

Chapter 85: All I've Wanted, Part Two

Raimie

When Nylion and I reached the gardens, the Sun was kissing the skyline. Thumb took up watch on the outskirts of Elisk's mini forest, there to keep unwanted intruders at bay.

I headed for the gardens' cliff side, in the opposite direction of the Matvai delegation's campsite. Such bad memories lingered here. A loathsome mass of human remains was mixed in with the soil underfoot, but hopefully, what happened today would supplant the dark images currently floating in my head with brighter ones.

The tree line broke up ahead, and I flung a hand up to shield my eyes from the Sun's piercing rays. Between my fingers, I noted the sky had acquired a rosy hue, and evening's daily magic sprang to life, turning the air itself into a picture of beauty. Soon, dusk would fall, ending this enchantment, but we had this quarter mark of perfectly-pitched glow to enjoy first.

When my eyes had adjusted, I lowered my arm before sucking in a breath. Ren was grinning at me from the cliff's edge, and I'd never seen anything lovelier. She'd arranged her black hair in loops and whirls with straggling strands dangling to frame her face, and light beamed through it, haloing it with an orange bloom. Ring must have painted her face at some point because black was rimming her gray eyes and her lips were apple red.

She was wearing... I wasn't sure what she was wearing.

A shiny, black fabric sheathed her body, accentuating every curve, but over that, a gossamer-thin, white fabric was delicately floating. Entangled in this outer layer, Ele bundles twinkled at me.

I raised questioning eyes to my friend. Rhylix was tense, probably due to his proximity to the nearby cliff, but he set aside his fear to acknowledge my curiosity and shake his head. If my friend wasn't supplying the Ele in Ren's dress, who was?

"Gods, she is beautiful," Nylion said, "but... why is she making that face?"

His question and the tilt of Rhylix's head toward Ren had me focusing on her again. Her smile had begun to falter, which had my heartbeat skipping, and in an instant, I was beside her, clasping her

hands.

“You’re stunning,” I said, stabilizing her grin.

“Not bad yourself, hot stuff,” she said. “It’s illusion work, by the way. The dress is, I mean. I don’t have access to a full-blood Eselan’s magic, but what I can do, I’m damn good at, as you can see.”

Yet another example of why I loved her. Recognizing my curiosity, she’d known it would gnaw at me until she explained. Leaning forward, I kissed the tip of her nose.

“Thank you.”

Ren flushed a dark red, incoherently mumbling.

“I guess that means both of you are sure about this,” Rhylix said with a laugh.

Raising an eyebrow, I mouthed at Ren, ‘Even with Nylion?’

We’d discussed my other half in excess over the last month, including the recent developments between us. Those talks had been awkward and halting, and I still half-expected her to run away from the conundrum that was me.

But she simply smiled and mouthed.

‘Even then.’

So together, Ren and I said, “I’m sure.”

Which of course, sent us into a giggling fit, one that had our hands tightening around one another, and Nylion hesitantly laid one of his over the bundle for a brief second before withdrawing. I wanted to call him back, but before I could, Rhylix rolled his eyes.

“Sickeningly adorable,” he said. “If you can control yourselves, we can begin.”

He gave us two, blood-red sticks, each a few inches long.

“When you’re ready, break the package,” he said, “but be aware that once the process has begun, nothing can stop it. You’ll be joined for life.”

Accepting the proffered item, I asked, “You’re sure this will work?”

“You survived a Joining with me in Allanovian. This one will be far more intense and *permanent*, but I see no reason for it to fail,” Rhylix said. “Why? Having second thoughts?”

None. Meeting Ren’s eyes, I lifted a slender stick, distilled from her blood, and after breaking it, I breathed her in.

Her life rushed by in fits and starts. Most of the pauses involved her brother.

Rhylix, telling her impossible stories. Rhylix, amazing her with displays of white light. Her, admonishing Rhylix's supposedly invisible shadows.

A few I'd already seen.

She clings, sobbing, to the brother she thought long dead.

Others, I hadn't.

Kylorian twirls her in a circle, peppering her head with kisses. Dury praises her for her accuracy with throwing knives. An unfamiliar boy whispers sweet nothings in her ear before silencing her giggle with a kiss, and she succumbs to long-repressed passion.

A bittersweet lash had accompanied the last two. The first of these, I understood. After the beating he'd received during the investiture, Tanwadur was still clinging to life, and Rhylix had privately told me that the leader of Tiro's prospects were grim. Of course sorrow accompanied the joyful memory of her adoptive father. It easily overshadowed my own vindictive pleasure at that horrid man's change of fortune.

As for the second, I was at a loss. I couldn't help my own, irrational flash of jealousy, even knowing the memory had come long before me. Perhaps that relationship had ended poorly, and its disastrous culmination was why Ren viewed what should have been a happy memory with an odd mixture of regret. Curiosity nagged at me, but it was swept away by the insistent flow of her memories.

Surprisingly, the ones that lasted the longest centered around me.

She follows the strange boy, hardly daring to hope, and caresses the hilts of her eshvik for when he proves himself a liar. Once more, the boy nearly trips with his clumsiness almost amusing, and a smile tugs at her lips. Eventually, the boy drags her name out of her, and soon after, a pop breaks the forest's stillness. Someone pins her to a tree, but before she can resist the hold, her new enemy's face registers. It's older, more weathered, but definitely her brother. The boy didn't lie.

She watches Raimie practicing his forms in the sand. His level of blade mastery is impressive, considering where he comes from. Leisurely running her eyes over the uniform that he's wearing, she can almost imagine him as a fabled soldier from the old Audish army. In the middle of a spin, Raimie notices her, and as if prompted by her presence, his form adapts and changes, shifting into a graceful dance. For some reason, this has her heart quickening in her chest, but Rhylix has to go and ruin it, yelling for Raimie's attention.

As she tells him about how his soldiers survived the recent battle, Raimie's eyes glisten. Their wellbeing genuinely concerns him, and that depth of compassion gives her the courage that she's been seeking over the last few days. She pulls him to her, and when their lips come together, she knows. He's the one she'll spend her life chasing.

A series of snapshots followed.

Introducing Raimie to Sigemond, her closest confidant. Hiking outside Tiro's walls while listening to him ramble about this forest's similarities to his homeland. Watching him grow to love her country and her people, slowly incorporating more of them into his 'family'. Wondering what tragedy befell him that he needs a replacement for his blood kin. Joining him in morning training sessions and laughing when her triumph in sparring contests surprises him. Working to surmount the ever-present barrier that prevents her initial touch from eliciting anything but fear. Relief that he wants her despite the harm she did to him and the years that have passed. Her heart in her throat when he returns from Qena in a wagon and she thinks him a corpse. Furtive meetings during his recovery where they make plans and he talks about the other man in his head.

The Joining should have ended with those memories. Rhylix had taken samples from each of us soon after those meetings, one he'd thought I was stable enough to part with more of my life's blood. It didn't conclude, however, moving beyond that last memory with ease.

A dreamlike state spilled over me, and I became Raimie-Ren, a state that I was quite familiar with, if not with her. We watched our loved one emerge from the jungle, squinting and shielding his eyes, and oh, he was beautiful. Ring had done a marvelous job. We'd have to thank her for it later, especially for convincing our stubborn man to wear the sword that he loathed. We knew that eventually, he'd need Shadowsteal, and despite his reluctance, he needed practice with it if he was to survive Doldimar's eventual return.

That was a time far into the future, though. For now, our man lowered his hand and blinked at us, and we blushed at the look passing over his face. With the sun shining directly on him, we knew how he must feel. We needed him to move closer, *closer*, so we could oh-so-carefully caress his face, complete the Joining, and find somewhere quiet where we could be alone together.

The scene skipped, and he stood across from us, absently holding the broken ends of his powdered blood stick. His eyes were wide with his face slack, and we momentarily worried that the Joining had fried his mind, despite our brother's assurances, but his brilliant, blue eyes soon focused on us. Stepping closer, he leaned down and oh, *oh*, OH! All was right with the world because we were one and we'd never need anything but each other and... and... one more of us. The world and its problems could die with a whimper because together, we were stronger than the world.

The world must have taken offense to that thought because it lurched. Suddenly, solitary Raimie was kissing solitary Ren, and while this felt nice, it was a faint shadow of what we'd been. We broke apart, gasping, and steadying us, Rhylix chuckled.

"That was..." Nylion whispered nearby. "We had that when we were children, did we not? It is like that one time in your study. Heart of my heart, we have to--"

Get it back, I growled. *We HAVE to get it back.*

Abruptly, my bad leg protested how long I'd been standing on it, and I wobbled in place. Rhylix helped me to the ground with Ren kneeling beside me.

"Give it a moment. You'll feel like you're back to normal soon enough," Rhylix said. "And congratulations. By Eselan standards, you're married."

His footsteps retreated toward the palace, leaving us alone. The Sun's crown had yet to disappear behind the horizon, and while dusk steadily encroached on us, it hadn't erased the play of colors in the sky. I offered Ren my hand, and she curled hers around it, scooting closer to lean against me. We stayed there for a while, watching the sunset, until I gathered the courage to speak.

"I hate to ask this, given what just happened," I said. "But I need... I have to..."

I couldn't finish the request, but Ren merely squeezed my hand.

"You need to speak with him privately?" she asked. "I don't mind. Do what you need to, Raimie, and once you're finished, know I'll be here."

Gods, I didn't deserve her.

"Wait," Nylion said. "You need to speak with me? About what?"

Ignoring him, I gestured at Ren's lap, and when she nodded, I laid my head in it, closing my eyes.

When I entered our shared dream space, Nylion was FREAKING OUT with his hands in his hair while he rapidly paced. He was muttering under his breath, a litany I tried not to hear, but it was kind of hard not to.

"What am I going to do? I thought we were making progress. I thought it was coming soon. Gods, he will reject me, and I have no fucking clue what I will do if he-"

"Nyl. Really. I'm not rejecting you."

Slowly getting to my feet, I stretched, advancing on Nylion, and when I was close enough, I draped my arms around my other half's neck with our faces close enough that we could kiss, if I'd stretched a teensy bit more.

"I will NEVER reject you," I said. "Do you hear me, silly? Never, ever, not in a hundred million years. I remember what being without you is like. I have fucking nightmares about it, so please. Don't worry about that."

Bit by bit, anxiety seeped from Nylion until it was gone, and he heaved an enormous sigh.

"Ok," he said. "What do you want to tell me, then?"

Smirking, I said, "First."

I closed the distance, gentle in the press of my lips against his, but Nylion was having none of that. Tangling his fingers in my hair, he pulled our bodies together, and a tongue traced the crease of my lips. Gods, it would be so easy to give in, to open my mouth and let this take the course that we'd established over the last month, but I didn't want that. I needed to say this, damnit, no matter how much it scared the shit out of me.

Digging my hands into Nylion's shoulders, I insistently pulled him away, wincing at the look on his face.

"We have to save it," I said. "Who knows how what happens in this place translates to the real world and Ren..."

For the briefest of moments, Nylion went still, widening his eyes far too much, and- and I heard a faint, couldn't-be-real voice whispering something I refused to hear, but before I could think to question either of these things, my other half was tilting his head to the side.

"You are right, of course," he said. "So, again I ask. What do you want to tell me?"

Taking one of Nylion's hands, I brushed my knuckles along my other half's cheekbone, pausing at the crest.

"It's something I've been thinking about a lot recently," I said. "Something I've been unconsciously considering since our memories first returned to me but haven't put serious contemplation into until Qena."

"Ok...?" Nylion said.

And gods, that apprehensive guardedness. It was so Nylion, no matter how much I wished it wasn't. I pulled him to me.

"I love you, Nyl," I said. "I'm sorry it took me so long to say."

Nylion rapidly blinked at me with his breathing quickening, and swallowing, he spoke.

"You..."

"Love you."

I ducked to brush kisses around Nylion's neck and jaw.

"Like I love Ren."

Gently, I sucked on Nylion's shoulder, curving my lips on his skin when he gasped and clutched at me. When I pulled away, I smirked at the splotched, red mark I'd left behind before meeting Nylion's eyes.

"I love you," I said. "No matter what that means about me. No matter how strange other people might find it. I love you, Nyl. Heart and mind and essence."

I was afraid that Nylion would faint from hyperventilation, but in a spike of initiative, he kissed me, firmly. With teeth grinding against lips.

In increments, he backed off, making a small cave between our faces when he leaned his forehead against mine.

"I love you too, heart of my heart," he said. "And I am more grateful than you will ever know that you have finally remembered this."

For a long while, we simply held one another, and maybe, MAYBE, one of us cried into the other's shoulder, but if it was so, neither of us was telling.

Eventually, I said, "Shall we return to Ren?"

Nylion hesitated with his breathing hitching.

"Yes," he said, "I suppose it is only fair."

"I did just marry her," I said with a smile.

Pushing me away, Nylion rolled his eyes.

"Gods, you are insufferable at times," he said. "Go on, then. Return us to the waking world."

And as I'd learned how to do over the last few months, that was what I did.

I woke up in Ren's lap, watching her watch the sunset. As stars popped into view, I squeezed her hand, and she glanced down at me with a smile.

Gingerly climbing to my feet, I helped Ren stand, noting Nylion waiting as far from me as he could get. We silently strolled to the palace, arm in arm, with Thumb trailing us. When we reached the room that I'd claimed, though, I firmly closed the door behind us, blocking the spy out.

Ren critically inspected my accommodations, wrinkling her nose, but I couldn't blame her. My obsidian box with only a narrow bed to fill it wasn't impressive.

"Where will you take her?" Nylion asked.

You'll see, I said in a sing-song voice.

"Don't worry. I'll get us something more fitting soon enough," I told Ren.

Igniting a gas lamp, I stepped into the shadows that it cast.

"In the meantime, we have other options."

I beckoned her forward, but she only stared at me uncertainly.

"Ren," I sighed, "don't you trust me?"

My challenge moved her forward, and tightly wrapping her in my arms, I let the shadows take us.

Revision #2

Created 6 September 2025 21:07:06 by FatalisticFable

Updated 1 October 2025 03:29:59 by FatalisticFable