

# Chapter 92: Mild Panic

## Raimie

As Rhylix and Ren again explained what was coming for us, I absently tapped Silverblade's hilt, keeping my eyes fixed above their heads. If I met their gazes or stopped this nervous tic, everything would catch up with me, and I needed it to wait in the wings for a moment more.

Sometimes, detaching from oneself and one's surroundings could be useful.

With a look of concern, my friend said my name, and I shook myself.

"Oswin, if I asked you to gather my family, Marcuset, and Gistrick, would you do it?" I asked. "Or will that interfere with your bodyguard duties too much?"

The spy, who'd faded into the background for this whole conversation, shifted in place.

"I could get someone else to do it," he slowly suggested.

For the love of...

"I can watch my own back for a little while, you know," I snapped. "Especially with Rhy here."

Ok. That outburst had been uncalled for, but of all the changes I'd endured in the last week, having someone constantly hovering around me, watching, had been the worst. It had made accomplishing some of my more sensitive tasks close to impossible. I didn't think Oswin and the various people he represented would appreciate me learning how to lockpick, like I needed to do for Nylion.

When he just stared at me, I sighed, unsure of how to continue. I should apologize, but how-?

"I could do it."

Turning to Ren, I raised an eyebrow, which made her grin.

"What? I know what they look like, so I can wrangle them into one place, which would make everyone happy," she said, "but why would you want to do that?"

Wasn't the answer to that question obvious?

“First, they need to know what’s happening, just as much as I do, and please don’t argue with me about that, Oswin,” I said. “I may have accepted the whole ‘being king’ business, but that doesn’t mean I should stop consulting with the knowledgeable people around me.”

Saying not a word, Oswin grinned, but what I’d said had Rhylix furrowing his brow.

“Becoming king business?” he asked.

“I’ll tell you later,” I said. “Also, if what you’re saying is true, then we’ll need to discuss battle plans, and given our timeline, we won’t have much time to do it. We should start soon.”

I already had some ideas about how to defend my people from the coming threat, but hearing from others, especially an experienced commander like Marcuset, would be helpful.

“You mean to fight them?” Ren asked.

With her nose wrinkled, she was looking at me like I was crazy, but I couldn’t blame her for that. I’d heard every word that she and Rhylix had relayed about the odds we’d face.

“Perhaps we will. At the moment, it’s our most likely course of action,” I said, “but I haven’t decided yet, not fully. Hence, why I want to speak with the others.”

With an uncertain nod, Ren said, “All right. I’ll grab them. Shall we meet in the same place as usual?”

Where she and I had been meeting to discuss her efforts in Tiro?

“It’ll have to do,” I said. “With so many people inside, the tent may get cramped, but so far as I know, we won’t find privacy anywhere else.”

“Yes, unfortunate as that is,” Ren said. “Give me a quarter mark, and I’ll have them there.”

“Thank you.”

Flashing a grin at me, Ren took off while Rhylix speculatively watched me.

“You two are working well together,” he said.

And he found this unusual, why?

“She apologized. I apologized,” I said. “Everything’s good between us now.”

For some reason, this made Rhylix smirk, and I might have asked him about it if Oswin hadn’t cleared his throat then.

“Are you... well, sir?” he asked. “Considering what we just learned, you’re acting very...”

Flippant? Yes, I was well aware. This was what always happened when I detached. As I'd said, it could be a useful skill at times.

Sighing, I rested my hands on my hips.

"Would you rather if I were panicking?" I asked.

Shaking his head, Oswin drawled, "No, I'm just..."

He appeared to have nothing else, so I patted his shoulder, hoping it would reassure him.

"Don't worry. I'm ok," I said. "I do need to grab a few things before this meeting, though, so Rhy? Will you accompany us?"

"Will it help?" my friend asked.

Was he serious?

"Yes, it'll help. Having you around always helps," I said, "and don't think I've forgotten that we still need to talk. You may have brought me another distraction to delay that conversation, but it does need to happen."

Wincing, Rhylix shrugged.

"Whatever you say, Raimie," he said. "Let's focus on survival for now, though, yes?"

One of these days, that man would run out of excuses for hiding things from me, and I couldn't wait for it to come. But in the meantime...

With Oswin and Rhylix following, I headed for my tent, ignoring the salutes that the surrounding soldiers directed at me, but then, I'd gotten pretty good at that in the last week. I wasn't sure why those forms of respect had been happening more frequently, whether it was because Oswin has shared the burden I'd accepted or not, but to my great relief, no one else had sworn their fealty to me since the spy had done it. I couldn't handle another exchange of vows, not so soon after the last one.

When we reached my tent, I spun on my companions.

"Wait here," I said. "I won't be long, and Oswin? You can keep a good enough watch on me from this spot. Please, stay put?"

I didn't want them to see what might happen behind those canvas walls.

With an explosive sigh, Oswin indicated his approval.

"We can wait," Rhylix said.

So, I ducked into my tent, reaching for the few texts I might need in the coming hour, but they weren't my goal in coming here.

No. For that, I collapsed onto my bedroll, and as I'd learned long ago, I quickly fell to dreams.

*I only let detachment fall away from me when I was in my nightmare realm.*

*"Fuck!" I howled at a never-ending horizon.*

*With my fingers tangling in my hair, I started frantically pacing, barely noticing as Nylion approached me with a hand extended.*

*"Heart of my heart, please," he said.*

*I wasn't sure how I made myself stop, but when I fell still, I hesitantly took Nylion's offered hand, gasping to calm my racing heart. As always, a long-lost sense of connection soothed me, and after gulping several times, I managed to focus, if only nominally.*

*Nylion squeezed his hold on me, offering a hesitant smile, and seeing it, I slid into panic again.*

*"Oh gods, Nyl," I said. "You heard what they said. What will we do?"*

*"What we always do," he said. "Survive. Together."*

*But that only highlighted something I hadn't let myself consider yet, and at the thought, I snatched my hand to me.*

*"That's right. You and I are one," I said. "If I fail... if my decisions get me killed..."*

*"I die too, yes," Nylion said, "but how is that any different from the soldiers whose lives depend on you?"*

*Squeezing my eyes shut, I turned away. I hadn't needed that reminder.*

*"It just is," I said. "I don't know how to define it, but my responsibility for them and the idea that I could get you killed... it's different, ok?"*

*After a pause, Nylion circled in front of me, squatting so I had to look at him.*

*"Heart of my heart, I trust you," he said. "I have always trusted you to keep us safe in the real world, and when you cannot do that, through no fault of your own, I am here to help."*

*He truly meant that. I looked at him, seeing his absolute faith in me, and it broke my heart. I didn't deserve it.*

*"But you do."*

*I didn't acknowledge that, snorting as I hauled Nylion upright.*

*"You feel like helping now?" I asked.*

*Dubiously eyeing me, Nylion said, "Do you want my help?"*

*As I considered what I knew about my other half, applying that knowledge to the coming meeting, I winced.*

*"Probably not a good idea."*

*"No," Nylion said with a laugh. "Social interactions are not my specialty."*

*"I'm not that much better with them," I said.*

*Nudging me, Nylion said, "Are you sure about that? I certainly find you inspiring."*

*For unknown reasons, that made my cheeks heat, and as usual when this happened, I ducked my head, hiding it. Fortunately, Nylion chose to ignore my reaction, although he leaned into me after a moment.*

*"Will you be ok out there, handling them?" he asked. "I will do what I can to help, but... it is not the same as it was."*

*Throwing my arm around him, I convinced myself I was doing it for reassurance's sake and not to take a brief taste of completion.*

*"I'm grateful for what we have, although..."*

*I pulled away, enough to meet Nylion's eyes.*

*"What's with the contradictory emotions that you give off when we're around certain people? Don't know how I keep forgetting to ask about that."*

*Shrugging, Nylion said, "I am not sure. What you are feeling is my instinctual reaction to them. I do my best to keep it private, but that does not always work."*

*"Well, that's not concerning at all, considering how hostile you've been toward some of them," I said.*

*Shrinking on himself, Nylion stepped away from me.*

*"I am sorry," he said. "Making life more difficult for you is never my intention."*

*Rolling my eyes, I said, "It's a good thing you're not doing that, then."*

*I pulled Nylion in front of me, holding him in place once that was done.*

*"You help me, Nyl," I said. "Look at what's happening now. If I didn't have you, I'd probably have lost it in an embarrassing way earlier. Instead, I held it together and fell apart here, where it was*

*safe and healthy to do so. That's all thanks to you."*

*"Ha!" Nylion scoffed.*

*Then, he grinned at me.*

*"I am glad that you find me somewhat useful."*

*Releasing him, I clicked my tongue.*

*"Fine. Be stubborn if you want," I said before grimacing. "I should probably go back. Who knows how long I've been asleep?"*

*Smirking, Nylion said, "Not long, I assure you. Time works differently here. Still, I wish you luck in the coming conversation and please. Remember that I am here if you need me."*

*"Thanks, Nyl."*

*I shook myself, flinging tension out of my arms, before resting my hands on my hips.*

*"Speed me along?" I said. "It's time to get this over with."*

*"Of course," Nylion said.*

*He touched my temples, and my nightmare realm dissolved into nothing.*

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