

Chapter 76: Half of My Soul

Raimie

"We need to talk," I said.

Nylion and I had nearly reached the top of the well with only a small stretch of wall left between us and freedom. Or whatever the next step in this quest would be, I supposed.

"It cannot wait until we are no longer hanging from this numbing stuff?" Nylion grunted, hauling himself up a little further.

"It could," I said, "but who knows what'll happen once we're out? I'd like to get a few things off my chest before we head into that unknown."

"Ah."

Nylion was silent for a moment, hanging in place, before continuing with his climb.

"Go ahead, then."

I wasn't sure where to start, though. Could I outright say what I wanted to without Nylion reacting poorly? Instead, maybe I should see what he thought about it first.

"Um... this might be a weird question," I said.

Glancing down at me, Nylion said, "Ok...?"

Swallowing hard, I focused on where my fingers had sunk into black gunk.

"When we touch in whatever way," I said, "does it feel... different to you?"

Hell, why was I asking my imaginary friend how he felt? Nylion didn't have real feelings.

Even still, I was desperate to know. When we were near one another, was an emptiness in him filled, the same as it was for me?

"A vacancy at my core is banished, and I am whole," Nylion quietly said. "When you touch me, I am as close to who I am meant to be as I can get right now."

With my mouth drying, I jerked my head to the shadows under my imaginary friend's hood. How had he known the exact words to describe what was always eating at me?

"Why do you ask?" he said.

"Because... that's how I feel," I hoarsely said, "and I don't know why."

For some reason, this had Nylion pressing his forehead into the wall.

"I see," he said.

But his voice had been so brittle. Before I could ask how I'd upset my friend, Nylion scrambled to get up the wall.

"Do you have other concerns you want to address, or is this the only one?" he said.

That one wasn't enough?

"Nyl, you don't understand," I said. "That emptiness you were describing? I've had it for my whole life. Why is that ravenous ache only satisfied with you? And hell. Why are you at the center of my nightmares? Why has the truth about my nightmares and about you been revealed so slowly and in such a frustrating way? Why now?"

"Well..."

Grunting, Nylion slung his arm up to grip the well's lip.

"I cannot answer most of those questions," he said, "but for the one I can help you with..."

Flexing, he pulled himself over the edge before peeking down at me.

"Come up here, and learn the answer."

He disappeared, leaving me muttering curses under my breath. When I eventually reached the top, though, Nylion was there to help me roll onto the surface, although he quickly retracted his hold on me. As soon as my foot passed through its apex, the hole in the ground contracted until no evidence that it had existed remained.

Rolling onto my back, I stared at a blank, gray sky while kneading my arms. After so long with it present, the lack of numbness, once jumping down my arms, felt weird.

I'd dragged myself to the top for a reason, though.

Sitting up, I looked for Nylion, but as I did, my head's swivel was stopped by hands on either side of my face, holding me in place.

That was fine, though. The object of my search was sitting across from me.

Beneath the hood, my friend's lips were tight with worry.

"Please, heart of my heart," he said. "REMEMBER."

That one word reverberated around me, and from the corner of my eye, I watched the oily blackness that had always filled my nightmares crumble away. I didn't get to see what was revealed, however, because Nylion brushed his fingers against my temples, setting something shaking in me.

And I remembered.

I remembered playing in the forest with a little boy. That same boy listened as I spoke of my woes, but this wasn't a stranger, a person whose features had been blurred.

This was someone as familiar to me as my own skin. This was home. This was a kindred soul who'd been with me for as long as I could remember. This was...

With a cry, I scurried backward while blinking away the feeling of having acid tossed in my eyes.

"Nooo..." I whined with my shoulders heaving. "How could I-? NO! You protected me and I..."

Slowly, Nylion cocked his head.

"I am... confused," he said. "Why are you upset? I always protect you. It is... It is WHAT I DO."

But I was only concerned with the cloth draped over Nylion's head. That damn hood! Too long had it hidden the man beneath, and I was sick of it.

So, I got to my knees, shuffling forward until I was a breath from Nylion, and half-expecting that he'd stop me, I raised trembling hands, nudging the hood back. It fell away, and from beneath it, my own face stared back at me, although this one was horribly bruised and those eyes! There was such terror in them.

"Nyl," I said, hovering my hands over his skin. "My other half. I'm so sorry that I forgot you."

With a tremulous smile, Nylion said, "You are not to blame. A binding spell, one intended to lock us from one another, was cast on us. I am glad you had the strength of will to break it."

"Still..."

Whatever hesitancy had existed in Nylion vanished at this sign of my regret, pulling his beaten face into determined lines. He nuzzled my hand, perhaps intending to comfort me, but instead, it brought along something unexpected.

Nylion touched me and...

A jagged shard slotted into place. An aching emptiness was filled. An ever-present sense of loss found what had been missing and oh. What that did to me... to Nylion... to us both.

"I-"

"I-"

"We... WE are whole."

A beat of silence passed, and then, Nylion tackled me, burying his face in the crook of my neck.

"Heart of my heart," he sobbed. "Oh... heart of my heart."

He kept repeating this while I clung to him, gasping my own mantra.

"I'm sorry. Please, don't leave. Gods, I missed you so much."

Slowly, each of us fell into ourselves, and while Nylion seemed content with the arrangement we'd found ourselves in, I stiffened. Even though I needed to push Nylion off of me, I didn't do it, unsure how he would receive that seeming rejection.

Fortunately, he quickly rolled to the ground beside me, joining me in staring at a sky that didn't look like a sky. It was much too gray, even more so than what was seen on the cloudiest of days.

Hesitantly, I sat up, glancing around this next layer of my nightmare realm. On all sides, the only thing I saw was gray: gray ground and gray sky and gray clouds. The differentiation in their shade might determine where the horizon lay, but the only color I could find here was in Nylion and...

"Is that... a vampire?" I said.

"Hmm?"

Lazily, Nylion rocked his head from side to side as if searching for something, and when I pointed, his eyes landed on what marred the join of the sky to the ground.

"Looks like it," he said. "Wonder how it got here. I never liked those stories growing..."

Falling silent, he squinted at the vampire before sitting upright with a gasp.

"What is it?" I asked.

Never removing his gaze from the vampire, Nylion said, "The chest beside that monster. Do you see it?"

Tearing my eyes off of his unnerving look of fixation, I checked and...

"Yes, I see it," I drawled. "Why?"

Spinning to me, Nylion grabbed my shoulders, and I fought to listen instead of falling into the bliss of union that I'd once more found.

"Our memories are in there," Nylion growled.

After blankly blinking for a moment, I said, "Memories?"

Hissing, Nylion looked away from me.

"Yes," he said. "From what I can tell, everything about who did this to us is in that chest. Unless you think you forgot me by ordinary means?"

With the reminder of my natural state recurring at each of Nylion's touches, I found his proposed scenario incredibly unlikely. How could I forget this?

"I don't understand," I said. "Why would anyone do this to us? It's..."

Glancing at me, Nylion said, "Barbaric?"

Mutely, I nodded. Whoever had cast Nylion's mentioned spell had torn our essence in two, violating us in the deepest of senses, and that...

Gods. I might be sick.

"Do not let your mind wander too far into the past, heart of my heart," Nylion said, "otherwise, we might never recover our memories or get our vengeance for this wrong."

He was right. Taking a deep breath, I shook myself.

"How do we do that, though?" I asked. "If we follow the same logic as the last two steps, I'd assume that reaching our goal will involve opening that chest."

"Probably," Nylion said, "although I am a little lost as to how we will do it."

Cocking my head, I narrowed my eyes at the vampire.

"Maybe the monster has a key for us, although I don't know how we're supposed to fight it," I say. "I'd be surprised if it's friendly, though. Most of their stories don't portray them as the kindest of creatures. I wonder why the spellcaster chose such a mythical creature to guard our memories."

Barking a laugh, Nylion said, "I doubt they did. Have you not noticed that everything in this place is your creation? Being tied down in the well was your projection, although this latest stage is similar to our mindscape from when we were children."

Huh. I hadn't noticed it, but again, Nylion was right.

"Thanks ever so much, subconscious," I said. "So? Are we meant to fight the vampire?"

“Even if that is the intended course of action, we should not follow it like blind sheep. We should be smart about this,” Nylion said. “I propose that we try something sneakier. One of us should distract the vampire, preferably you since you summoned it, while the other one picks the lock on the chest.”

Jerking toward Nylion, I leaned away.

“You know how to pick a lock?” I asked.

“Unfortunately, no. Not anymore. Many of my skills have withered while waiting for you,” Nylion said. “You will have to learn the skill in the waking world before we can move on.”

The waking world...

Petrified in heart and mind, I licked my lips while swimming through my scattered thoughts.

“But... that would mean leaving you,” I said. “I CAN’T-”

Sipping at the air, I rubbed at my burning eyes.

“I can’t forget you again, Nyl. I can’t lose this.”

Blindly, I reached out for my other half, and he obligingly twined our fingers together, making us gasp at another taste of what had been long lost.

“I do not think you will,” Nylion eventually said. “If I am right, you should remember me, even in the waking world. From what you have told me, knowledge of me has been hovering at the edge of your awareness for a while. This—”

He waved at the gray landscape.

“—should be the push needed to break me through this gods-awful part of the spell.”

“You’re not sure about that, though,” I said.

With his lips pulled thin, Nylion took my other hand, squeezing it.

“You will have to leave here eventually, as sleeping forever is not an option. You must keep our body alive,” Nylion said with a wry smile. “I know how terrifying you find the prospect of waking up. I feel that fear too, yours and mine. But you must do it. I will be right here, waiting for you, either way.”

Biting my lip, I leaned forward, resting my forehead on Nylion’s.

“I...”

Scared. I was so fucking scared. I didn’t want to be torn apart again.

“I know,” Nylion said, rubbing the top of my head, “but you must go, and we will hope that you remember. All we can do is hope.”

Revision #2

Created 25 August 2024 23:02:56 by FatalisticFable

Updated 7 September 2025 21:23:48 by FatalisticFable