

# Chapter 76: Help for a Friend

## Raimie

Kylorian had stopped talking, obviously waiting for my reply. Unfortunately, I was a little too lost in my own head to speak up immediately.

"I *knew* there was something wrong with that man when we first met him!" Nylion said.

He was pacing across the room behind Kylorian with his hands raised to strangle the air.

"Gods, I should have followed my instincts about him. Damn Chaos for advising caution!"

I wasn't sure what he'd meant by that, but I couldn't question him right now, not with Kylorian staring at me. We'd already gone through one awkward, revelatory conversation today. I wasn't keen on having another, no matter how well the first had gone.

Ren had taken my recently changed relationship with Nylion relatively calmly, if also with a drop of confusion. I'd had to make things explicitly clear with her before she'd understood what I was telling her, which had been uncomfortable, but then, she'd smiled at me.

"I'm glad the two of you are happy. It's what I've always wanted for you," she'd said, "and for the record, I'd be fine with you having a relationship with another person outside of your head as well. Not sure how I feel about you having one with another woman, weird as that is, but another man or other? Fine with that. Although I guess that might cause a scandal among the other kingdoms, what with you soon to become king."

I... had not and still did not know what to think about that idea. Given how many difficulties I'd had with one romantic relationship alone, I was pretty sure Ren would be enough for me for the foreseeable future. Anything else seemed... intimidating.

"...Raimie?" Kylorian hesitantly asked.

Right. My friend and the horrendous truth he'd just shared.

On the other side of Kylorian, Nylion stopped short with his face pulled into a grimace.

"I did not mean to distract you," he said. "It is just... his story. I can-"

He cut himself off, pinching his lips inward, but the word he must have meant to say still echoed in our head: relate.

*I can relate.*

A sense of intrinsically knowing what someone else's pain felt like, even if I'd never experienced something similar. The same sense I'd felt after Rhylix had shared his truth with me years ago.

How could Nylion and I *relate* to Kylorian's story? The idea that we could when our life had been nowhere near as terrible as what he'd described was awful of me, but there it was, daring me to deny it.

"I understand that I've put you in a difficult position."

The brittleness of Kylorian's voice snapped me fully out of my thoughts.

"I'll... give you some time to think about it."

He slapped his knees, leaning forward as if to stand up, and I shot toward him, pushing down on his leg.

"You haven't. Put me in a difficult position, I mean," I said. "I was just thinking it over. Trying to decide what to say, which was stupid when I already have the words I need."

I craned my head to meet Kylorian's eyes. He'd been darting them over the room for quite a while now, but while I understood that impulse, I needed to make sure he was listening to me now.

"You've told me all of this as if I'd have to make some grand, agonizing choice at the end of it, but I don't, Ky. I really don't," I said, "because the choice is simple. I pick you."

Kylorian froze, staring at me without a blink. Meanwhile, Nylion raised an eyebrow at the other man, crossing his arms with a huff.

"Did he think there was a chance in the void that we'd chose a sadistic fuck like Tanwadur over him?" he said.

With a miniscule headshake at him, I leaned forward to rest a hand on Kylorian's shoulder, smothering a grimace as I did. After this conversation and the one I'd had with Ren, I'd need to rest again soon. Rhylix may have fixed the injury I'd gained near Qena, but I was most definitely still recovering from it, considering how tired such a simple motion had made me.

"You mentioned something about severing ties with... him," I said, barely remembering to replace the words 'that bastard' with something more neutral in time. "Do you want any help with that?"

Kylorian's mouth flapped open. He tried to speak, squeaked, and cleared his throat. On his second attempt to speak, he managed a single word.

“Help?”

I nodded.

“I’m about to become king, right? If people insist on giving me so much power, I might as well use it for something good,” I said. “I could place a sanction on Tanwadur, make it so he can’t legally be near you. Or something like that. Anything you think might help. But only if you want it. It’s *your* decision how much you want me involved, if at all.”

“I do. Want your help.”

Kylorian paused, as if shocked that he’d really said that and so quickly too.

“I just don’t know...”

He trailed off, narrowing his eyes. I wanted to rush forward with more suggestions, but Nylion shushed me, flapping a hand practically in my face.

“Let him think.”

So, I did, and after a moment, Kylorian took a breath with a sharp nod.

“I want you to tell him your plan for us. That I’ll be working for you, which means I’ll need to live in the capital. That I can’t be disturbed by any calls for help at home that he might try to make,” he said, “and that you won’t change your mind about any of it.”

I saw the worry in his last statement and made my mouth, whose corners wanted to twitch into a smile, stay flat.

“I won’t be changing my mind, not any time soon at least,” I reassured him, “and that’s an easy enough task for me to complete. Is there anything else I should keep in mind while speaking with him?”

Almost immediately, Kylorian was earnestly nodding while leaning forward in his chair.

“You can’t let him know that I told you about my first meeting with him,” he said. “Tanwadur would see that as a threat, both from you and from me, and while I can hold my own with him and I’m sure you could too, I don’t want to cause you more trouble than I must.”

With a snort, Nylion said, “Please. This will not be any trouble. I only wish we could ruin Tanwadur as much as I might like, now that we know exactly how much of a piece of filth he is. But that might upset Kylorian, which I know you would not like.”

I let a smile crawl onto my face this time, making sure that my other half knew it was for him.

“It’s good of you to think of my wellbeing like that, but you don’t need-”

“And Ren too, I suppose,” Nylion interrupted with a contemplative look on his face. “Anything that happened to her adoptive father would upset her too.”

I clicked my teeth together so hard that I was worried about whether I’d chipped one. Ren... As if I needed another complication in that part of my life.

With a barely contained wince, I asked, “Does... Ren-?”

Kylorian’s curt headshake cut me off as effectively as Nylion had just done.

“She knows he brought me home after... intervening with my original caretakers,” he said, “but she doesn’t know the full extent of our father’s misdeeds against me. No one does.”

That made me wryly grin. I was glad I wasn’t in love with someone who could ignore something as awful as what Tanwadur had done.

“Except me,” I said. “Now, I know everything.”

Kylorian paused, eyeing me.

“Yes...” he slowly said. “You... do.”

Gods, he looked uncomfortable. Time to change the subject.

“I’ll get started with this right away. Best not to have it hanging over your head any longer than we must, right?” I said. “Unless there’s something else we should discuss first?”

“No,” Kylorian rushed to say.

As if once again started by his own abruptness, he paused before clearing his throat.

“No. Thank you,” he repeated. “We’ve addressed everything I came here to speak about.”

“In that case...”

I turned toward the nearby closed door before raising my voice.

“Dath? Could you come in here, please?”

As usual, my old friend from Ada’ir had accompanied Kaedesa on her journey across the Narrow Sea, and as always when that happened, the queen had dismissed him from his guard duties once they’d arrived. Inevitably, he’d found his way to my bedside after I’d returned from Qena, like he had done on every visit here.

It annoyed me slightly that this time around, he’d convinced Oswin that he could act as my bodyguard while Auden’s spymaster handled a few last-minute security precautions for the coming investiture. Ring, Pointer, and Thumb were busy in greater Auden, although they were due back before the ceremony, and I’d seen neither hide nor hair of Little since he and Oswin had had their

altercation yesterday.

Which left Oswin busy enough to allow a former enemy-turned-friend to take his place.

I'd wanted to spend time catching up with Dath, not enduring enforced rest while under his watchful eye, but I hadn't been given much choice in the matter.

Oh, well.

Leaning into the room, Dath raised an eyebrow at me.

"You need something, invalid?" he drawled.

Which only made me roll my eyes. He'd been giving me so much crap about what had happened beside Qena's tear, going on and on about how one of Rhylix's students should never have been caught unaware like I had. He'd cited his long list of accomplishments since leaving our mutual friend's tutelage in Ada'ir as proof of how much I'd been 'lazing away' with my training.

Not that I minded his teasing. Much.

"Could you please send a runner into the city?" I asked him. "I need to speak with Tanwadur, the... guiding influence of Tiro."

Damn, that self-professed title seemed even more pretentious and annoying, now that I knew the man's true nature.

"I believe he arrived in Daira early last week," I continued. "He's staying at one of the inns closest to the palace."

Dath tossed a casual salute my way.

"Sure thing, Raimie."

As he closed the door, I caught Kylorian's confused look and snorted back a laugh.

"He's an old friend from Daira. That's why he was so informal," I said. "Now. Do you want to be here while I talk to your... father?"

Was that still the right word to describe Tanwadur's role in Kylorian's life?

Sighing, my friend said, "Yes, I still consider him my father, sad as that is. And no. I'd rather be... elsewhere."

Nylion watched Kylorian's rise to his feet with such pained eyes!

"It's not sad at all," he whispered, almost to himself.

I ignored him to smile at Kylorian.

“Thank you for stopping by, Ky,” I said. “At some point today, you should go find Eledis too. He mentioned something about offering you a position during the investiture ceremony, but unfortunately, I don’t know which one it could be. I’ve left planning that awful thing in his hands.”

Finally, the barest hint of a real smile flashed across Kylorian’s face.

“We have an appointment to speak about it tomorrow morning, but thank you for the reminder,” he said, “and... thank you for everything else. Truly.”

It was my great pleasure to say-

“You’re quite welcome.”

Kylorian dipped into a short bow, which was still startling to see directed at me and especially disconcerting coming from him.

“I’ll take my leave,” he said. “Good luck, Raimie.”

He soon disappeared, and I turned all of my attention on my other half.

“You know how you’ve always wanted revenge for our family’s betrayal?” I said. “I’ve explained why we can’t have that—”

Yet, I silently added.

“—so how do you feel about using Kylorian’s bastard of a father as a replacement for that?”

Slowly, a beautifully vicious grin covered Nylion’s face, and seeing it, I shivered.

“I would love that,” he said.

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