," I said. "Perhaps you remember a conversation where I said that I don't care if you have secrets? All that bothers me if you try to hide them from me. Yeah, I'm getting the same feeling now that I did then."

With a long sigh, Rhylix slumped.

"Please, just help me light the damn fire, Raimie," he said.

Gods, he looked exhausted, but then, it had been a long day for him, one as hectic as mine. I could give my friend a break for tonight. In the morning, he had a lot of questions to answer but for tonight...

Crouching beside my friend, I extended a hand for the flint and within seconds, had sparked a fire. While I fed it a healthy diet of twigs, Ren settled opposite us.

"Is a fire such a good idea?" I asked. "Earlier, you were scolding me about keeping quiet, and now, we have a merrily crackling flame to announce our presence. Seems contradictory."

Ren shifted her gaze to her brother before speaking.

“I find the risk minimal now,” she said. “With our numbers, we can fight off anyone who attacks us, and at night, camping beside the sea can get dangerously chilly.”

“Ok...”

Digging in her pockets, Ren said, “I’ll bet you two are hungry. I don’t have much but...”

She tossed us strips of dried meat, which like she’d said, wasn’t much, but I descended upon it like a starved animal anyway. Finished well before the others, I watched them eat for a while before shooting to my feet.

“I’ll keep watch,” I said, jerking a thumb over my shoulder.

I wasn’t sure why they were making me uncomfortable. Perhaps it was the easy, unspoken companionship I saw between them, even after their years apart. It spoke to the lack of anything similar in my life, and for some reason, that lack grated on me tonight, more so than normal.

Settling into a tree’s hollow, I stretched my senses into this shadowed forest, listening to its stillness.

So, this was the land I was meant to save, was it?

What an awful place. I missed home.

Revision #2

Created 25 August 2024 20:39:29 by FatalisticFable

Updated 7 September 2025 21:19:53 by FatalisticFable