

Non Human 541

Chapter 541 Vim – His Progress... Or At Least, An Attempt

"How's Liina, Vim?" Jasna asked as I turned to greet her. I was sitting in the commons area next to the main kitchen, waiting for Renn, but unlike usual I had been sitting with my back to the main entrance. Upon turning I found Jasna still had the layer of wetness to her that those who ventured out into storms had. She looked fine, and relaxed, but you could tell by her clothes and out of place hair that she had likely hurried here from the docks where she'd been working lately.

"I think she'll be okay. I think she's just got food poisoning. She needs lots of rest, and I've suggested she drink lots of fruit juices... which as you can probably guess..." I said with a small wave to the nearby kitchen. There were no sounds coming from it at the moment, but there was a rather noticeable scent in the air coming from it. Not of things cooking, but instead a fruity smell.

Jasna smiled softly as she nodded. "Renn's handling at the moment. Yes, I can smell it all, and I passed Wynn who had a jug of it a few moments ago," she said.

I nodded back. Ever since Renn had heard me say that Liina needed such drinks, she had taken it upon herself to make a huge batch of them. Almost too much, to be honest, but it was fine... since everyone kept coming over to get a pitcher or two of it for themselves. She also had plans to deliver some to Lamp and her people, too.

"That's a relief, Vim... I wonder what it was she ate to make her sick...? We all ate together after our shift at the docks," she said with a frown.

I shrugged a little. "Could have been anything, or something she drank too. It might also just be a typical sickness that is hitting her hard... who knows, but I think she'll be okay. She's already awake and able to sit up and stuff. She was reading a book last I saw her," I said. I'd just been with her, in her room, a few dozen minutes ago. I'd been making it a point to check on her every hour or so.

Jasna nodded. "I'm going to go see her right now. I'll take care of her, Pierre was kind enough to cover for me as I do," she said.

"That's good," I said gently. Renn had actually wanted to care for her... but she knew better than to force herself in such a way. Liina although was no longer outright scared or bothered by Renn, she was still a feeble little thing. Renn made Liina on edge a bit, which was partly the reason Renn was making her drinks right now. It wasn't just because Renn wanted to make some for herself, but because it was all she could do for the woman.

But it was fine. Liina seemed to be recovering already. She had spent a good portion of the day throwing up, amongst other things, and I think she got it mostly out of her system. She'll likely be back on her feet in a week or so, as if nothing had ever happened. Although not of the thickest blood, Liina was still a non-human after all.

"Oh! Good!" Renn walked into the room, carrying a large metal pitcher. She smiled happily as she headed over and went to offer the jug to Jasna. "She's already got cups and stuff, Vim took a bunch to her already, but it's probably time to give her fresh and cold stuff," she explained as Jasna took the jug.

"Thanks Renn... Thank you as well for noticing she collapsed in the hallway. Everyone's been so busy lately, so sometimes stuff like that gets missed..." Jasna said as she lifted the lid to the pitcher jug, and smiled warmly at the stuff within it. It smelled like some kind of apple juice.

"Hm... She hadn't really collapsed, just... had half fallen asleep I think," Renn said with a small smile, as if unsure if odd rumors had been spread or not concerning Liina's condition. There had been, but nothing too unusual. From what I could tell most of the members simply were worried for Liina, if a little upset she wasn't taking better care of herself.

Jasna sighed a bit as she nodded. "The silly girl sometimes forgets to take care of herself. You'd not believe it, Renn, but sometimes I have to force her to bathe. She just outright forgets sometimes," Jasna said, speaking as if Liina was her daughter to be annoyed over.

"I have the same problems with Vim! So I get it!" Renn said happily as her tail swayed over to thump me in the arm.

I ignored them as they giggled at me and went to take a drink from my cup. Renn had not long ago brought me one of her creations, a mix of different leftovers from batches she'd made over the last hour or so, and honestly it was nasty. But it gave me something to focus on instead of the two giggling at me.

"Then I'll go check on her. And yell at her for not telling me something was wrong! Really. She's not a little kitten anymore, she should at least notice when she's sick...!" Jasna said as she turned and stepped away.

"Right!" Renn happily agreed, likely because of the whole... kitten thing.

I hadn't realized it before, but it seemed Renn had a slight feeling of solidarity with Liina. Since they were both cats. After she had told Gerald of Liina's condition, and had returned after I had checked on the sick girl, she had told me how worried she was... and how sad she was that she knew Liina wouldn't really appreciate any help from her. Since she was slightly scared of her.

All this time Renn had been avoiding Liina, out of compassion. Yet deep down it seemed she had been wanting to spend more time with the woman, which I guess made sense... many of our kind felt a connection with those who hailed from the same, or at least similar, bloodlines. It made me wonder how Renn would act if she ever met another of her own kind, another large predator cat, like a lion or something. A non-human one, not a monarch, that is.

Would she feel kin to them? Or would she feel on edge? Most predators, unless family or mates, felt more vehemence than friendship when they encountered their own. Renn though was so gentle-natured...

"Thanks again!" Jasna said one last time as she left the room, and Renn waved her goodbye... then after a moment I watched as her happy hand which had just been waving... slowed and limply fell to her side.

I lowered my cup, which was nearly empty, and studied the woman I loved who now had a sad expression. Not just on her face either. Even her ears had drooped a little.

"Renn...?" I gently reached over to grab her hand. She startled a little at my touch and then turned to smile at me, with a grin full of sheepish joy.

"What, did my nasty drinks tickle your fancy?" she asked, and then laughed at her own little joke. A nice giggle that could be fully felt through the few fingers I had a grip upon.

Seeing her laugh so happily, and over such a silly thing, told me that all was well... but at the same time I knew the truth.

Like always, deep down in Renn's psyche, there were cracks. Or at least, tiny little wounds.

I couldn't know what had happened just now to make those cracks visible, even if for but a moment, but I didn't need to know. Whether it had simply been her feeling bad about not being able to take care of

Liina herself, something Jasna had said or done, the fact that she wasn't going to get to make more juices... or anything at all, didn't matter. The reason didn't matter. All that did was those cracks had shown themselves. Nothing more.

"If you were one of these drinks, I think you'd be rather tasty," I said, hoping to keep that nice smile on her face.

It worked. Her smile grew and got all weird as she squinted at me. "What's with that!" she said before laughing at me.

It was the truth.

Renn giggled a bit, squeezed my hand... and then went to sit down next to me. The table I sat at didn't have chairs on this side but instead a bench so she was able to sit right next to me, and kept holding my hand as she did so.

As she did she reached over to grab the cup I'd been drinking from. Her ears fluttered a bit in joy upon finding it was still half-full and went to take a drink.

After she did so, I watched her face scrunch up a bit as she laughed again. This time a laugh of amusement. "That's nasty!" she said happily.

"Did you not taste your own creations...?" I asked. She'd brought me quite a few jugs of such things over the last couple hours. Most, if not all, had been just as bad. It was why I had figured she had brought them to me, so I could do away with what no one else would drink.

"I had. And I'll have you know not all of them tasted this bad, a few actually turned out quite nice," she said as she took another drink.

She flinched again upon drinking it, telling me she did indeed find it to taste nasty... yet she still drank the rest down. She sighed a bit as she finished the rest of it, and nodded. "Next time less sugar." she said and decided.

Enjoying her enjoyment, I decided to take some seeds from the crystalline caves with us up north. I would have to... do some intricate work to get some of the stuff to grow up there in such a cold climate, but the results would be thrilling. From cocoa to coffee, there were plenty of tasty wonders I could show her. I could even go grab some of those sunflowers near Nebl's place too. Renn had liked those seeds when roasted, though oddly not when salted.

As I thought of all the tasty treats and unique foodstuffs I could let her try someday, I must have drifted a bit in my thoughts for Renn patted me on the thigh. "Vim?"

"Hm?" I frowned at her as I focused on her, since I had not thought I had been so lost in my own mind as to not hear her say something.

"What were you thinking just now?" she asked.

Ah. Maybe I hadn't missed her question or words, but she had simply noticed my thoughts on my face. "I'm planning on how I'm going to fatten you up later," I said.

A mix of a frown and a smirk covered her face, and then she blushed a little and glanced around. "Was that a sexual joke?" she asked worriedly.

It was my turn to flinch as if I'd just eaten something nasty, and I shook my head. "No... I was thinking of food I could make you that you've never had before. Why would you interpret it that way?" I asked. How did increasing someone's weight mean that...?

"Well... you know. Getting pregnant and all..." Renn mumbled as she messed with my cup, which was now empty.

Oh. Right.

Gently nudging her with my elbow, I couldn't help but smirk at her. At us. "A lot of cultures believe it's not good for the baby during pregnancy for the mother to eat tasty food. They're fed bland foods and plain waters. Sure you want that?" I asked, teasing her a bit.

Renn's ears fluttered wildly as she tilted her head and side-glanced me. She still had her face angled towards the door, which told me she was both embarrassed over our conversational topic and still making sure we were alone. We were, to a point. There were two people above us, in a room to the east of ours a floor up. I could tell one of them was Lawrence, but I couldn't tell who the other was. "Um... I'd be more than okay with it, Vim..." Renn mumbled.

Ensure your favorite authors get the support they deserve. Read this novel on the original website.

My eye twitched at her answer, since I should have expected it. Renn would happily endure horrible things for a child that wasn't even hers, so why would I have thought she'd say anything different for her own?

"At least let me tease you a little bit..." I groaned, feeling like an ass all of a sudden.

She finally looked back at me, for real, and gave me a toothy grin. "Does that actually help? The baby, I mean, not your teasing me and it making you feel better and putting you in a good mood," she said happily.

"Yes and no. It doesn't in the truest sense but a healthy diet while pregnant can indeed make a big difference for the child's formation and birth. I don't know if you've ever noticed, but people born during famines and times of unrest are typically shorter and have more health problems than those who are born during good times," I said.

Her happy grin died a bit as she pondered my words. "... I haven't ever noticed, honestly," she said.

"It's a little thing, but it's true. It's also a good way to tell if a nation or region is healthy or not. The people themselves look healthier. Stouter. Taller. Fatter. Better hair and skin, nails and so forth..." I said, shrugging a little. How'd we go from talking about food to this?

"Hm... I have been meaning to ask, and since you brought it up... will we be okay, Vim?" Renn then asked, and I noted as she did so her hand gripped my own a tad bit harder.

"Be okay...?" I asked. What was she talking about? The vote? My stepping down as protector? The society itself? Light and the rest? Gods and monarchs? The storm outside? That terrible drink she just chugged down that will likely give her a stomach ache later?

"You know... when she's born. Is there anything special about giving birth to a saint? Anything I should know?"

Oh.

I ever so slightly shifted my left foot, and was very glad the bench we sat on didn't break. I doubted it would actually hurt her too badly, but I'd feel utterly terrible if she even just got a small bruise because of me. "A saint's birth isn't typically any different than a normal child's... but the years after are. If..." I stopped a bit, hesitating at the look in Renn's eye, and then coughed and nodded. "When she's born, for her childhood we will need to do certain things and make sure of other things as to keep her both safe and sane. But other than that, you will be in no more danger than you would during any other birth," I explained.

Renn softly smiled at me. "Thank you for correcting yourself there," she said softly, and I could tell she meant it. Meant it deeply.

I nodded and sighed. "I'm trying Renn. I really am," I promised.

"I can tell. While you're trying so hard, can I ask another? Or would you like to rest for a bit?" she asked with a grin, her tail swaying happily behind us with such momentum it was now rather audible.

"One day it will be you begging for rest. Go ahead," I said and steeled myself.

Renn's tail went still and then she laughed and bumped me with her shoulder. "Vim!" she said between her laughs, finding my joke hilarious.

"What? You're the one who started it. Go on, before someone shows up. It's about time for the workday to be over, so everyone will be here soon," I said, hoping to keep her from latching too strongly onto the joke I'd just made. Honestly I shouldn't have made it. Especially since I was the one impeding progress on that point... but I'd done so instinctively because I knew she'd find it either utterly hilarious, or terrible. Either would have made her focus on it, and thus give me a chance to change topics and avoid any more of such questions... but I had promised. Not just her, but myself. To be better.

Renn's giggling quickly subsided, as she nodded. "Right... they're already finishing. I hear Lawrence upstairs, though I can't tell who he's talking to," she said as she tilted her head upward, angling her ears every which way as if to find out the answer.

Her hearing really has improved. Which was scary, since it had already been pretty damn good. I wonder if she could hear better than I could now...? One day we'll have to test it.

"So?" I asked, nudging her ever so gently to get her to focus.

"Ah. Right. Hm..." she pondered for a moment and then nodded. "I can sense those like Light, or Martin, who have hearts like me. It's rather obvious, the tingling sensation. Why can't they do the same for me? Why is Light fooled? Shouldn't she be able to tell?" she asked.

"A pregnant woman, carrying a saint, gives off the exact same feeling. They just think they're sensing the saint, your baby," I said.

Renn hummed at that. "Even though my belly is still flat?"

"Yes, that should be a big indicator, but this is you we're talking about. You're a non-human, one very thick in the blood... plus, well..." I gestured at myself. It was interesting Renn was wise enough to realize a baby needed to be formed past a certain point for someone to sense them. I wonder if she had already assumed such a thing, or if it was just... an instinctual thing that women just subconsciously made sense to them?

"They internally explain odd things, excusing them, because it's you we're talking about," she said, nodding.

I nodded back.

She tapped the cup she held with a finger, and I noted the sound. Her nail was a tad longer than usual. She usually kept them really short, ever since I got her that nail kit. "I've been busy," she told me, likely noticing what had caught my eye.

"I like them sharp, it's too bad you have to hide them," I said.

Renn went still for a few moments, and then grinned at me. "Maybe one day I'll not have to worry about it," she said.

I sighed at that. "Let's not talk about that."

"Fine. Back to even better topics. I thought my lack of needing to sleep was because of what's happening to me... but the moment you return I find myself sleeping more. Am I really so simple that your presence lets me feel at ease enough to sleep comfortably, or am I just still adapting to the heart?" Renn asked.

Oh? How cute. "A little of both, probably. A connection to the divinity enhances you. Makes what's already there, better, in a sense. The best way for me to explain it would be like a flower or tree. If they get steady sunlight and rain, they grow stronger and healthier, becoming taller and whatnot. But if they go without any, they wither and become weak. People without divinity are the ones not getting enough sunlight and rain. That being said, you're still you. Still a person. Still flesh and blood. If my presence, even just being nearby in the same building or town, relaxes you... then yes, my return could be a large factor in the reason," I explained.

Renn frowned at that, but nodded in understanding. "That's... something I understand completely. Why'd you not explain it like that before?" she asked.

"I've been avoiding talking about it Renn," I answered simply.

"Right..." she smirked at that.

"Though don't think yourself more than you are. You're stronger, your hearing and senses are stronger... but only to a certain point. You're still a being of normalcy, Renn. Don't forget that," I warned.

"Hm... I can still get hurt and die, yes," she said knowingly.

"Yes. In fact you now have... as I do, an Achilles heel," I whispered with a small gesture to her rear.

Renn sat up a bit straighter, and at first I wondered if she didn't remember my telling her of that story. But of course, thanks to her memory, she knew. "Right...! I'd not thought of that... does that mean if I lose it, or break it, I will die...?" she asked.

I nodded. "Your life is now connected to that heart, Renn. For better or worse. Now that being said, it's not that your soul is connected to the heart itself... but rather the trauma and shock of being separated from the divine conduit is what kills you," I specified.

Renn grinned at me. "That's a rather odd thing to say, Vim. Why would you say that?"

"Because I've heard too often those fools who try to say the heart is a soul. They're not."

"Hm... you've said that before," she mumbled.

"Of course I have. That heart is not you, Renn, it's a piece of you. There's a rather definite difference," I said.

"Like my ears and tail," she said.

"Yes, in a way."

"So... where's yours then?" she asked.

"I don't have one. You should be able to tell, Renn, just by sitting so close to me," I said. I didn't mention that Renn had been lately touching me in random places, such as with her tail or gentle tap of a finger, lately. I'd noticed it, and had found it cute so hadn't said anything yet.

She frowned at me. "It is weird... why don't you make me tingle, Vim?" she asked.

"Back to the sexual jokes are we?"

Renn's face went red and she squeezed my hand hard enough that it almost hurt. Almost. "Vim!" she groaned at me, but laughed anyway.

Smiling at her, I nodded. "I'm... special, Renn. In a certain way," I dared to say, but wasn't willing to say anything more. Especially not here. No one was nearby, and thus no one could hear us, but I didn't want to risk it. At least, that was the excuse I was telling myself.

Her red face remained a bit as she studied me, humming as her tail squirmed behind her. I could tell her mind was still on the teasing I'd just done. "You're not a monarch," she stated.

I nodded.

"Yet not a god," she added.

I nodded again.

"But obviously you have their powers. Or at least, a form of them. You're making me think rather odd things, you know?" she said, and I could tell by her little smirk she was trying to tease me. Probably trying to get me back for my own teasing.

Too bad for her it didn't work at all. All it did was make me want to tease her more. I kept myself in check though, to a degree... and nodded gently at her. I brought our hands up, the ones which held each other, and I went ahead and pointed at her with a pinky. "I won't answer any of that... but in exchange I'll tell you something else, something that might be just as important," I offered.

Renn nodded expectantly.

Leaning closer, Renn did the same. Her ears fluttered a bit as she angled them towards me, and I had to keep myself from just outright kissing her. She looked utterly adorable right now, all hopeful and happy. It was a good look on her. I took a tiny moment, forcing myself to look away and unfocused my whole attention on her, to make sure we were still alone. We were.

Looking back at her, I found her golden pupils sharp and focused. In fact this might be one of the first times I'd ever seen her eyes become so... cat-like. I knew it wasn't because I was so fascinating to her, but instead because of her heart. Or well, the one she had absorbed. It was enhancing her traits.

"Well?" Renn whispered, and out of the corner of my eye I saw her tail twitch.

I nodded gently at her. "I have a suggestion. Though I'd understand if you already decided, of course, or find it unsightly or rude... so, like I said, just a suggestion," I said carefully, making sure I didn't sound too odd as I spoke.

Renn's eyes narrowed a bit, but at least her pupils remained the same size. "Suggestion...?" she asked with an odd look. She suddenly looked a tad bit flustered, which told me she had not expected me to say such a thing. Odds are she had expected me to tell her some deep secret, or maybe continue the teasing from earlier instead.

Taking a small breath, I confined myself to fate as I nodded once more. "Of her name."

Renn blinked and leaned back a bit. She frowned in a way that told me, for once, she had absolutely no idea what I was even talking about. Which made me feel kind of silly. Maybe this moment had been the wrong one to bring it up...?

"Her name...?" she whispered, and then her pupils expanded. Within a heartbeat it was clear that Renn realized what I meant, as it dawned upon her.

"Of our daughter," I said, confirming what she just realized.

Renn didn't say anything. She went still, her mouth slightly agape... and for a tiny moment I wondered if even her heart had stopped moving too. But then I heard it return to its beating half a moment later, stronger than ever. "Vim..." she whispered as her eyes began to shake and glimmer.

"How's Nory sound? Or would that be," before I could even finish my sentence she tackled me in a hug, with enough force that we fell backward off the bench and to the ground. I made sure to land beneath her, to make sure she didn't hurt herself, as she completely ignored the fact I was now lying on my back as she wrapped her arms around my neck and squeezed me with enough strength to make her tremble.

"Vim...!" she cried out, unable to say more thanks to great emotion. I sighed a bit as I went to patting her on the back, and watched her tail squirm like mad in the air above us.

Maybe this had been the wrong time to bring it up. She was now weeping.

For a few long moments Renn cried as she buried her face into my chest, clinging onto me as if her heart had just broken. She really was emotional. I'd be panicking right now if not for the fact I could hear her joy in her weeping, and could feel it in the way she clung to me. She was crying, yes, but not because of sorrow or pain. She was just...

"What the hell is going on!?"

I turned my head, angling it a bit as to look between Renn's ears, and found Merit. She was staring down at us with a look of utter confusion, but at least not disgust.

"Merit...!" Renn noticed her friend's voice, and turned to look at her. As she did she revealed a face full of tears and snot, to the point that Merit actually stepped back a bit.

"This is my fault," I said.

"Obviously," Merit scoffed.

Chapter 542 Renn – Brandy's Scheme

Nory.

I tried to not think about the wonderful thing Vim had brought up as I walked into Brandy's office. She gestured for me to shut the door behind me, and as I did I pretended I also shut out the thoughts of my daughter, her possible name, and Vim's lovely method at trying to be a better man all outside, with the rest of the world.

I needed to focus. Or at least, attempt to.

"How've you been Renn?" Brandy asked as I stepped deeper into her office, over to her desk where she sat.

"Fine?" I answered, unsure why she'd even ask.

"Really...?" Brandy gave me an odd look as she nodded, and I realized why she was likely asking.

I cried a few hours ago. Although only Merit had actually seen me do so, other than Vim, I undoubtedly had a face of proof when others had shown up. Red eyes and whatnot. They had noticed, and thus there were now rumors going around that I had likely wept. I wonder who had spread such rumors already...? Merit wouldn't have, especially since I had explained to her why I had been crying in the first place.

I'd of course not had cried from grief or pain, but rather just... happiness. Or maybe even shock, possibly. It was one thing for Vim to talk about our daughter, our prophesized one, it was another thing completely for him to do so in such a... lovely way. Vim had lately been mentioning that he had, and would, try to be more open with me... to be better when it came to putting aside his own hate and such, but this was the first time it was so obvious and well intentioned! He had indeed been getting better, but that had likely been the greatest step, and proof, of his commitment to me I'd received. Even if just a simple thing, it meant a lot to me.

It was the same as him confirming he'd not only do nothing to stop or impede such a prophecy from coming true, he was actually expectant and happy for it. For him to actually consider what we'd name her... Even I hadn't even thought of such a thing. Though I admit that I'd been trying not to think too deeply about my soon-to-be daughter, since I hadn't wanted to risk it. I didn't just want to not risk Vim's ire, I also didn't want to risk the girl herself. I knew, rather well, that a saint's prophecy could be wrong... or could go wrong. So in fear of ruining the one about my daughter, I'd been trying to not draw too much attention to it. As if to protect and shield it... not just from Vim, but everything and everyone.

Then Vim goes and does such a thing...! He's lucky, or unlucky, he'd revealed his thoughts to me in such a way and at such a place... otherwise who knows what I would have done...

"You sure you're fine...?" Brandy then asked, and I didn't need to wonder this time at why she was asking such a thing. I had a huge smile on my face, and I knew it likely looked a little silly. Especially here and now in this moment.

"I'm fine. Just happy," I said as I glanced at the nearby chair in front of her desk. Judging by the angle of it, someone had been sitting in it before I arrived. Whenever Brandy got up and left her office she

always re-arranged the chairs to their proper spots, and it was slightly angled away from her desk right now. Who would sit in it in such a way to make it angle, though, I wonder?

"That's good..." Brandy said, and I noted the tone of her voice. She wasn't sure what to think of me at the moment. But what was I going to say? Although happy about Vim's growth, I also wasn't much in the mood to share it with anyone. It was... private, I think. Though maybe not, since I had happily told Merit all about it. And I'll likely tell Lilly too, once I see her.

"So, how can I help?" I asked, getting to the point. Sofia had asked me to come see her, since Brandy had something she wanted to ask me.

Brandy nodded. "Vim's recent request. I was wondering if you'd like to be the one to handle it?" she asked.

Request...? "About the rumors...?" I asked. How was I supposed to handle that? Possibly just... going around town and talking to people, maybe? I'd probably be okay with that, I suppose. Though it'd be sad to waste time on such a thing instead of spending my last handful of hours here with my friends.

She frowned at me as she leaned back a little in her chair. "Rumors? No. The more important one," she said.

Important one...? "Sorry, I don't know what you mean," I said. As far as I was aware the only request Vim had given to anyone lately was concerning the rumors for monarchs and gods. So he could address them, or track them down. Supposedly he had used such a process before to great success, way back in the day.

Brandy sighed. "So he hasn't told you. Did he not mention at all the young girl he saved?" he asked.

Slowly shaking my head, I wondered what she could possibly be talking about.

Brandy's eyes narrowed a bit as she studied me. "On purpose, or is this just Vim's indifference...?" she mumbled.

"What are you talking about?" I asked, a little upset she didn't just come out and say it.

She gently nodded as she gestured to her desk. As usual it was slightly cluttered, but it seemed she was pointing at a small satchel and a letter she'd likely just finished. "Vim rescued a young girl while dealing with a monarch on his way back here. He asked me to send her some money, and possibly invite her to work for the guild. I was just wondering if you'd like to be the one to handle it? We're busy right now, and it's only a day away at your pace. I figured Vim could even go with you, since he's not really busy at the moment," Brandy asked.

Oh!? "He saved a young girl...?" I asked. He in fact had not mentioned this at all to me. I wonder why?

"Someone named Mistle. He took her to family, extended family, and something must have made him worry about her because... well..." Brandy shrugged lightly as she gestured again at the letter and satchel.

"Because he'd not have asked for such a thing otherwise," I said, nodding in agreement.

"Mhm... I'd deal with it myself, but I'll not be able to leave for months thanks to an upcoming council meeting with Thraxton. Not to mention Light and her schemes causing issues, to say the least, and honestly I think I might have a small issue with asking anyone else to do it. Recently Gerald brought in some kids, and now there's a small sentiment amongst everyone here that we should put a stop to allowing in humans. I can't fault them, we've tripled the human member population in less as many years, but still..." Brandy said with a sigh.

Huh...? "Wait..." I frowned as I put together what she was saying. Those here, the non-human members of the Society, were upset at the number of newly recruited human members?

"No one faults you, Renn. As I said, Gerald just brought in a bunch himself. In a way you can say it's his fault. He pushed everyone's sentiments over the ledge."

That didn't make me much feel better. "Wait so... when you say help someone, and bring them here to work... you mean actually let them join the Society? Not just... giving them a job, or whatever?" I asked for clarification.

"Of course...? If someone requests a human to be given help, it's usually because they did something to deserve it. Either by helping us, or being a friend to one of us. Why would we not make such people members?" she asked, as if it was obvious.

I hadn't realized that at all! So that was why Roslyn, Lamp and the rest are considered members... here I had thought it had been because of Vim's actions, since he had allowed Lamp to meet me without my tail and ears hidden. Because she had realized it, and it was his way of keeping her alive! But maybe he had simply hastened what was already in motion... same with that pirate he had brought back with him, that Ronalldo...

"He did say I can just send her some money, but that's usually more harm than not. He knows it, which is why he asked me to find a spot for her here. I think I'm going to put her in the bank, you know... since we're somewhat short on members there now," Brandy said lightly.

Right... because Herra was gone. She had been one of the supervisors for the bank.

"Okay... I don't mind. Even if Vim is busy, I'd be more than happy to go see her and offer her a position here," I said, deciding before anyone else could for me.

Enjoying this book? Seek out the original to ensure the author gets credit.

Brandy smirked at that. "Really? Good! Vim can give you better directions, I'm sure, but here's his original letter with all the information about her he gave me," Brandy said as she reached over to grab a letter. I took it, and was a little surprised to find Vim's handwriting. It wasn't often I got to see it.

"This is the money, which you can give her no matter her decision. But if you can, try your best to convince her to join us. More often than not any humans we give such funds to, for one reason or another, end up losing it all or dying because of their newfound wealth. Particularly the younger ones," Brandy said as she handed me the satchel of coins.

I didn't peek into the coin purse, but I did study its weight for a moment. It was a small pouch, but heavy. A little too heavy.

Were there gold coins inside...?

"I'll go find Vim, and then leave today if I can," I said. I was a little worried about leaving, since Light had seemed to think she'd return to find us here. It made me believe she had a prophecy concerning us being here for when she came back, and I didn't want to risk that if I could keep myself from doing so.

"Thank you. If you can convince her to return, I'll put her under Sofia. So I'll let her know to expect the girl," Brandy said.

Good. Sofia was not just a calm person, and didn't hate humans, she also had been a mother herself. Many times over. She'd know how to properly handle a younger girl.

"Got it," I said as I nodded. I folded away Vim's letter and tucked it into one of my pockets, but didn't do the same for the coin purse just yet. "And that letter?" I asked to the one she'd been pointing at earlier.

"No need for it now. Was going to send it to her with our mail carriers if no one was willing to go themselves. You're going, so," Brandy said with a shrug.

Ah. Right. "What if the girl isn't able to read?" I asked. I'd been wondering that myself, back when I had spent a few days working in the mailroom I had wondered how that worked. Several people had paid for letters that I had written for them, or someone else had, since they themselves hadn't been capable of doing so.

"The mail carriers will read it to them, if they want. Most people just take it to someone they trust though, a lot of folks don't trust the carriers enough just yet. Which is funny, since they carry the letter for who knows how long... humans," Brandy said with a smile.

I see... that meant any carrier had to be capable of reading and writing. Interesting. I mean, it made sense... and the orphanages in the Society did in fact teach the children at them such things, but... hm...

"What're you thinking now?" Brandy then asked, likely noticing my thoughts.

"Was just wondering how hard it is to teach a child how to read and write is all," I said as I thought of Nory.

For a few long moments the office was quiet, so I glanced up and away from the letters on the desk to find Brandy smirking happily at me.

Oh. Woops.

"Don't tease me," I said with a groan.

"I won't. Get going, if you dally too long you won't get there before the sunrise which means you'll have to waste half a day waiting for them to wake and not scare you off when you knock on their door. The humans at those smaller port towns don't like being bothered until after sunrise," Brandy said.

"Right... Thanks for letting me know, Brandy, Vim's always so forgetful," I said as I turned to leave.

"Sometimes, yes," Brandy said.

Leaving her office, I shifted the bag of coins in my hand as I wondered why I suddenly felt... tired.

I wasn't tired. In fact I had been getting really good sleep lately, since we got back here. And before walking into Brandy's office I had felt somewhat giddy and excited, not just because she had summed me for help but because I had still been so happy over what Vim had said and done a few hours ago. Now though...? Even thinking of what Vim had done, I still suddenly felt...

Slowing to a stop, near the end of the hallway, I frowned as I realized what was bothering me.

Brandy's comments about Vim were what had made me realize it. But was I right? Or was I just misunderstanding?

Staring at the bag of coins in my hand, I felt my tail squirm beneath my pants. Brandy's office wasn't in the housing area, but instead where the humans could get to. Just like Gerald's. So I had hidden my traits, though now I wished I hadn't. My ears too wanted to flutter something fierce.

Surely this wasn't some scheme, was it...? Had she actually just pushed this onto me on purpose...?

I had a hard time believing no one would do this if asked, especially if the girl was only a day or so away from here. Plus, why couldn't one of the human members handle it too? We had several ships that sailed around the port cities all nearby; any one of them could have delivered this money or the invitation just as easily...

Maybe she thought by doing this I'd stay here longer? Or maybe she hoped I would want to then live here in Lumen, since I'd latch onto all the humans...? It seemed like such a stretch to think so, since it should just be her asking me to handle Vim's little request. Who wouldn't ask the wife to handle something the husband needed done? But something about the way she had brought it up...

Though maybe I was reading too deeply into it. Maybe Brandy just felt Vim's request was that important.

Sighing softly, I decided to not think about it. Brandy has been acting off ever since Light returned, so maybe I was just seeing something else. It genuinely felt weird to think someone would scheme in such a way... but I mean...

I bit the inside of my lip as I thought of what I had overheard Brandy and Gerald talking about, before I'd left with Light to the Bell Church. I had been trying my best to not think about it, to the point it was almost sad even for me, but... maybe I should.

Maybe I should bring it up to Vim. I hadn't yet, for multiple reasons. The main one was... it hurt to acknowledge that people were treating me differently, if not outright doing things entirely, thanks to prophecies about me. Then of course, since it was related to a prophecy... I didn't want to bring it up to Vim since he'd grow upset over it. And likely not in a good way.

Honestly I hadn't experienced yet what Vim was like when it came to prophecies, at least in the way most others would know. Many people have told me, and claimed, that Vim got very... odd, if not irate, when told about prophecies without warning or permission. And he was known to outright defy them, going so far as to break them intentionally if he could.

If I told him that Brandy and the rest had likely voted to banish me, if only in part, because of a prophecy... I had no idea what he'd actually do about it.

Yet at the same time...

"Rennalee!"

I looked up, but hadn't needed to look up too high. Merit hurried over, smiling up at me as she did.

"Hey Merit," I greeted my friend, and was glad to see she didn't have that weird smirk on her face anymore. She had teased me a bit about crying over Vim's suggestion of naming my daughter Nory, after my dear friend. She had done so nicely, but I was glad she didn't seem intent on doing it anymore. I wasn't in the mood to grin and wiggle and laugh, I was slightly upset.

"What's wrong?" Merit asked as she glanced past me, as if to find the source of my discomfort.

"I've been given a task. From Brandy," I said.

My little friend's little eyes narrowed on my hand, which held the bag of coins. "Task...?"

"She asked me to go see and meet the girl he saved. Mistle. To invite her into the company, and Society," I said.

Her eyes narrowed a bit. "The human girl. Whose family had been eaten by the monarch," she said, understanding.

I nodded.

"Didn't he take her to other family members...?" she asked.

"He had. But he had asked Brandy to get her a position here. You know how Vim is," I said.

"No, Renn. I do know. He'd not have asked that normally. You're infecting him with your kindness," Merit said with a sigh.

Although I knew she had been genuine with her sigh, as if exasperated over the idea of Vim being so kind to a random stranger, I couldn't help but smirk in pride and joy. "I hope so," I said. Honestly I felt Vim has, and had, always been kind, I just don't think most of our members ever realized it for one reason or another. Or maybe they simply didn't wish to.

"Hm..." Merit frowned though as she tilted her head and pondered for a moment. Then she grimaced and made a "Tsk," sound.

"Merit?"

"She's trying to manipulate you, Renn," Merit said.

Ah. Gosh... for her to have realized it so quickly...

"Is. Is that really what she's doing...?" I asked, worried again.

"You don't see it?" Merit asked.

"I do! That's the problem! I was hoping it wasn't what I thought it was," I said.

Merit nodded. "Right... you're too good of a person, Renn, really. Yes. She knows full well of your affection for humans. Particularly the ones you or Vim end up tending to. She's a schemer, Renn, just like Light and the rest. One of the worst, in fact."

Great. "Are you saying I shouldn't do this...? But Vim really did want to help the girl," I said.

Merit gave me another frown. "I'm not saying that... I'm just saying it's obvious what Brandy's hoping for. She's hoping you'll latch onto the girl and bring her back, and thus keep you here because of it. I bet she'll continue to try again and again too, once it doesn't work," Merit said.

I sighed at the situation, and wondered if I should just... ignore it all. Maybe I should just focus on what I want, and what makes me happy.

"Have you seen Vim? I'd like to talk to him about it," I asked.

"He was with Lawrence a little bit ago. In his office."

I nodded and went to head that way. It was near the main entrance, not far from where Reatti usually was. "What were you doing?" I asked as she went to walking alongside me.

"Heard Brandy had called for you. Wanted to make sure you weren't getting wrapped up in something stupid," Merit said.

"Too late," I said with a smirk.

Merit nodded and sighed at me. "Always am..."

Chapter 543 Vim – To Recruit A Mistle

Knocking on Lilly's door, I stepped back a bit and waited.

It didn't take her long at all to open the door, and when she did she gave me a smile... one that died after a moment after she glanced around a bit.

"Yes, I know. Just me. So terrible," I said as I entered the temporary house.

Lilly giggled at me. "I didn't mean that, Vim," she said as she shut the door behind me.

Sure you didn't. "Ready to leave?" I asked.

Lilly's happy smirk immediately turned into a huge, happy grin. "Finally!" she shouted.

I nodded. "Renn's took up a quest. She's to go pick up the young girl I saved. The plan is to pick her up, bring her back here, and then head back west," I said.

"What...? You saved a girl?" she asked with a frown.

Ah. Right. I'd not told any of them. Renn had been kind of upset over that fact... "One of the monarchs I encountered on my way back here had attacked a small homestead. The only survivor had been a young girl, Mistle. I asked Brandy and Gerald to help her out, since I had felt the family members I had left her with had been... not too excited over the fact of another mouth to feed. Well, Renn got wrapped up in it," I said.

Lilly nodded and sighed. "Right. I'll never understand her love for humans. Oh well, least it gets me out of here even if for only a few days!" Lilly said happily.

"I don't plan on sticking around when we come back. In fact I plan to just hand the girl off and leave, if I can get away with it," I said.

"Even better!" Lilly said happily as she hurried down the only hallway in the house. I knew she was going to pack up what little luggage she had.

Stepping over to the balcony window, I sighed as I stared out into the city. It was midday, which meant we'd likely not get to that port city until after nightfall, but it was fine.

Really. What was I going to do with her? I mean... it was to be expected. I should have foreseen Renn getting involved, but I had not thought Brandy would have been the one to force the matter. Maybe Renn and Merit were onto something. Maybe this was indeed one of Brandy's many schemes... though it seemed like such a farfetched idea... Luring Renn into staying by making her feel even more obligated than she already was? With lingering attachments via humans...?

It made sense. And in a way, might work, but... wouldn't Lamp and Roslyn, and their people, be enough then if it did? Or maybe it was just one extra straw upon the camel's back, one they'd add to as many times as needed to get the results they wanted...

Unluckily for Brandy, and maybe Gerald, I don't think they realize how it would backfire on them. They were hoping Renn sticking around would keep Light and the rest of them at a distance, as if Renn could act as a buffer. Or maybe me, too. But that was utterly foolish. Renn had... much to my despair, taken a liking to Light and the others who served her. There were a few who she found odd, such as Glasses and Mono, but that oddness was not odd enough for Renn to want to distance herself from them. In fact it did the opposite...

"I'm ready, Vim."

I turned to find Lilly fully outfitted. She had a relieved smile on her face as she nodded at me, ready to go.

"Want the house, Lilly?" I asked with a gesture around us.

"Gods no. Let the Society have it or whatever," she said.

I nodded. Figured.

Maybe I should request it... a part of me, in the recess of my mind, expected to stay on as protector. Or some form of it. So I expected to return here, if not at least eventually... many times over, and soon. With Light's return, and her making this place her headquarters, there will likely be a lot to do and very soon. Having this place, this house, away from the Animalia Guild and Light's Cathedral would be...

I put a stop to such thoughts. Even though it'd make me happy to have a place I could go here, to be alone, I knew it was pointless. Renn wouldn't stay here. She would want to stay where her friends were, where the rest of the Society was. So there was no point. This home would just be empty, whether we weren't here or not.

"I'll go pick up Renn. Shall we meet at the eastern gate? We'll be heading southward, along the coast," I said.

"Got it. We're traveling on foot, right?" she asked.

"Yes. Renn asked too, thinking the girl would have a bunch of stuff to bring and thus our need for a wagon, but no. The girl barely has enough for a single bag on her back, and I doubt the family she's with will be willing to part with anything extra," I said.

"Such are humans," Lilly said simply as she stepped over to me. She handed me a metal key, one that looked recently made. "The key," she said.

"Mhm. Need anything before we depart? Any supplies?" I asked.

She scoffed at me. "Please, Vim."

Right... "Well, an hour then. Renn is supposed to be getting ready... but well... you know her," I said.

Lilly laughed at that as she nodded. "I do indeed!" she said as she headed for the door. I could see the pip in her step; she was more than ready to leave.

I left the house with her and turned to lock it from the outside. Once it was, I gave Lilly a small nod and patted her shoulder as we both headed for the street. "Hope you're ready to go home," I said.

"Honestly? I am. I'm scared to go back and find it empty, but at the same time I really want to hurry all the same," Lilly said.

Empty...? Oh... right. Her issues with her kids. Right... "Let's hope for the best, Lilly," I said gently.

She nodded and sighed. "I am. I think. We'll be stopping at the Smithy right? To pick up Lellip?" she asked.

I nodded. "That's the plan. Then Telmik, to pick up Randle... and whoever is joining him," I said. Lilly and Lellip could head north and go straight home if they wanted to, but we hadn't talked about that yet.

"Busy, busy. Light's back, we're escorting a bunch of people to and fro... it's just like old times," she said, and somehow actually sounded happy over it.

"For now, at least."

We reached a street that diverted, and decided to part ways for now. Lilly headed for the eastern gate and I headed back to the Animalia Guild building, and thankfully found Renn who was packed and ready.

I found her in our room, sitting with Merit and surprisingly Tosh too.

"Hey Vim!" Tosh greeted me first with a grin, and I could tell by that grin that they'd just been talking about me.

"Tosh," I greeted him back, and felt a little bad. I had spent time with him while we were here, of course, but honestly not enough. But it wasn't entirely my fault... I had left to Berri's rather quickly when we first got here, and upon my return I'd been busy a bit. And when I wasn't, it was usually because everyone

else was too busy to have time for me instead. Tosh particularly. He had regained his old work ethic, the one that kept him working long hours happily.

The tale has been taken without authorization; if you see it on Amazon, report the incident.

Glancing at the bed, and the bags readied upon it, I noted a distinct lack of anything... not ours.

"Was hoping to have had another long night of drinking with you two, but oh well, next time!" Tosh said as he stood from the chair he had been sitting in. He walked over to shake my hand, and then after a firm nod he left the room.

"I'm never drinking again," Renn mumbled as she went to the bed, to start gathering up the few bags she herself carried.

"That's what everyone says after their first time," Merit said happily.

Renn's tail twitched a bit as she turned to look at me. "We ready, Vim?" she asked.

I nodded... and then glanced at Merit once more. The small woman noticed my look... held my eyes for a moment, and then nodded gently.

I see. So she didn't plan on leaving with us here and now. I wonder if that meant she planned to do so when we returned with the girl? Or had she changed her mind, perhaps? Or maybe she hadn't meant

she wanted to leave here and now, but instead once Renn and I had finished building a place for us up north?

No matter.

"Are you ready?" I asked my wife as I walked over to the bed and went to picking up the bags I carried.

"Yep! I look forward to meeting this girl and especially her cat!" Renn said happily.

"Cat...?" Merit asked.

"Vim said she had a cat. Named Beetles," Renn said with a happy smile.

Merit sighed. "Beetles."

"Renn's jealous her name isn't something so neat," I said.

As I picked up the last bag and placed it upon my shoulder, Renn hit me with her tail as she laughed at me.

Once we were ready Renn turned to say goodbye to her dear friend. I ignored the two as they hugged and whispered in each other's ear, not just saying their partings but teasing me as well. Although I tried not to listen into their whispers, I still noticed the way Renn and Merit spoke to one another.

Renn still didn't know that Merit wanted to come with us. Which meant Merit hadn't brought it up yet. Or maybe she had changed her mind...?

As I pondered that, Renn handed me my spear. I frowned at it, since I'd nearly forgotten all about it... and because it seemed she planned to let me carry it for now. She was odd sometimes, but maybe it was because she planned to hug and say goodbye to more people and simply didn't want it in the way as she did.

"Take care of her Vim," Merit said to me as we all left the room. We left the door open, since Renn was basically relinquishing it with us departing.

"I'll try," I promised.

Renn and I left the Society's housing area, and then the Animalia Company building, without any fanfare. Not very surprising, but a relief all the same. My coming and going was seen as normal, so it was to be expected... but usually Renn's departure wasn't treated so simply. Though maybe everyone has finally started placing her in the same mindset as they did me, what with her being my wife and partner.

"Just a couple days, right?" Renn asked as we left the building and headed for the eastern gate, to meet up with Lilly.

I nodded. "Remember though, we'll not be returning to stay."

Renn knew, but didn't nod. "I'm still not sure if I should be happy or sad that we've got so much to do, yet all the things we need to do are so..." she went quiet as she searched for a word to describe our tasks.

"Simple?" I suggested.

She shook her head. "They're not simple. They're important. Maybe I should say life threatening? But yet at the same time maybe they are all the same?" she wondered.

"Escorting people to a new home can indeed be difficult, yes. I've had it end badly several times," I said.

Renn groaned at that. "Let's avoid such a thing, please."

"I always try, Renn."

As we headed for the gate we left the warehouse district and entered a market. It was slightly busy, but thanks to being near one of the main entrances to the city also a place with many travelers. Renn and I looked at place here, with our gear and bags.

Renn focused on the stores and market stalls as we passed them by, but luckily she didn't see anything that caught her eye. We made our way to the eastern gate, showed our Animalia Guild stamp that allowed us to leave without having to pay exit fees, and found Lilly about half a mile from the gate, standing on the side of the road.

As we approached the owl, Renn hurried away from me to rush over to her friend. Renn made Lilly reach her hand out, as the two shook hands happily as if meeting each other for the first time. "Thanks for coming, Lilly!" Renn happily said.

Lilly smiled gently at Renn, in a way that reminded me of a tired mother. "I'd do nearly everything to get out of that town, Renn, this isn't that weird for me to do."

"Still!"

Resting my spear against my shoulder, I approached the two and glanced down the road we were about to travel. It looked busy, almost too busy. It was a good thing we didn't need a cart or wagon, because there was actually enough traffic that it would have slowed us down far more than usual. Maybe it was because winter was ending, and people were in a hurry to get their last bit of profit from the winter goods and trends.

"You look tired Vim," Lilly said to me as I went to stand near them.

"I do?" I asked. I mean, I felt fine? As I'd said to Renn, I've actually felt rather good lately. I didn't want to outright admit it, but it was likely thanks to my slaying of Stance. It had felt weird, and I still wasn't sure if it was the right move or not, but I had no other choice but to admit it was mighty relieving to slay a god again after so long.

"He's probably just a tad annoyed over what we're doing," Renn said.

"Can you blame him? Not only is this something that Brandy and the rest should have handled, they're only pushing it off onto you two because they're hoping it'll affect your decisions, Renn," Lilly pointed out.

Renn sighed at that. "I know..." she groaned.

"It's only a couple days at most. I'm annoyed over it, but no more than I usually am when having to handle such things," I told them honestly.

The two studied me for a moment, and then glanced at one another with looks of obvious disbelief.

Did I really look that annoyed right now...? I mean, yes. I was annoyed. I had asked Brandy and Gerald to handle this for me on purpose. And now they were just using it as a way to try and manipulate Renn and me without even hiding it. It was not just insulting it was annoying.

But... I wasn't actually upset over this. I had already decided to help that little girl out if I could. As I always did, and would do, for those who suffer at the things beyond their natural world. So was my agreement with my mother, to always do such a thing. Was nearly the same reason I was the protector of the Society, and...

"See? Now he's all lost in his thoughts," Renn whispered.

"Want to let him be, or should we drag the truth out of him?" Lilly whispered back.

"I'm not ignoring you. Come on. Let's get this handled before I actually do get annoyed over it," I said as I stepped past them, as to join the many hundreds of others along the road.

The two followed dutifully, and I was a little surprised to find them taking their places beside me. Usually they walked a bit ahead, or behind, as to talk to one another. And even more so, usually, Renn liked walking right next to her friend's... so she could really focus on them, or even hold their hand as they walked. Instead though they had taken their positions on either side of me, putting me in the middle.

It made me feel oddly uncomfortable though I had no reason for such a feeling. "What if this girl just says no?" Lilly asked.

"We give her the money and a letter of invitation, for if she ever changes her mind," Renn happily answered.

"Within reason, Renn. That letter won't be to join the Society, but instead just become an employee of it. You only get the offer to join the Society once," I said.

"Oh...? You know I've been meaning to ask, why is it we don't outright ask other non-humans to join, but will ask humans?" Renn asked.

Lilly scoffed at that. "That's one of Celine's old rules. Back in the beginning she invited people without hesitation and it got many people hurt. Enough so that she had no choice but to enact a new rule, one for her own self to follow. Our kind have to request entry, basically, now. Though there are many like Vim who basically see all of us as members, whether we're a real member or not," Lilly said.

I nodded. "Just as when I first met you Renn, or Fly and her people. I see all of you as members... at least, until you break one of our rules and then become enemies," I said.

"Right... you had indeed said that, back then. You just looked at me and nodded, as if you had been able to tell with a glance that I wasn't a threat," Renn said happily.

"Had it really happened that quickly Vim?" Lilly asked.

I shrugged. "Yes and no. I watched her for a few weeks, remember? But I realized rather quickly she was fine. She's more threat to herself than she is anyone else, really," I said.

Lilly laughed at that. "Right!?"

"I'd say you're the one in most danger, myself," Renn said.

Lilly laughed even harder at that.

Chapter 544 Renn – Mistle

"Ah. That's her."

I turned my head, following Vim's point... and down the road I saw a young girl, one who had a dutiful cat following right behind her. She was alone, other than her cat companion, and seemed to be heading

in the direction of the sea. This port city wasn't very big, more a village than not. It was mostly just a place all the nearby farmers and fishers came to sell their goods at the port... so because of that the port and the market that fed and was fed by it were the biggest things here. There were only small neighborhoods throughout the rest of the village, reminding me of how most human towns used to be like back in my youth up north.

The girl, Mistle, looked like most humans in this region. Slightly poor, but otherwise healthy and fine. She was as scrawny as Vim had described her, but he had forgotten to mention that this so-called poor farm girl had what was likely the brightest red hair I'd ever seen on anyone before. It was so colorful that I had almost mistaken it for a hat or something like it at first.

Following the bright red-haired girl was her cat, Beetles, whose tail twitched as it followed its owner. It looked like any other cat you'd see anywhere, though probably not that much older than a kitten based off its appearance. Although one could argue it stood out thanks to how healthy and well-fed it looked. It wasn't really a fat cat; it just had that healthy weight and coat to it. The kind that no alley cat or stray could ever mimic. I knew Vim would say it likely was fed as well as I was, as to tease me, if he was to describe it.

Smiling at the sight, I picked up my pace and left Vim and Lilly behind. I didn't wait for them to catch up, because I knew there was no point. We had camped outside of the port city last night, since we had arrived too late to even use an inn if we wanted to, and had only recently entered the town. Vim hadn't wanted to bother the girl or her family during the early hours of the morning, opting for us to wander around the market for a few hours before heading this way to Mistle's home.

And it seemed we didn't need to go all the way to her home, since we'd find her already.

I caught up to the girl rather quickly since I had hurried and she was just leisurely walking, but as I approached her cat noticed me. Its tail flickered in annoyance at me as I neared and the girl turned to look at me with a worried look.

"Hey there... Mistle, right? My name is Renn," I greeted the girl, and was about to explain to her that I was Vim's wife, but she brightened up at the mention of my name and stepped towards me.

"Vim's cat!" she said excitedly.

I hesitated a moment, and then laughed as I nodded. "Yes! I am. Vim's over there," I said with a point behind me. He and Lilly were walking our way, though slowly. I'd think they both wanted to give me a moment alone with her, but I knew the real reason they were being lazy in their approach. Neither Vim nor Lilly really wanted to get involved with this girl. At least, no more than they needed to be.

"Oh my gods!" Mistle saw Vim and then ran off, leaving me behind. I, and her cat Beetles, stood in slight shock as we watched her run straight at Vim all excitedly.

Feeling a little ignored, I sighed and smiled as I watched the girl run right into Vim, wrapping him in a hug as she did.

Even Lilly smiled at the young girl as she greeted him, and he her. I glanced down at the cat, and found it lazily sitting and watching its owner with the typical indifference a cat usually had.

Walking over to them, I left Beetles behind. As I approached the girl who was happily talking to Vim, I glanced around and was glad to see we weren't drawing attention. This village seemed small enough that any outsiders would stand out, simply thanks to how few people lived in this city, but at the same time this place often got travelers and merchants. Odds are we'd not be too noticed until we really started acting odd.

"How've you been Mistle?" Vim asked as I stepped up over to them.

"Fine! Beetles doesn't like the ocean, but otherwise we've been good!" Mistle said happily.

"Cat's don't like water, typically," Lilly said with a nod.

Mistle glanced at her with a smile, and then frowned and looked over her shoulder at me. She studied me for a moment, and then looked up at Vim with an odd look, one that made Vim tilt his head at her in confusion.

"You're one of those who have multiple wives? That's not good, Vim, even if you're an angel," Mistle said to him.

I was a tad stunned, since she had said such a thing so seriously, so I didn't get to laugh as quickly as Lilly did. She happily chuckled at that and reached over and patted the girl on her head. "I'm not his wife, I'm... like a younger sister, or daughter, more than anything else," Lilly said to her.

While Lilly ruffled the girl's bright red hair, I wondered if I could reach out and touch it too. Did different colored hair feel the same? I'd never thought of it before, since this was the first time I'd seen someone with such a unique brightness to their hair.

Still... angel? Her calling him such a thing made sense, considering her circumstances and her age, but it was still a tad silly to hear it said so seriously. Though that might be not so much my own understanding and knowledge of Vim, but instead my bias. After all, all the churches I've ever been in throughout the world and Society, each and every one of them had a singular constant. All their statues and motifs of

angels were typically of younger children, especially young girls. I don't think I'd seen a single statue or drawing before where a so called angel or divinity was depicted as a man.

The realization of such a thing made me kind of pause for a moment. Since I had never once ever even noticed, or questioned, such a thing before. How come I had never realized the faiths, at least the ones I've been exposed to, so heavily leaned on the idea that all holy figures were female? Even the motifs of the gods were typically of women, and Vim had just said the one he had just dealt with had been a man...

"What're you doing back here? You said I'd likely never see you again!"

Support the creativity of authors by visiting the original site for this novel and more.

I blinked out of my thoughts, deciding to speak about them to Vim later, and focused on the task at hand. Or rather, the red-headed girl... who glanced down at our feet as her cat walked up to brush against her as it walked past. Beetles first rubbed against Mistle's feet and shins, and then headed for Vim's. It began to purr as it brushed against Vim's feet, though did so without meowing.

Although it shouldn't be too surprising of a thing to see, it still shocked me all the same. Animals, particularly the small kind, rarely interacted with Vim like this. If at all, even. Half the time they acted as if he didn't even exist, as if they couldn't see, smell, or sense him in any way. Yet here was obvious proof that not only did this cat sense Vim, it seemed to like him.

"Huh," Lilly was just as surprised as me it seemed over the sight, but we didn't get a chance to really dwell on it as Mistle then turned to look at me.

"Do cats just like him or something? Beetles doesn't purr for anyone, never has, rarely even does it for me," Mistle asked.

I smirked at that, since I knew the real meaning of her question. She wasn't just making small talk, or asking about how Vim is seen in general by cats... but instead the truth of the matter, since I myself was one too. And being one I should obviously know, right?

"Well... to be honest animals don't normally even notice him. I think your cat is just very smart," I said.

The girl beamed a smile at that, and then coughed and nodded. "Well, I've raised her well!"

Vim knelt down to pet the cat, and once it noticed he had done so Beetles actually raised up on its hind legs, playfully clawing at Vim's arms as he petted it. As if it wanted him to pick it up, and hold it or something.

Maybe it simply liked him so much because he had saved it and Mistle? The hawk I had raised had been the same. I felt it had only liked me, and stayed with me, because I'd rescued it when it was young.

"Where were you headed, Mistle?" Vim then asked.

"Hm...? Oh, to the fishery," the girl said with a point past me, down the road she'd just been heading.

"Fishery?" I asked.

She nodded. "Was going to go work. I'm allowed to work two days a week, today's my second."

I frowned at that, since it seemed odd to me. I mean, it was obvious she wasn't as young as Vim had claimed her to be... but she also wasn't old either. This girl was likely a handful of years from even being considered an adult by any measure, even the old human ways.

"Let me guess, family makes you earn your keep do they?" Vim asked.

My left ear twitched a bit under my hat as I watched the girl frown in a way that made it clear she wasn't sure why Vim would even ask such a thing. "We're poor after all," she said simply, as if it was obvious.

Was it though...? The girl was dressed simply, and did look a tad dirty... and now that I was actually focusing on her, I could indeed smell fish upon her. But I mean... this was a port city, a place where fish were caught in mass. I personally felt the whole place smelled like fish. So her smell, and her general appearance, didn't outright scream poverty to me. At least not the kind I expected so close to Lumen.

Though I suppose I shouldn't think that. Lumen had more than its fair share of beggars and homeless. One of the current dramas in Lumen, for the Society at least, was over a group of children that Gerald had taken in.

Like usual I simply didn't outright notice the harsher life many lived all around me, since I was surrounded by comfort.

"Well, then we shouldn't keep you. Come, we'll walk to the fishery together," Vim said as he stood. Beetles finally meowed at him, displaying its displeasure of his ceased affection. Vim ignored the cat though as he stepped forward, gesturing softly for Mistle to follow suit.

I was a little stunned to hear him so pointedly say such a thing. Did that mean he had already made the decision to not help her...? Why? Or was he just being cordial? It was odd, a little. I had expected him to just outright ask her, or let me do so.

She joined him, not finding it odd at all as she went to walk side-by-side with him. "Do you work too, Vim? Or do you just slay monsters and stuff?" Mistle asked as she happily smiled up at him.

I glanced at Lilly, who noticed my glance and gave me a small smile and shrugged. I sighed a bit and went to follow them, but did so a few paces behind. Beetles the cat walked between me and them, once again with a twitchy tail. Maybe it liked to walk?

"I've honestly been doing a lot of slaying recently, which I'll not complain about. But no, I do indeed work. As my father would say: No work means no pay, and no pay means no say," Vim said.

I wasn't the only one who tilted their head at that. I even heard Lilly behind me do so, which told me she too had not understood his meaning.

"No say?" Mistle asked for us.

"Hm... my father favored jokes and riddles, and his mind worked oddly. But it makes sense, in a certain perspective to us. Without money in today's world, you really don't have much say in anything anymore," Vim said.

A little surprised to hear him talk of his father, especially here and now, I studied the way Vim glanced down to the girl as they walked and talked. He looked... a little too calm, even for him. The type of calm he normally had when he was in fact, not calm at all. As if forcing himself to be so.

I wonder why...?

"Ah..." Vim then came to a stop, as if he just remembered something important. Not only did I have to come to a stop, since he did and I had been walking behind him, but so even did Beetles.

"Vim?" I asked, wondering what was wrong. He suddenly seemed even odder as he frowned in a rather... dramatic way. He then sighed and turned to look at me.

"Renn, would you take her the rest of the way? I forgot to pay for our breakfast!" he said.

I blinked at that, since not only did we eat breakfast outside of the city, with food we ourselves had brought, but... Vim? Forgetting to pay someone something? Especially for something like a meal? That was impossible. Vim might not care for money himself, but he definitely cared about properly paying people what they were owed.

Which meant this obvious fib was on purpose.

One I wasn't sure I understood at all, but knew better than to question just yet.

"Sure. You can be so forgetful sometimes," I said with a smile as I stepped forward, to take my place opposing Vim on Mistle's other side.

The young girl frowned as she glanced at me, and then hurriedly looked back at Vim. "You're leaving already...?" she asked sadly.

"No, no. I'll see you later. After you're done working for the day. Don't get my cat and yours mixed up now, okay?" Vim said with a smirk.

My ears twitched again as I glared at him, but smirked alongside him. That had been a good one.

"How's that even possible!" Mistle said with a laugh as Vim gently patted the girl on the shoulder and then stepped away. He nodded at me, and then he and Lilly turned and headed back from whence we came, as if to actually go pay this supposed bill we'd forgotten to pay.

Mistle and I watched them go, as did Beetles, and then I sighed a bit on purpose, to get her attention back on me. I'd get to hear Vim's reason for this later. For now I'll just go ahead and do what I'd come here to do. "So? What do you do at this fishery? And how do you get away with letting Beetles join you as you do it?" I asked.

The girl grinned as she turned back around, and quickly went ahead and filled me in on how she cleaned the barrels and boxes all day near the docks. And all about the small pieces of fish she occasionally tossed to her cat as she did so.

Chapter 545 Vim – A Pinch of a Conversation

Putting my clothes back on, I tried to ignore the look Renn was giving me as I did.

We had bathed together a few days ago, before leaving Lumen. Why was she acting as if she'd never seen me naked before?

"So... proof is it?" Lilly asked as she studied the dull heart she was holding close to the candle.

"It is. Though... I'm still not sure if what it proves is something positive or negative," I said as I tied my trousers.

"Why didn't you let us know what you were going to do, Vim? I had been caught off guard," Renn asked as I grabbed the shirt I'd been wearing earlier off the bed. Lilly had brought my clothes to this inn for me, after I'd taken them off right before jumping into the ocean. I had swam to the island where I'd left Pinchie the monarch, the colorful crab, as to verify if Stance had actually done what he had said he had done.

He had.

"Forgot to, I'm sorry," I apologized as I put the shirt on.

Renn sighed at me, and I wasn't sure if it was over what I'd said and done, or if because I was now fully dressed again.

"You know, I'm really not sure what to think of this. I mean... it makes perfect sense that a god can kill a monarch, especially one of its own creation, but at the same time..." Lilly said with a sigh as she shook her head and stepped over to Renn, to hand her back the heart.

I watched it move hands, and wondered if I should still call it a heart or not. After all... was it? In theory it was, since it had been Pinchie's heart indeed, but at the same time it was now devoid of any and all traits that made it a heart in the first place. It had no divinity anymore. At all. Now it was basically just a glass bead, or a polished stone or gem, at best.

"It means they could kill us the same way, doesn't it...? With but a snap of their fingers? Makes me wonder how Vim kills them, then," Renn said as she studied the dull orb.

"They can kill you in that way, but not with the same methods," I said.

The two glanced at me, and I realized I probably should explain it a little better. They deserved such truth and honesty. Both of them did.

So...

Renn smiled gently as she looked at Lilly. "I had expected him to say they'd not be able to, since he was here to protect us, instead," she said happily.

Lilly scoffed at that. "That's because you're a romantic. Vim may be able to kill gods, but that does not mean he is one himself. I've myself buried countless people who perished during his battles with

monarchs back in the day, so I know full well that Vim can only do so much no matter his desire to do more," she said.

A little hurt by the way Renn glanced at me as she took in, and processed, Lilly's words... I nodded gently. "Yes. There's a reason I ask, and tell, you all to keep your distance when I fight them. Also, the reason I had said that is because a god can only extinguish a life in that way if they themselves had been the one to create it. However they don't need such an authority over your life, they can kill you a million different ways with that same snap of the fingers or a wave of the hand," I said, explaining a little.

They both studied me for a moment as Renn's tail twitched behind her on the bed. I was trying my best to not notice she was sitting on my socks, and was likely doing so on purpose. Not that I really needed them, of course. Not yet anyway. It was too late for me to need to really go anywhere or do anything. It was one of the reasons I'd been able to come back into this village without more than just a cloak. I had left a cloak on the rocky cliff I'd dived off into the sea earlier, and had worn it back here under the cover of darkness. It was now hanging in the corner of our little shack, dripping quietly.

"So? What of the girl?" I asked, feeling tired all of a sudden. As if I'd just swam miles through a storming ocean, and then did it again.

Renn and Lilly looked like they wanted to sigh at me, but didn't. "She's a good-hearted girl. She firmly believes you're an angel though, which makes her... well..." Renn hesitated to continue, and I knew why without having to be told.

"It affects her decisions. Yes. It was why I wanted others to come and invite her, not myself," I said. I've dealt with such people a lot more than I wanted to admit, so had expected it to a degree.

Renn nodded and sighed. "Yes. I've not outright invited her yet, Vim, because I wanted to talk to you about it first but... She'll say yes. Without hesitation. Because of her..." she then frowned and her ears fluttered. "Affection? Of you? It influences her."

Lilly chuckled at that. "It's not affection it's worship. She's not in love with him; she's just awed and enthralled. I'm surprised this is the first time you've encountered it, to be honest, since it's not just humans that do that. A lot of our own do it too," Lilly said.

"Right...! And I've encountered it already; of course, it's just never been a cause for concern. Her mistaken belief that Vim's something special will influence her choices, ones that could affect her whole life in ways beyond her understanding. It worries me," Renn said.

I smiled at that. "Yes. We're not meant to play god. However, now that we are here and have made contact with her the question must be proposed. Does she actually work in a fishery by the way?" I asked.

Renn nodded. "Yep. She cleans barrels and stuff, basically just spends all day scrubbing and cleaning."

A typical life really. In this era, even in the more modern towns such as Lumen or Telmik it wasn't uncommon for children her age to already be in the workforce. Though usually they were working with their parents... "Does her family work there?" I asked. I assumed, based off the poor conditions of their home and selves, that they didn't own it.

"No. Most of her family are fishermen. They work two different boats, alternating out on the sea. Some of them are gone for weeks at a time, I guess," Renn said.

Another thing that was common amongst such peoples.

Lilly shrugged a little. "A typical poor human family, Vim. She's not abused as far as I can tell, though it's obvious she's a burden. She works so she can buy her own clothes and some extra food, not just to support the family," she said.

"Poor does not mean unhappy. Nor does it mean her life will be one of hardship or sorrow. Most people are poor, in relativity, and most live full lives all the same," I said.

"Is that the protector talking, or the immortal man who would be content walking around naked without a care in the world if he could?" Renn asked.

I smirked at that. "That had been the man who has seen the greatest of empires and the lowest squalors. You might not believe it Renn, but some of the happiest people I've ever met had been living in the worst conditions you can imagine. As my mother would say, a rich man can hire a legion as to search for happiness and never find it. Yet the poorest soul can find it under any random rock," I said.

The small shack got a tad quiet as they both stared at me for a moment, and I once again felt tired because of it. Why had they been looking at me lately as if I spoke in riddles? That hadn't even had been one of my father's riddles, but instead one of my mother's teachings. Even a fool could have understood it.

I sighed and gestured lightly at the two, who seemed unable to say anything. "So? There's no denying inviting her into the Society would grant her a steadier life, but is it actually what she needs?" I asked the two.

Lilly didn't answer, but I hadn't expected her to. I knew she honestly didn't care. The only reason she had even paid attention, and or involved herself on any level, was because of her friendship with Renn. She glanced at her friend, who was rolling Pinchie's empty heart in her hands as if it was a toy pebble to fidget with. "I'd argue instead, Vim, that if we didn't invite her... that if we didn't take her into the Society, we'd be the ones committing an act of cruelty. I'd argue that point more than I would if she'd be better off with or without us," she said.

Although I was glad that Renn was obviously starting to form her own opinions on such matters, and doing so very well, it was also worrying. She really was a gentle soul, and I didn't mean it in the way everyone else did. Did she even realize what she'd just said? She was basically arguing the same thing my mother had so long ago.

I was blessed. We were blessed. And because we were so blessed, it was our duty to help those less fortunate.

"If that's the argument, the whole world needs to be invited into the Society," Lilly said plainly, exposing one of the biggest flaws in such logic.

I nodded. "Yes, Renn. If that's your argument for your decision, then it is regrettably a flawed one," I said.

Renn nodded. "I know. It's hypocritical. But it's the truth, isn't it Vim? In this case she is someone that you personally got involved with. You could argue you already did your good deed, by saving her from the monarch that attacked her family, but I'd say that's only half the battle. It'd be one thing if she was a fully grown adult, with a life already built for her to support herself with, but she's not. She's just a child, and the only support she has right now is a family that although accepts her does it with much reluctance. They only do it because they have to. What if something bad happens soon, before she can find a way to support herself? What if another famine or plague comes through? The family would choose to not feed her, if it meant choosing between her and their own children. And you'd not be able to blame them," Renn argued.

This novel is published on a different platform. Support the original author by finding the official source.

Lilly groaned. "Not only does she speak like Celine and the rest, she does so with not just surety but common sense and truth," she said as she shook her head and turned away.

Renn frowned at that, but I smiled at it. "She's praising you," I said as Lilly went to sit down at the table nearby. As she did I noted a pair of boots not far from the table, resting against a large trunk. They weren't any of ours, nor were they mine.

The shack they had rented for the night was just a small hut. We weren't far from the center of the town, and odds are this was someone's home. Likely one of the fishermen or maybe even captains, or boat owners, who were currently out at sea. And their family had happily rented it out, since it was being unused. I didn't mind it, since although an inn would have been cheaper this was more private. But there was an odd feeling that I was in someone else's home... intruding, since I kind of was.

"Am I wrong, Vim?" Renn asked worriedly, likely thanks to Lilly's comment.

"No. Not really. As you know I myself have my own rules and morals concerning such things. But as you also know, my line is... drawn much closer than yours is. I've grown calluses over my long life, ones many would argue are too thick and need to be sanded down," I said.

"Those who would are fools," Lilly said simply as she pulled out a small knife. She went to using it on her nails, either to clean or cut them.

"Ah, Lilly, I told you not to do that!" Renn complained as she hopped off the bed and hurried over to one of her bags. Lilly sighed as Renn hurriedly dug out the little leather pouch which held her nail-cleaning set.

Watching Renn and Lilly as Renn acted motherly as she made sure Lilly used the set to take care of her nails, and not just a plain knife, I wondered what I was to do with them. With Renn, more specifically.

I was happy that Renn was getting along with Lilly, and so too by extension Merit and so many others... but another part of me was kind of worried over it too. Not that I didn't trust Lilly or even Merit and the rest, but instead that I didn't trust Renn.

Renn's heart was a massive thing, and as beautiful as it was... it was also concerning. She was getting very emotionally invested in her relationships with others, to the point that it made me worry. I couldn't even count the number of people I'd seen perish, wilting away to nothing, all because they lost those they considered friends and family. More than I wanted to admit, or count. Renn was like such people. If she lost too many of them, too quickly...

"You should do yours too," Lilly commented, making me glance at Renn's hands. Sure enough her nails were a tad longer and pointier than usual.

"I know, but I was hoping to wait until Vim noticed first," she said with a glance at me.

Huh? Why? "Even if I did notice, I'd not say anything. I actually like them that way," I said. The only reason I had gotten it for her was because we were traveling so much through human towns. Her longer than usual, and pointier than usual, nails would have been noticed if she hadn't tended to them. Otherwise, if she had lived alone or at a non-human only location, I'd have never even thought of giving her such a gift.

Renn smiled at me, blushing a little as Lilly sighed. "Can you not flirt, please? I'm here too you know."

"That hadn't really been flirting, had it?" I asked.

"To me it had," Lilly said.

"Me too," Renn said happily.

I shook my head at them as I went ahead and stepped over to the bed. I took ownership of my socks, before Renn could keep them captive again, and went to putting them on.

"So? I'll not give you time on this Renn. It's something that needs to get done, and I vowed to do it, but I... we have many responsibilities. Ones that are more important than a human child. We cannot linger here," I said.

Renn sighed at me. "I know. I'll invite her tomorrow. She can't work the rest of the week anyway, so I invited her to breakfast."

I nodded, glad to hear she wasn't just willing to invite the girl but also was going to do so post-haste. We really did have more important things to address, after all.

"I'm glad you're both willing to be prompt about this... but can we go back to talking about the gods coming back and killing off their creations?" Lilly asked.

Renn's ears made loud noises as they fluttered and she looked at Lilly, and then glanced back at me with a quickness that told me of her concern.

She too wanted to ask about the topic, but obviously was trying her best to not pry. It was rather obvious, considering she now looked worried.

Sitting down on the edge of the bed, I looked away from my disgruntled wife and the concerned Lilly. I glanced to the nearby window, a smaller one with very heavy drapes and shutters blocking it. The kind that I knew hid even a shadow from prying eyes.

"Vim?" Lilly spoke up again, and with it came Renn's soft whine.

"She has a right to ask Renn, and so do you. You need not be so gentle with me, especially when it concerns something so serious," I said as I kept my eyes on the window.

I heard Renn shift, the kind of shift that told me she was unsure of herself. I heard her grab her own tail, like she usually did when either really embarrassed or stressed and worried. "You've been... slowly explaining it, Vim. I know you will tell us what we need to know, when we need to know it, so..."

"What...? Renn this was the perfect moment for you to push, not get all passive!" Lilly said.

I nodded. "It had been. But it'll work all the same," I said as I turned to look at them. Although I had meant to include Lilly in my focus, my eyes of course honed in on Renn and Renn alone. "I can't explain it. I've always expected there were still gods wandering this world, but had figured I'd never see them again. Not even a hint of them." For obvious reasons.

"Merit said you encountered one near her kingdom," Renn said.

"Yes. I had. He had been losing his mind, going insane. He wanted me to end his life, since he feared what it was doing to him. I think there was a high probability Stance was going through the same thing, in some way at least. He had acted very oddly, even for him," I said.

Renn's ear twitched as she glanced carefully at Lilly, who only met her eyes and nothing more.

"My current assumption, until I find more evidence, is that the remaining gods... the ones who have escaped me all this time, have been living in hiding. Keeping to themselves, as to not be noticed by the world or me. The last few have all been similar. Before Carson, the one who had been living near Merit's Oasis, I had encountered a pair of siblings. I had killed them... swiftly, but now that I recount the encounter I believe they too had been suffering some kind of malady of the mind. Just as Stance had, though his had been very... odd. I believe the reason they reveal themselves after all this time is because they don't realize what they're doing. They're acting rashly, because their own minds are working against them," I went ahead and told them of my current thesis, and how I had gotten there... and then I went ahead and explained why it mattered. Turning a little, as to face them a bit better, I gestured lightly at Renn. "Any god who has survived this long is one who knows better. They know not to alter the world, or mess with its rules, to any great degree. Because if they do, if they did, I'd be able to track them down. I'd notice them. So any who do now, after all this time..." I shook my head. "That could only mean they are not in their right mind. Since it goes against everything they've been doing for the last two thousand years," I said.

"So... There could be a lot of gods out there...? Just waiting for their minds to break?" Lilly asked.

"I hope not. But... there could be a few, yes," I said.

"How many is a few to you?" Renn asked.

Rolling a shoulder, I wanted to groan. "I don't know... maybe a couple dozen?"

There hadn't been that many, even back during their golden age. A few thousand at most. It was hard to imagine any more than that still living to this day, especially after everything I'd done.

"Uh... what about, you know...?" Lilly asked.

Renn and I both glanced at the owl, who suddenly sat up straighter and got all wide-eyed. "Oh. Um... you know, kids? If it's been two thousand years, even if they only have a few like we do that would still end up being a whole lot more than a couple dozen, right?" Lilly asked, specifying what she meant.

My wife must have found the idea interesting for she smiled as she nodded. "Yeah?" she said as she glanced at me.

Why was Renn seemingly so ready to believe such a thing? What with her perfect memory and all? Hadn't I ever... Wait no. I might not have ever told her. "No. Gods can't give birth. They're infertile," I said. The two shifted at that, and I couldn't help but notice the look on Renn's face. I felt my tense shoulders relax a little as I smiled at her. "I told you, Renn, I'm not a god," I said softly.

She blinked at me, and her ears fluttered as she opened her mouth to say something in response... but nothing came. At least, not right away. Lilly chuckled, speaking up before Renn could find her words. "Renn tells everyone you're not, but deep down she was kind of hoping you were," she said.

Renn's face went red as she grabbed her tail with both hands and started to twist it. "No...! I mean... I was just... I thought your parents were special, Vim. Very special. So..."

So you thought I was a god, because you had assumed they were gods. "Thus why I can confidently say there can't be too many left. They can't procreate," I said, choosing to switch topics ever so slightly.

Renn of course noticed, but it didn't seem Lilly did. "So... other than a god going insane, and possibly doing terrible things all around because of it, is there no other concerns then? Why the fascination with the hearts going all... dull?" Lilly asked as she gestured to the heart that still laid on the bed. It had rolled a bit closer to me, what with me sitting down on the bed, but it was still on the other side of the bed where Renn had left it.

"The hearts are confirmation that Stance had not lied to me. He had ended the monarchs he'd given birth to. It's also... an oddity, to me. I've killed many gods, and have with my own eyes watched many times as their creations are sent back to the abyss. Never before have I seen a heart lose its connection like these ones have. It makes me wonder if something else is going on too, or if maybe Stance had just been... that far decayed in mind and body. It is possible the hearts going inert is simply because of Stance's condition at the time of his death," I said as I reached over to grab the heart.

Picking it up, and feeling no divinity at all, only further enforced to me how odd it was. There wasn't even a lingering presence of divinity, not even a hint of it.

I glanced at my wife, and for a moment felt the feeling coming from her. She called it a tingly sensation; I'd call it the feeling of warmth. Her heart was forming very well, and as such it only made Pinchie's heart being devoid of any divinity all the more alarming.

A heart being empty when near a half-formed heart of pure divinity only further made one aware of both how odd it was for a heart to be empty... and how noticeable divinity was in close proximity. Renn's heart was pulsing already, though I doubted anyone else noticed or heard it. Not even Renn. It was almost distracting, especially since her heart, her actual organ, had synced up with it. They thumped in unison now, just as all monarchs did.

Although I was very glad she was doing so well, it was also... terrifying.

My wife was now, and forever would be, visible. To all the world. To any who had eyes that can see, and ears that heard.

Though... maybe I'll get lucky. Maybe all the rest will be like Stance. Broken. Blind. Deaf.

Renn smiled at me, since I'd been staring at her for a moment... and I went ahead and smiled back. I was worried, more than I wanted to admit even... but at the same time I knew better than to let that worry ruin me.

Plus it felt good to smile at her, and get a smile back. I don't think anyone, not the world itself or anyone in it, knew what I'd do for that smile. No one had any idea the price I'd happily pay just to see it for a moment.

So, to see it for the small price of my own smile...? Talk about a no-brainer. Especially since it gave me a sense of pride too, as to receive her smile in return for my own.

"Why do I feel like suddenly all of the Society's problems are now not worth worrying over...?" Lilly said with a sigh as she went back to dealing with her nails.

Seemed us smiling at each other hadn't been considered flirting to Lilly, which was funny... because it was to me.

Chapter 546 Renn – A Lumen A Day

I was glad now that I'd asked Roslyn and not Lamp to watch over Mistle.

Not because I felt Lamp wasn't good enough or anything like that, but instead for a more... motherly reason.

Lamp just had a child. And right now she and her husband, Mark, were going through a rough patch in their relationship. Though I personally felt it wasn't that big a deal, and that Lamp was being kind of... odd about it, there was no denying that Lamp was upset with him. She was still fuming over the fact that he was still sad and depressed over the loss of his parents. And her frustration had blossomed into almost unjust rage over it, at least in my opinion. She had threatened him over it, basically he was either going to have to put aside his sorrows or leave their home.

Basically Lamp's household was in slight disarray. Not enough to really justify not asking her to help watch over Mistle, but enough to pick Roslyn instead. Roslyn was a busy woman, but her biggest drama in her life was her people were growing fat and lazy. And her own child Rosie was very close to Mistle's age, which was one of the main reasons that decided it for me.

It also helped that Roslyn lived outside the Society proper. It was a tad concerning on my end, that they did, but it seemed many of the members in Lumen were growing concerned over the number of human members here... so this was my way of trying to keep the peace as well as help Mistle the best way we could.

Vim had seemed happy with my decision, though I couldn't tell if that was simply because the task of handling Mistle had been handled properly or instead because it was over and done with...

No matter. I also planned to ask Merit to keep an eye on her, if she would, before I left. Between all of them watching over her I'm sure she'd be fine... Lumen was actually a relatively safe place, all things considered. As long as you weren't homeless, at least.

"Homeless..." I whispered the word as I slowed as I neared the Society Housing metal door inside the Animalia Guild building.

Wasn't I technically homeless myself...? That was why not just I, but even Vim, have been wanting to make a place for us... right? I mean sure, in reality I could claim any location in the Society was my home, and as such not actually homeless, but...

Granted most of my life I'd been homeless. So it really wasn't something new to me. Even when I had lived in actual buildings, such as with the kids or Nory, I honestly never really considered them a home. Though maybe I had, at the time, and I simply didn't now because of the implications.

Back then they had been homes. And not just because I had lived in them. Today though...? Today I saw them as momentary stops. Kind of like how Vim and I stopped at a Society location for a few weeks or months, and then moved on.

But did I think that way because those homes had been in the past...? Or because I had lost them? The home I'd built for the kids, with the kids, had been something I had only lived in a handful of years after all. It was Ginny and Lujic's home, not mine, at least that was how I saw it.

What about the small cottage Nory and I had built though...? Shouldn't I see that as a home...? A real one? It genuinely felt like I should.

Yet I didn't. Did I?

No. I didn't. Not anymore.

I wonder why?

"Renn?"

I blinked and looked up, and found Vim. He was standing a little close to me, and I realized I'd stopped right in front of the metal door that led to the housing area. I hadn't even opened it. Vim had, though.

"Sorry. I kind of got lost in my thoughts," I said as I stepped forward. Vim turned as to let me into the housing area, and then he went and shut the door behind me.

"I can see that. What's wrong? Mistle is fine, isn't she?" he asked.

I nodded. "Yes. Roslyn was actually really excited over seeing her. Even Rosie was, though I think that was more thanks to Beetles than Mistle," I said as I smiled while remembering their meeting. Vim had gone with me to drop Mistle off at Roslyn's home, but had not lingered long. He had wanted to check on the ports, since his pirate friend was back. So he had gone to see Ronalldo while I had spent time with Mistle and helped her settle into her new home amongst former pirates.

I'd enjoyed watching that awkward, but happy and warm, moment between them all. It was the reason I had gotten lost in my own thoughts, too.

Glancing at Vim as we headed deeper into the housing area, I wondered what he'd say if I told him about what I'd just been thinking about. Would he understand? I knew he probably would, he always seemed to understand, but...

It was weird. And a little embarrassing. To claim I have been homeless all this time. When the reality was far from it.

The truth was, for as long as I walked beside Vim... I was home.

"Well, I'm glad she'll be fine. I'll make sure to ask Brandy to keep an eye on the girl too, just in case. Ah," Vim seemed to remember something as he paused and turned to face me. "We can't leave as soon as I'd like. Ronalldo brought back a letter, from the Summit. I need to handle something before we leave," he said.

"You're leaving again?" I asked, a little disheartened to hear so. He was my home. Whenever he left, I felt lost. Homeless.

Vim softly smiled at me and shook his head. "No, I just need to handle a few things. Here in town. I..." He went quiet as he glanced around, and I knew why.

"Want me to go?" I asked. I knew he was speaking of Lilly. We had told her upon entering Lumen that we'd only be the night, so she had chosen to camp outside. Now though that was going to be an issue, again.

He shook his head. "I'll handle it. I think I'll send her to the Smithy," he said gently.

Ah... I nodded at that. "Yes," I agreed. I too had been worried we'd been keeping Lilly away from her family for longer than need be. I was glad that Vim was willing to let her go finally. I could just imagine how sad Root was right now, what with her mother being gone so long.

I couldn't imagine leaving my newborn child for so long. I knew Lilly didn't really see such things as I did, and also it made a difference for her because of how many children she's had, but... still...!

Vim nodded. "Knowing her she'll still wait for us all the same. But I'd like to give her the option anyway. I think I'll go do that now, in fact."

"Okay. Have you seen Merit? Or Liina?" I asked. I wanted to check on Liina, since when we left she had still been bedridden.

"I saw Merit earlier, from a distance. She scowled at me. I've not seen Liina, but I've also not been told of any bad news, so I'm sure she's fine," he said.

I wanted to huff at that. "Sometimes such news lingers. I'll go find out myself," I said as I stepped forward and around him.

He chuckled at me and patted me on the shoulder as I walked past. I glanced at him as he did, and then he simply turned away and headed for the door I'd just entered from.

Watching him leave, I glared at his back for a moment before looking away.

Again he leaves without even a goodbye! I know it was just for a moment, since he'd come right back after talking to Lilly, but still...!

Sometimes Vim seemed so... indifferent. I knew it was just his nature, and his old age, but it still sometimes made me very self-conscious when he acted so passively. Especially when it concerned me.

I nearly panicked each time he left. My jaw clenched. My tail squirmed, and ears twitched. My pulse quickened, and I grew ever more tense as time went by.

Yet Vim never seemed too bothered, no matter how long we were apart. Even when months went by while we were separated he always returned to me with the same stupid grin on his face...

The tale has been taken without authorization; if you see it on Amazon, report the incident.

"What's nipping at your tail, Renn?" I blinked and looked to my right, and found Jasna. The tall, pretty, woman gave me a smirk that told me she had enjoyed teasing me as I smiled and approached her.

"Vim just annoyed me. How's Liina?" I asked.

"A lot better. She plans to return to work in a few days. Honestly she's likely already able to do so, we're just being safe about it," Jasna said.

I relaxed a little, nodding gratefully. "That's good to hear."

"Aye. Make sure you see her before you run off with Vim again. She's sleeping right now though," Jasna said as she happily patted me on the shoulder and walked past.

I nodded in farewell as she left, and wondered why her patting my shoulder had felt so different than Vim's. They were almost the same height, and had touched me in nearly the same spot... was it the forcefulness of it, maybe? Although Vim's hand was bigger, he had been gentler with his patting. Jasna had almost felt as if she had gripped me a little as she patted me, as if to squeeze me as she did.

Ever since I'd lost my scent, a lot of people have been treating me differently. Jasna was definitely one of those people. She was a lot more... touchy-feely as Vim would say.

Not that I minded. I was actually very glad that so many people were friendly with me. Though it worried me and bothered me that some of them were acting so for... less than honorable reasons. Like Brandy.

Though if I dubbed Brandy's friendliness in such a way, I likely needed to do the same for Light's... and who knows who else's...

"Ah!"

I turned forward, and was a little surprised to find a wolf here in the Animalia Guild.

"Hello Tundra," I greeted the wolf as she hurriedly rushed up to me. Unlike the other times where she'd nearly outright tackle me, she instead just reached out and grabbed me by my forearms. She brought my arms up, almost forcing me into a wild handshake as she greeted me back.

"Renn! Where've you been!?" she asked excitedly.

I smiled at the girl's obvious joy. It was so simple and pure it made me feel as if I should replicate the same emotions alongside her. "Vim and I had to do a few small things outside of Lumen. How've you been?" I asked. I didn't want to outright say what we'd been doing, since I knew Tundra wasn't a big fan of humans. She was what Lilly called a primitive predator. Someone who believed they were more important than most others, especially humans, thanks to their bloodline and strength. Lilly hasn't met Tundra yet, but had a rather firm opinion on her just based off my and Merit's description of her.

Lilly had spoken of Tundra as if she was a lost cause. Not worth my time.

Which was funny, in a way, since Lilly wasn't too dissimilar. It'd not surprise me at all if I learned that Lilly had acted just like Tundra did now, back when she was young. And that was the reason I was not willing to so easily write the girl off, as so many others had.

"I've been great! Everyone at the church have been annoying me, asking me to help all day long, but it's fine! They're all so weak, so it's only right I help them!" Tundra said happily.

I read between the lines, and wasn't sure if I should be glad or sad. She was happy, deep down, that people were asking her for help. Likely with building the new cathedral here, but... was that a good reason for being so? She was only happy because she got to further prove, in her own opinion, that she was stronger than everyone else. Thus more important.

"Did you get permission to move here?" I asked, hoping to change topics a little.

Tundra's happy smile dimmed. "Ah... no. I was visiting. I brought stuff with Less, since Saint Light is supposed to be returning soon," Tundra said as she turned, releasing one of my hands so she could point down the hallway. It was indeed in the direction where Light's room was located... I wonder if that meant Less was down the hallway?

I see. Judging by the way she had answered, and that tiny twitch of her smile, it was likely that the residents here had voted against allowing Tundra to live amongst them. Not an outright banishment, but more like the one I had originally gotten.

Such a thing probably hurt her, even if her pride would never let her admit it.

"What about you, Renn!? Are you back for good? Or are you going to go off on an adventure again?" Tundra then asked, her smile returning to its full glory.

"Ah... We had planned to leave again, yes. But Vim got a request, I guess, so we'll be here a short bit longer," I said.

Tundra's headdress made some noise, and I knew it was because like me her ears were moving wildly. "Right! Vim! I have another request for him!" Tundra then said, as if just remembering.

"A request...?" I asked. I'd known about him taking her to Lawrence, since had once lived with those like her. Fellow wolves, but I hadn't realized it had been a genuine request. I had thought Vim had said he had told her about them on his own, without being asked.

Tundra nodded excitedly. "Yeah!"

I waited a moment, to hear what it was, but it seemed she wasn't going to say it. I spent a tiny moment to consider asking her about it, thinking maybe she just... didn't realize I had been asking what the request was, but I decided against doing so. A few people have kept their request to Vim secret, finding them personal and private. Although Tundra didn't outright strike me as someone who would do such a thing, I didn't want to risk it and offend her by prying.

"Well, he should be back later tonight. I'll make sure to let him know to talk to you, before we leave," I said. I wasn't going to ask if she'd be here when he got back or not. I knew she'd likely leave soon, likely with Less. Likely long before Vim got back.

"Thanks! I gotta go tell Less! Maybe she'll let me stay the night with you!" Tundra then said, and then turned around and ran off before I could say or do anything.

Watching her run off, I groaned as I realized I was likely going to be the cause of discord. Less might just give her permission, expecting me to take responsibility for it... and honestly, I didn't want to. I wouldn't mind spending the night with the girl, at all, but I didn't want to do it if it'd just cause issues amongst those here...

"What do you expect, Renn? Predators don't think beyond their own desires. They can't put themselves in other's shoes."

I turned, and smiled warmly down to my friend. "Surely she's not that bad, Merit. I think she's just... exciteful and young," I reasoned.

"Keep telling yourself that. I'm honestly surprised you're so hopeful about her, and those like her. What with being one yourself, and having had the siblings you did," Merit said simply.

I flinched at that, since it was the truth.

Yes. I did see the resemblance. There was no denying that Tundra had that same... forcefulness, that my siblings had possessed.

They expected the world, and all it held, to bend to their whims. To do what they wanted.

The difference though seemed to be that Tundra actually tried to correct herself when the world pointed out her flaws. She had fasted for several days back when we'd first met, as her way of penance for making a mistake. I wasn't sure who had installed such a personality trait into her, but I figured it had been done on purpose.

It made me wonder if I'd need to do the same for my own children...

"Renn...?"

I blinked, and sighed. My mind was wandering. Because Vim wasn't here. My home was gone. "Will my children be like her, you think?" I asked my little friend.

Merit tilted her head up at me. "I... don't know, Renn. If it was just you and Vim being taken into account, then I'd wager that they'll be fine. Probably annoyingly fine. But..."

"But my family proves otherwise," I said, nodding in agreement with her assessment.

"Mhm. And we don't know Vim's circumstances. At least, I don't. Honestly he might be something we shouldn't really consider anyway. For all we know he won't have any input into their personalities."

"I was kind of hoping he would..." I grumbled. I actually found Vim to be not just attractive, but his personality to be lovely. Even if so many believed the opposite.

"Well, at least they might inherit his strength? Good luck carrying the baby around though if it can get all heavy like he does," she said with a small laugh.

I grinned at that. "I've thought of that too! I plan to tease Vim about it when I can," I said happily, glad she had thought the same thing I had.

She smirked and nodded... and then glanced around. "Where is he anyway? Figured he'd be all over you, since he had been so worried over if you'd adopt that human girl or not. Bittles or whatever."

"Beetles was the cat's name. Mistle is fine. No, I'll not adopt her. Our life is far too busy and hectic for such a thing, it'd not be fair to her," I said defensively. Plus, to add to that, I was hoping soon I'd have my own children to worry about...

Merit nodded, glad to hear it. "So?"

"We had planned to leave tomorrow. But now he has to stay for a bit, since he's gotten a request," I said. Multiple requests now, what with Tundra's. "So he went to let you know who know," I said.

Merit slowly nodded. "Good thing we kept that house then. I'll give you the key in a bit," she said.

My shoulders slumped a little, as I was once again shown just how big Merit's heart was.

So she hadn't handed it off to Brandy yet! She had planned to. And Merit was not one to procrastinate. That meant she had waited... just in case... for Lilly, her friend.

Reaching down, I ignored Merit's small yelp of annoyance as I went to wrap her in a big hug.

"I love you Merit," I said happily as I gave her a tiny squeeze.

She took in a deep breath, and sighed it out after a moment of holding it in. "Yeah, yeah..."

"Ah! Me too! Me too!" Tundra's voice filled the hallway as she returned, running at us.

Merit let out another yelp as the wolf wrapped us both in a hug, which it seemed Merit allowed... and although I knew it was only because I too was holding her, it still made me squeeze her even more.

She was one of the smallest people I knew, but had one of the biggest hearts. Even if she tried her best to not let anyone else know about it.

As we all hugged each other, while Merit pretended to groan and wiggle free, I wondered if it'd cause problems if I asked Merit to come with us. Up north.

I wished she would. But I feared voicing such a desire. Since I knew I wasn't supposed to do such a thing.

At least... That was what Vim would say.

But I wasn't Vim, was I?

Chapter 547 Vim – To Finish One's Tasks

"It's perfect, Vim..." Glasses said with a whisper.

Although I figured it would have been, it was still relieving to see it with my own eyes. The leg brace I'd made for her was now a perfect fit. I had only needed to adjust it a few times, surprisingly, and honestly I was glad it not only was working so well but also that it was now over with.

"Odds are it will last several years, but eventually you'll need to make a new one. In the chance I'm not around to do so for you..." I pulled the small book out from my pocket and held it out to the saint. Her eyes brightened up at the sight of it as she gently took it from me. "It's a step-by-step process in making the brace. I also drew some illustrations. Between that and the finished product, someone half-decent with leather-work should be able to make a decent replica," I finished.

She sniffed as she nodded. "Thank you Vim... Really," she said.

Yes. I was long used to such tears, especially from those like her. But that didn't mean I wanted to keep seeing or hearing them.

Renn didn't like it when members of the Society acted indifferent to my assistance and deeds, but honestly I preferred it that way. Seeing them get so emotional made me uncomfortable. Especially when it was someone like her.

This saint wasn't just a member of her clergy, she was the personification of it. She blushed and panicked over just me seeing her bare legs, and squirmed and fretted when I touched her as to take measurements or check on the brace itself. She hadn't said anything or hinted at it, but something told me she likely prayed after our little meetings. As if to cleanse herself of sins or something. Like how Light took purity baths.

It upset me to think my mere presence, my touch, of all things caused someone such discomfort. It made me feel like an ass. She might be odd and weird to me, being so bothered by my presence and touch, but she had a right to such beliefs. It was I who was the wrong one in this context, in my opinion.

I shouldn't even be putting her in such discomfort. But what was I to do? I could ask Renn, and others, for help in many ways... but at the end of the day the best way to get the job done was for me to just handle it myself.

"I suggest not wearing it all the time. I know it sounds odd, but your leg will become worse if you don't work it occasionally without the brace's support. I suggest occasionally having a day where you don't wear it, just to keep your leg in shape," I suggested.

"Okay. Yes. Like faith, it must always be tested. I understand," Glasses said with a nod.

"I'll be around for a few more days, just let me know if anything bothers you about it before I leave. If something serious does happen, you can send a letter of request for me anytime you want. Either Light or Gerald at the Animalia Guild can handle it for you, if you don't know how," I said, as I realized these people might not in fact know how to use the Society's inner systems. At least, the ones who hadn't been involved in the Society back then might not know.

Glasses nodded again. "We've all been taught the letter systems. Same with the code words and banks," she said.

Right. Brandy had been complaining over that earlier. "That said; is there anything else you can think of? If not I should go speak with Blasco before I leave," I said, hoping to move on to my next task of the day.

Glasses shifted, and I watched as she put more and more weight on the leg with the brace. It was hidden beneath her thick robe, so I couldn't actually see it, but I could see her extra surety and confidence in her leg than from before just in the way she stood. Her shoulders weren't as slumped, her arms and hands not as stiff from pain and her attempt to balance herself. She now stood as if she didn't have a lame leg at all.

It was actually very relieving to see her so obviously better than before. It made me feel as if I had actually accomplished something for once, in a way.

She nodded, then looked up at me and smiled. "I love it, Vim. Thank you," she said softly, again, with that voice of pure emotion. She spoke with a tone that made me focus on her, and would no matter the circumstances. It was a tone most people went their whole lives without hearing, or speaking.

It was one of those voices you normally didn't hear from someone else. Or if you did, only heard it on the rarest of occasions. I didn't know how old she was, but it was obvious she wasn't young. Maybe not far from Renn's age. It made her heartfelt emotions, so clearly written on her face and in her voice, all the more potent. Almost enough to make me forgive and overlook the fact she was a saint. Almost.

Still it made me pause a moment. Renn sometimes spoke like that to me, but I mean... that was Renn. She was an emotional person. Plus she was my wife. Her speaking in such a way to me, or around me, was to be expected. At least, in a way.

At least she wasn't trying to hug or kiss me. A perk of her chaste lifestyle and personality, I suppose.

I took a small breath, taking note of her smell. It was wildly different from Renn's. But, like most of the people here, it was similar in the sense it was pure. Unlike many in the Society today, or the humans outside of it, the folks here were thicker in the blood than what was common today. She, like Tundra and the others, smelled noticeably non-human. Made ever more present by their clean lifestyles and simple lives. They didn't have fancy oils or perfumes, or unique foods from distant lands, to mask their normal smells. It made them ever more obvious.

I dedicated her scent to memory, in case there ever came a day I needed to recognize it in a crowd or at a distance.

"I'll leave you be then. If you see my wife before I do, don't let her know about all the wicked stuff we did okay?" I said as I teased the saint.

Her huge and thick glasses couldn't hide the massive blush that instantly took over her face. "Vim...!" she barely got my name out as she began to stammer, as if the mere thought of such a joke was enough to ruin her purity.

I chuckled at her and nodded. "See you later then, Glasses," I said as I headed for the door.

I left behind the small bag I'd made and gathered, full of leather and tools. I'd not need it anymore, after all.

Glasses groaned and made noises as I left the small room we'd been using. She hadn't allowed the door to shut, but had wanted it half-closed. She didn't want people seeing her naked legs, but at the same time didn't find it proper for us to be alone in a room either.

As I left, I heard her start to giggle a little. Either because of her joy at her new leg-brace, or my joke. I paid the tiny laughs no mind as I rounded a corner and headed for the entrance of the building.

Blasco's office was near the front. It was where, eventually, an entrance would be made for the Cathedral. Where hundreds if not thousands of people would flow in and out during sermons and ceremonies. Right now though, the large hallway entrance was retrofitted into smaller offices and storage rooms.

It didn't take me long to reach the man's office, but I found it empty. A few candles were burning within it, telling me he had likely just been here and would return shortly, so I simply lingered in the area for a moment.

A few people came and went as I waited, but none really engaged with me. Most seemed to just nod at me, or outright ignore me as they focused on whatever task they seemed intent on finishing.

It wasn't too odd that most of the people here seemed to either want to ignore me, or only interacted with me as little as they possibly could. Most of the people here didn't really know who I was, having been born on the other continent. And those who did know me, like Less, were the type to not want to associate with me more than needed.

Though I shouldn't say they didn't want to interact with me. They did. I've spoken to pretty much everyone here, and not a small portion of them had given me requests. Most were simple things, like wanting to know if someone they had known or heard of was still alive or not. For instance one of the

younger men had wanted to know if his brother was still alive. I had regretfully informed him that Trek had passed not too long before they had returned.

"Protector!" A younger looking woman smiled at me as she walked past. She entered Blasco's office, put some things on his desk, and then left again.

Yes. They weren't scared of me, or didn't like me, they just... had their own focus. They all seemed hell-bent on getting this cathedral done as fast as possible.

Couldn't blame them, really. The longer this place took to build the more likely there would be accidents. As it was it'd likely take five or more years for this place to finish, at the rate they were going. Which was funny, since that was how long Light had wanted me to take a vocation...

Speaking of that, I wonder if Renn had spoken with Light more about that while they had traveled together and spent time together. While I'd been gone. I'd yet to hear anything more about it since I had left, oddly. Maybe the suggestion had been abandoned already...? Or maybe Light's schemes had changed, adjusted, thanks to having gotten closer to Renn while I'd been gone.

I sighed as I crossed my arms and leaned back against a wall. Doing nothing and just standing here was letting my mind wander into places I didn't want it to go... even if I needed it to.

I really needed to address and handle a lot of things. But at the same time... well...

"Why're you frowning like that?"

This novel is published on a different platform. Support the original author by finding the official source.

I turned to find Less, who was giving me an odd look. The kind of look I gave Renn more often than I wanted to admit. As if I was being weird or something.

"What?"

Less studied me for a moment, and then must have decided not abandon whatever thought had just been in her head. She relaxed a little and then gestured at the office nearby. "Blasco's busy with a shipment of supplies. He'll not be back for a few hours," she said.

Supplies for the cathedral, likely. I wonder where they got them from. Odds are it was one of the organizations related to the Society, one of the noble-owned ones that the Animalia Guild used often. Brandy likely would give me an earful about it if I asked. So I decided never to do so.

Still... that meant I either needed to wait here, or go find him and intrude into what was likely an annoying headache. The type that would become mine if I got too close to them all as they dealt with it. I wasn't in the mood to build this cathedral, even if I really should be involved in it.

"Now you look annoyed. Is there anything I can do for you, Vim?" Less then asked, likely noticing my feelings.

"No... I'm trying to finish up all the little requests I've gotten, so I can leave in a few days, and I'm just wondering if I should go finish his here and now and risk getting dragged into more, or just wait until

later," I said. Honestly I'd already finished them all, such as the one that Glasses had given me. I had simply checked up on her and made a few smaller adjustments after she'd worn it for a few days is all.

The only ones I'd not finished so far were those like Mono's. Things I'd not be able to complete anytime soon, or at least, not something I could just handle here and now in Lumen.

"What'd he even ask of you...?" Less asked as she glanced to the man's office.

I frowned at her. "You know I can't answer that," I said.

She startled, and then smiled and nodded. "Right... sorry. I've lived so long amongst those who don't hide anything that I've forgotten such a simple thing. Funny."

It was, in a way. "Oh you people hide more than enough, Less. You can lie to yourself but don't lie to me," I said simply.

Less's eyebrows met, but she nodded. "Yes... I suppose you're right. I'm sorry Vim, I had not meant it that way. I meant in general," she said.

"I know. How is this all going, by the way?" I asked. I knew she'd not outright tell me if it was having issues, or something like them, but I still wanted to see the way she responded.

Less gave me a smile, one of confidence. The type that told me even if something was wrong, it didn't matter to her or anyone else. "It's going well. It's going to take a little longer to build this place than we all thought, but it's fine. We'll have more hands soon enough," she said.

Oh...? "When are the others meant to arrive anyway?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I'm not sure. That's not my department. Light and Frima handle that."

Sure it wasn't. I'd believe her, thanks to her personality, if not for the fact I knew Less was standing right beside Light nearly all the time. There was no way Less hadn't at least overheard such information. She just didn't want to share it with me.

Likely on purpose. Ordered to by Light. Because of some stupid prophecy...

"Where's your bride...?" Less then asked as she glanced around.

"Running around with Mono and Tundra," I said. I was kind of worried about her associating with such kids, but I was also thankful for it. She occupied them, and kept them out of my hair while doing so.

Less knowingly nodded. "She seems to get along well with those who live on the brim. Like Merit and Lilly," Less said.

"And your sister. You'd be surprised how well those two get along," I said.

The saint's knight shifted a little, giving me an odd look as she did. "Yet she's also able to be friends with those of us who are normal. I wonder how she does it," she said.

I noted she had outright ignored my comment. It seemed some things didn't change, at least. "I'd happily argue with you on the definition of normal, but instead I'll simply say that Renn simply treasures friendship. She was lacking in such relationships for most of her life, if not nearly the whole of it, before joining the Society. Because of that she's very... serious about her connections," I said.

"Then there's you, who is cordial with everyone yet never gets too close to anyone. Until now, at least," Less said.

I shrugged. "I'm still a man. One who makes more mistakes than most others," I said. If not all others. Technically thanks to my long life I've undoubtedly made more mistakes than any other man in existence has, just by law of numbers. To not say the least to the few mistakes that were... well...

Blinking softly, I felt oddly sad all of a sudden as I thought of my past. The foolish things I'd done, and how little I've done so far to make amends for them.

"Saying your love for her is a mistake is rather cruel, even for you. Or is that one of your weird jokes that make no sense?" Less asked.

I hadn't meant it that way. But it was interesting to think, and know, that Renn would have laughed at me and returned the joke in kind had she been here instead. "By the way..." I changed my line of thought as I glanced at the badger, and noted the scent upon her.

That smell was unmistakable. Especially here in this place that smelled of construction. It was the smell of the sea. Of sails and rope. Of a ship, one seafaring. As if she'd just been at sea herself for weeks. It was a smell that under normal conditions, I'd have dismissed. Since this was a port city, after all. And we, the Society, did indeed have many ships ourselves that sailed the seas carrying cargo and whatnot. It would have been easy to simply assume why she had such a smell upon her.

But I had just yesterday smelled the same scent. One that was unique enough to stand out. One that I recognized without fault or fail.

"Huh...?" Less shifted as she glared worriedly at me, unsure of what I was saying.

"He's just a human. An employee. But he is also the son of a family I've known and been friends with for longer than you've been alive. Don't toy with him," I warned her.

Less's face went pale, her mouth going agape in shock... and then, like an ocean wave, a flush of red quickly took over the paleness. I found myself a tad startled, since she was blushing even harder than Glasses had just done. And Less, although a pious woman, was not as thin skinned or weak. Far from it.

I'd never seen her this way before... ever. And it was shocking to say the least.

"I... I!" Less stammered as she tried to get herself under control. I ignored it though as I gently shrugged at her.

"I'm usually not one to say such a thing, since it goes against my rules... but I promised his mother I'd keep an eye on him. He's a good man, or well, he will become a great one if we don't ruin him. Really, Less, here I thought you weren't like your sister..." I started to say as I thought of the poor pirate boy, who likely had no idea who he was getting involved with.

I mean, really? Less of all people? I'd not deny she wasn't good looking, in her own way, and I could see why someone like Ronaldo would find himself attracted to her... the hardiest of sailors usually fell for those like her. The types who seemed soft and gentle, but were as hard as them deep down. But still... he had to at least know she was a non-human, right? I'd spent a little time back then, last time we'd been in Lumen, to explain the Society properly to him and all...

But maybe I was reading too much into it? They could just be enjoying each other, they were adults after all... maybe I should have just kept my mouth shut and...

"Um...!"

Glancing at Less, I hesitated as I found her a little closer. She had lowered her head a bit, still embarrassed, and she was twirling her thumbs around each other as she mumbled something. I made out a few words, but couldn't understand what she was asking. Something to do with Ronaldo?

"Hm...?" I stepped away from the wall, and stepped closer, to hear her better. Less noticed, glanced up at me... and then groaned a little.

At least she wasn't as red in the face as she had been. Her ears were still red, though. "Do... do you not want me... to..." she then began to ask.

Ah. She was asking if I wanted her to not get involved with him. "That's not what I meant, Less, and you know that. I'd never say something like that. I just meant... if you're just having some fun, please do so moderately. I'm hoping he serves the Society for a very long time, so..." I said, and realized I'd screwed up.

She wasn't playing around with him at all.

"Mhm..." Less nodded, taking a deep breath as she did.

Feeling like an ass, again, I reached up to scratch the back of my head. "You like him that much?" I asked. How long have they even known each other...? Ronaldo had just gotten back, hadn't he? Well, no. I shouldn't think like that. Less and her people had been here in Lumen for a while now, they likely had encountered each other once or twice before then...

"Mhm...!" Less nodded again, this time a little stronger.

I see...

Reaching over, I gently patted the badger's shoulder. "Stand Tall, Less. You need not hide such a thing. Be proud of your feelings," I said.

She glanced up, but remained somewhat slouched forward. "You're... okay with it?" she asked quietly.

"As long as you're happy, Less. I had just... well... I suppose I had just been rude to you. I had instinctively considered your sister, and well..." I felt bad as I explained why I had assumed she had not been taking her romantics seriously. And as I tried to explain as to the why, I felt more and more like an idiot.

Less gave me a hearty smile, a flash of teeth that reminded me of Landi. "I'd be offended if I didn't know you better," she said.

"You can be offended. I'm offended of myself too," I said. She giggled at that and nodded. I released her shoulder after a soft squeeze, to let her know all was well. "Then, congratulations then... I think? Am I interpreting the moment correctly finally, or am I still misunderstanding?" I asked.

She shook her head. "You are. I plan to wed him as soon as I can."

"Oh...?" That quickly...? Even if they had met months ago that still seemed...

"I have a good reason for it, Vim," she said gently with a small gesture. One to her belly.

"What...? Already?" I asked, a tad shocked to learn she was already pregnant.

"Says you?" she responded with a laugh.

My eye twitched, and I quickly changed topics. "Well... congratulations then, for an even better reason. Really..." I said. Less was going to have a child huh...? Scary.

And... well...

Shifting a little, I thought of her sister. And her attempts, over centuries, to do what Less had seemingly accomplish in a fraction of the time.

Happenstance...? Or...

"No one else knows yet," she whispered. I turned my head, to glance down the hall and heard why she had said such a thing. Someone was coming.

I nodded, and sighed. "You want to become a fast friend of Renn's...? Tell her," I said. Less and Renn had seemingly not spent much time together. Renn was still... debating, internally, if she wanted to like Less or not. She was torn between her allegiances, what with Landi in mind and all.

Personally I wasn't sure which sister I'd prefer. Each had their own issues, and dangers, associated with them. Though in Less's case most of hers were from guilt by association, than she herself. So...

Less gave me an odd smile. "Is that permission I hear?"

I nodded again. "Sure. I may be a failure in many ways, but I like to think that when it comes to putting a smile on my wife's face... that is one place I don't fail at," I said. Not willingly, at least.

She giggled at me and then reached over to give my arm a squeeze. She gave me a rather gentle smile, tilting her head and looking happily relaxed as she did... seemingly far more relaxed than she's ever been around me. "I'll hold you to that, then."

Great.

Chapter 548 Renn – A Talk, Long Coming

Grinning happily, I slowly stepped into the hot bath and sat down.

Although the bath was big, the kind of big that would have allowed me to sit across from Vim in my own little section, I chose instead to sit right next to him. Not close enough we were outright touching, but close enough that I could with ease if I wanted to.

"I'm happy for her, Vim. Even if it means sorrow will come eventually," I said, continuing our little conversation about Less and her... recent romantic development.

I hadn't told Vim that Light had already told me about it, since she had prophesized it, but I was a little surprised to hear it had indeed been the man that Vim had brought into the Society. The pirate boy.

What were the odds...? Or maybe that was just how it worked, sometimes.

"Yes, yes. So happy. Now I have to go talk to the lad, and make sure he understands fully what he's done too," Vim said with a sigh as he leaned back a bit.

He had laid a towel over his face. One he'd just soaked in the hot water. It was steaming a little, as was the water we were sitting in, and he looked... oddly enticing as he did so. Was he doing this on purpose? Was that his way of trying to keep himself from staring at my naked body? If it was, then I could forgive him. It was adorable.

"You'd force your will like that?" I asked.

"Only because I have to. The lad was raised well, but he's still a pirate, Renn. They're... sometimes not the greatest when it comes to such affairs," he said through his towel.

"You act as if Less is incapable of taking care of herself," I said.

"Landi would kill me if I allowed her sister to get hurt while under my watchful eye. Especially when it concerns a man I myself had vouched for," he said.

Oh! Was that why Vim was acting out of character, then...? Because he himself had been the one to invite, and allow, Ronaldo to join the Society?

Made sense, in a way.

My tail floated a bit, and I watched it float near the surface of the bathwater for a moment. I was enjoying the warm water, but it was a tad too clear. I could see... well, everything, right below the surface. Typically that wasn't a problem for me, but I had a couple bruises on my thighs from the fight with the monarch. They were rather visible. Stark reminders that I was still... well...

"Well it is of no matter... There's no saying that Less's children will be completely human, after all. She's very thick in the blood, her first generation might retain most of it if we're lucky," he said as he reached up and grabbed the towel on his face. He pulled it off, sighing as he dropped it into the bath near his lap.

I watched the way the towel floated on the surface for a moment, and then sunk. "So much for your bold talk of stepping down next winter," I teased.

Vim side-glanced me, and I smirked at him. "And so? How was your day?" he asked, changing topics.

I allowed it, since I was in a good mood. "I spent time with Mono and Tundra, as you know. Then Liina and Jasna... and then Brandy for a bit, before you came back and begged me to bathe with you," I said. I'd planned to spend more time with Brandy but she had ran off in excitement after getting a report from Lawrence. Something to do with some investment they had made.

"Begged," he noted, and I ignored him. He hadn't. I had. I had convinced him thanks to his decision to leave in a few days, since it'd likely be... well... a long time, possibly, before we'd have a chance to bathe together again like this. Telmik had baths big enough to do this, but he didn't plan to linger there long if at all. And then we'd head north, to where we'd be building a new location... which meant there was no telling when we'd get this kind of opportunity again.

My plan was to get him to bathe with me every night we were here. Though if I'd get more than tonight was unlikely. Vim indulged me, and seemed to enjoy doing so, but he was also... well... Vim. It was a little wrong of me, I felt, to be doing this... when I should be spending as much time as I could with everyone else, but...

It was only right and fair that I indulged a little in my own love wasn't it? Surely?

Vim studied the water for a moment, looking lazy as he did. I could tell he wasn't actually looking at anything, and was just lost in his thoughts, but it made me want to tease him. So I did. I sent my tail out over his lap, causing him to blink as it came into his view.

"You ever get bit on the tail, Renn?" he then asked.

"Bit...?" I asked. My tail returned to my area of the bath, since I was now focused on his question.

"Like from a fish or something? While in a river or anything?" he asked as he pointed at it.

Oh. He meant, because of the way it twitched and whatnot. It did kind of squirm in a way that would attract a fish... "Not that I'm aware of. I've felt fish brush up against it often, but I don't think any of have actually nipped at it," I said as I went through my memories. As I did, I kind of regretted it. Most of the times I'd been so submerged in water, with fish in it, were during moments of... well... unhappiness. Either because I was hurt, or something like it. Either hurt or starving.

"Maybe it's too big," he wondered.

"It is a little puffy, isn't it? The rest of my family had thinner tails, though they were big they weren't as poofy," I said as I reached out to grab it. I dunked the end of it under the water, and squished it a bit until all of the fur on it went flat as possible. "Kind of like this," I said as I showed him. It wasn't too much different than from what my tail was usually like, but it was still a noticeable difference.

He nodded. "Typically jaguars have shorter, fatter, tails compared to other big cats... but that can all be reasoned by whatever god made you. Could have been made by an eccentric, like Stance," he said.

My tail twitched a bit in my grip, and I went ahead and lifted it to my face. I had it brush against my face for a moment, wetting it and covering me, as I stared at him.

"Could you... elaborate on that a bit, Vim?" I asked.

"How so?"

"You've... kind of mentioned that before. A long time ago. That we were all made by gods," I said as I pointed the end of my tail at him.

He nodded and frowned. "Yeah...? Isn't that something pretty understood? Even your silly faiths believe in that," he said.

"Yes, but... you've also made it clear they're not real gods, right? If they're not real, how did they make us?" I asked.

"By making your ancestors. Monarchs, Renn. You're all descended from monarchs," he said, and then yawned.

I watched his yawn with interest, since it was something rare. Especially for him. "You're feeling tired again?" I asked worriedly. Hadn't he been feeling better lately...?

"Suddenly... I think it's this place. We've been doing a lot of stuff, but at the same time I feel like I'm just spinning my wheels. I'm glad we're finally leaving soon," he said as he reached up to wipe his face. This time he did so without the little towel.

Glancing around for the thing, I found it on his thigh. I reached over to grab it, making sure not to touch Vim as I did.

Lifting the towel, which was now hot again thanks to having been submerged for so long... I went ahead and placed it over my face as he had done. I had to lean back a bit, tilting my head, to keep it on... but quickly realized this was rather amazing.

This felt great! It was soothing, and I liked how it felt to try and breathe through the wet towel... and especially more so, I liked how it smelled like him.

Vim chuckled at me as I left the towel on my face for a moment. "How were we born from monarchs, though, Vim? Just naturally? Slowly gaining human traits over time?" I asked after a moment, through the towel.

"Yes. Kind of like how Bray's children are all ending up normal wolves. Either that happens, or you happen. Eventually all monarch genetic lines revert back to their sources, their normal variants. Typically after hearts stop forming and whatnot," he explained.

I huffed a little at his words, though not because of their meaning. Instead I huffed over the fact that I could hear him so clearly, and well... thanks to the fact that the towel was not covering my ears at all. I wonder what it'd feel like if my whole head was covered like this? It was too bad the towel too small to do such a thing with... and although I had bigger towels nearby, they were for us to dry off not to be wasted by testing here and now.

I'll make sure to grab an extra later, just to try it.

"Then... are you saying humans are the originals? I thought we used to outnumber them, back in the day?" I asked. Even he had said such a thing before.

He chuckled at me, and my ears twitched since I heard the truth in his laugh. He wasn't laughing at my question, but me myself. I must look silly with the thing on my face. "You had. In fact there used to be no humans at all."

That... that made no sense. I reached up and took the towel off my face. "So... humans are from us, our descendants, yet they're the originals?" I asked.

"Why's that odd to you?" he asked.

"The idea of something being an original means it's the source. The beginning... right? How can the beginning come after us, who are supposedly not the first?" I asked.

"What's a monarch, Renn?" he asked.

I blinked at that. "A... creature created by a god...? For whatever reason they make them for...?"

He nodded. "And they're made with intent. A god doesn't snap their fingers," he snapped his fingers, underwater, which made a really weird sound and made my ears twitch. "And just hope and wish for the best. They create with purpose. They can not only choose the type of creature they make, they can alter its very existence. Empower it, to whatever length they wish to."

This story has been taken without authorization. Report any sightings.

"Okay... how does that explain what I'm asking about though?" I asked as I stared at his hand underwater, resting on his knee. There were still bubbles swirling around his hand, from his earlier snap.

"What's a god look like, Renn?"

Looking away from his hand, I shook my head. "I don't know, Vim. I've never seen one."

He frowned at me, and then nodded slowly. "I... suppose you're right. Sorry. They're human, Renn. In shape and form, at least," he said.

"Huh..." I nodded back, and wasn't sure if I should be shocked or not. I mean... I honestly never really considered what I thought a god had looked like. Though maybe all this time I had thought them human in appearance, as he said, thanks to he himself.

Vim's mother. Her statue, under Telmik. She had looked rather human, if not completely so.

So maybe I had always assumed all gods had, since... well...

He then sighed. "My personal assumption is deep down, unconsciously, every god who made a monarch left a small piece of themselves in each creation. A piece that, although tiny, allowed humans and human forms to appear down the generational lines of their creations. It's just a theory, but it's worked for me all this time at least," Vim explained.

A theory... "Why is it you seem to know so much, yet sometimes act as if you know nothing about them?" I asked him.

Vim shifted a little, arching a leg as he did. As if to hide a certain part of his body from me. I knew though he had just done it because I had made him uncomfortable, though I'd not really meant to.

"I'm trying my best here, Renn. I really am," he said gently.

I sat up a little, as I realized what he meant. He had just apologized... because he had not told me the whole truth. Or at least, not enough of it.

"Okay... sorry. I didn't mean it that way, Vim... I'm just..." I hesitated as I wondered what to say. He was indeed doing his best. I couldn't imagine Vim so readily talking about this kind of topic, and answering such questions, so readily even just a few months ago. Let alone years ago. So of course I admitted he was doing more than before, but...

"I'm not offended. Or well, I am. But I'm offended over myself, not you. If my father knew how many secrets I kept from you he'd have been so ashamed of me he would have wept. Wept as he buried me, that is," Vim said.

A little glad to hear his father had been the kind to think such a thing, I went ahead and took the opportunity to ask about him. "Did he not keep secrets from your mother?"

"Not a one. But I mean... she could read his mind, so it wasn't like he had much a choice," Vim said with a small grin.

My toes clenched a little, and I hoped Vim hadn't noticed them do so. Had he just made a small joke, or had he been serious...? It could have been interpreted either way. Either as a typical husband and wife trope, or him alluding to their special abilities.

"As I've said before, Vim... I'm okay waiting. It makes me happy that you're trying, and for me that's enough," I said gently, unsure if I should press him more on his father or not. I wanted to ask so many things about him, and of course his mother, but... I worried about ruining the moment if I did.

We were bathing. Alone. This moment was special. The kind that warmed my heart in ways this hot water never could. I loved these private little talks and moments we had, and didn't want to risk them. If I ruined the moment it'd make me want to cry, and then Vim would just feel even worse... and the moment would get even more awkward as he tried to apologize...

He nodded gently as he sat up, splashing some water. My heart nearly jumped into my throat, half expecting him to just stand up and leave, but instead he turned a little as to face me more directly. "We're a pair, you know," he said gently.

I sat up too, and also turned to face him. I felt a little awkward as I did, since sitting like that fully revealed my upper body, but I knew better than to think this moment would be ruined by such a thing. Vim wasn't even looking anywhere, he was focused on my eyes.

"Well... we have been married for a while now, haven't we?" I said, a little happy to say so.

"Actually, no. We've not been."

I frowned at that, and was about to protest, until he reached over and grabbed my left hand.

Watching him intently, I stopped trying to keep my heart under control as it thumped wildly as he lifted my hand up. Since it'd just been underwater, it dripped as he carefully held it up between us, holding it in a way that even I recognized.

Was... was he about to propose to me? Here? Naked in the bath?

"I've been meaning to bring this up for a bit now... And honestly the fact it took this long is kind of sad, even for me," Vim said as he held my gaze.

I gulped as I waited.

"I'll let you choose. Whatever style or ceremony you want. That of the pagans, the Church of Songs, or whatever your northern peoples use. Just... let me know, okay?"

I squirmed as I bit back a groan. "Vim...!" I whispered.

"What? I'm talking about a wedding," he said defensively.

"I can tell!" I said, raising my voice. I mean, that basically was a way of proposing... but I had somewhat expected it to go differently! In that book I'd read, the Queen's Lament, written by one of our members she had gotten her hand kissed whenever she had been proposed to!

"You're upset with me. Why?" Vim asked, genuinely sounding and looking concerned. If he didn't look so bothered I'd have flung his hand away myself.

"I was expecting you to kiss me, or something," I said as I looked away from him, a little ashamed to admit it so openly. I mean, it was the truth, but it still made me feel ridiculous.

Here he was, trying his best, and being a genuinely good man... and I was expecting more from him. I was so selfish.

"Ah. I was going to do that in a second. After I asked if you wanted a ring, or a necklace," he said.

"Necklace...?" I asked as I looked back at him.

"Or earrings. Typically we both wear one of the set, but well... no matter what material I make mine out of it'll get lost or broken if on me. So hopefully you'll forgive me for not wearing one myself, unless you're okay with me always having to make a new set... which would work I guess," Vim then began to ramble a little, in a way that told me he had been pondering this for a long time. In fact...

"You'd be okay with that?" I asked.

"I would. But I'd understand if you wouldn't be. You don't even like me ruining the clothes I wear, let alone something special like a wedding ring or something, so I'd understand," Vim said with a nod.

I smiled at him, and grabbed his hand a little firmer. "I love you, Vim."

"Mhm. Yes. But that's not what we're talking about right now, is it?"

"No, but it's just as important. I'd like rings. A necklace will get in the way of me taking clothes off and stuff, and my hair is so unruly sometimes that any earrings I have will just get hidden half the time. So a ring, please," I said, deciding quickly.

Rather, I hadn't needed to decide. I had made the decision a long time ago, though I'd never spoken about it with him. I had simply hoped.

"Rings. So you want me to wear one too? You okay with me occasionally losing or breaking it?" he asked.

I nodded. "As long as you promptly replace it. I mean... wouldn't anything eventually wear down and break anyway? Considering how long we live?" I asked. Like my little box of nail supplies. The one Vim had gotten for me years ago in Telmik. It was already starting to wear down and break and most of its contents had been replaced several times over already from use and time. So such a thing was just... normal. To be expected.

"You'd be surprised..." Vim mumbled as he then tugged on my hand. Before I knew it my hand was up near his face, and he was kissing it.

My tail squirmed so much it splashed as I grinned happily as his lips left my hand. "Are you giving me permission to hold it soon then?" I asked happily.

"Figured you could do it while we're up north. You'll have a bunch of your friends nearby, and will be close to what you consider home. We'll likely be up there for some time. Or well, you will be. My plan is to let you stay up there with everyone, where you'll be safe, and I'll run around handling my last few requests before I step down next winter," Vim said.

This happy moment became a sad one. "Vim..." I whispered.

"What? I've made my decision, Renn. I'm not one to change my mind. And I'd think you'd not want me to be the kind to do so, considering," he said as he lifted the hand he still held, as if to imply our relationship with it.

"Well... no. I actually find myself very attracted to your sense of duty, or whatever you'd like to call it. But still, Vim... haven't you realized it?" I asked.

"Realized what?"

I gestured with my hand, the one he still held, all around us. "The Society. It's growing. Grown? There are so many more people now. People who need you. Look at Glasses, Vim. That poor woman would have had to suffer her limp leg if not for you," I said. I had seen her before leaving the new cathedral earlier; she had been nearly jogging around in excitement. Vim's little invention seemed to be working just perfectly for her.

She was a little odd, as many of our people were. But all things considered, especially for a saint, Glasses was one of our more normal members in my opinion. I actually really liked how much she reminded me of Rapti, she had that same... comfortable aura to her. A person who was genuine, easy going, yet quick to blush if you weren't careful.

"That's not a reasonable argument, Renn. Because anyone could use that against me. Any person, anything, anywhere, could argue they need my help," Vim said.

I flinched, since I knew he was right. If we used that argument in full, then he could argue it for our enemies too. Since if all it took to keep him in line was that someone needed his help, well... "Still, Vim, you get my point don't you? Think of all the chaos that will come with all the new members. Without you there to help them through it? And you yourself are worried that monarchs are becoming more frequent...? And a god shows back up? If you're not here to deal with those things, who will?" I asked.

"I'll always handle monarchs and gods. That's a vow I made long before the Society, Renn. So that too can't be used against me here in this moment."

Wanting to growl at him, I instead bit my cheek and shook my head. "Your original intention of leaving the Society was because of the vote. Because you felt staying in your position would just lead to more chaos and disaster. That stepping down was the lesser of evils. But now that isn't the case is it? Since Light has shown she's not actively scheming against you? That she plans to even help you during the vote? Is your decision not then based off false pretense?" I asked.

"Don't start talking like her, Renn. That will just make me even more resolute," he warned.

I flinched, but nodded. "Sorry. But I mean what I'd said, Vim. Light has schemes, I'll not deny that. She has more than I can even imagine. But at the same time neither you nor I can say those schemes are actually against us, are they? Really?" I asked.

Vim held my gaze for a moment and then sighed. "No... I can't say they are," he admitted.

"Then...?"

Vim for a moment didn't answer, and then lowered his hand... bringing my own with it, as they both plopped into the water a little lifelessly. "I had been hoping to save this conversation for later. This moment had meant to be a good one, what with the talk of the wedding and whatnot," he said gently.

My chest started to hurt, as if I'd just been stabbed thru. "Sorry... I'm..." I hesitated, as I felt my eyes start to grow watery. He was right...! The moment had just been so lovely, and I had just ruined it! And I

had just moments ago been thinking about how I didn't want to ruin this lovely atmosphere, yet I went and did it anyway!

"You're right, of course. I know, Renn. My decision to step down is now no longer a valid one, since all the chaos and disillusion will be handled by Light in one form or another. And as such, my choice of stepping down to avoid drama is no longer justified," Vim then said.

Blinking some tears out, I sniffed as I looked at him. He was softly smiling at me, likely because he found my emotional self to be adorable. "I was very happy about the wedding and rings, Vim," I told him.

He smirked and nodded. "I'm glad. You'll be even happier once they both happen, too. By the way later on let me measure your finger okay? I don't want to wing it, considering how important it is," he said.

"Oh...? Okay." I wonder how one measured for a ring? And even more importantly, would it bother me to wear one? I'd never worn jewelry before, hopefully it didn't.

"We'll... talk more about this, okay? I still feel stepping down is the right thing to do. At least, in part. But... I'll admit that just might be my own emotions getting the better of me," he said as he squirmed a little.

Was the water hot again all of a sudden, or was it just me?

"I'd rather you didn't, Vim. In all truth. Even the people I don't know what to think of yet, like Mono and Tundra, or Less and the rest... though they may end up being people I disagree with, or don't like, I still feel like they deserve to be protected. They still deserve to live under your protection, Vim, even if they disagree with us," I said.

He smiled and nodded. "I agree, Renn. I really do. But it's not just about our likes and wants. As I've said, all things come to an end. Everything does."

"Even you?"

He blinked... and for a tiny moment, I saw uncertainty in his eyes. It faded as quickly as it came, as he then smiled at me.

"Yes, Renn. Even me."

I didn't believe that. But I knew better than to voice such a thought here and now.

Especially since he was leaning in for a kiss, finally.

Chapter 549 Vim – The Protector's Distractions

Placing the box down, I brushed my hands off as I stepped out of the small storage room.

The room didn't have a door, so I didn't need to bother closing one. I headed down the hall, and wondered what I should do now.

I'd spent the last few hours helping Gerald out with a few things, stuff considering those kids he had adopted somehow. He could have gotten other employees, or even other members, to help him but I think he's still conscious over the fact he had unintentionally brought in a bunch of human children into the Society without meaning to.

Not that I cared much. I preferred having something to do, even if just something monotonous as bringing supplies in or helping set up a new set of apartments for them. But I wasn't sure yet what to think of the kids, though honestly I knew better than to really expect anything from them. Like the young girl I'd recommended, Mistle, they were things that either worked out or didn't. And even when they did, at best they only existed inside the Society for a few generations. Like that one woman who had daughters Sing and Song...

Wait, had Renn met them yet...? I probably should make sure she has before we leave...

In fact that might be something worth doing right now. I've dealt with everything asked of me; even the issue with the Summit was now handled. So all in all it was finally time for me to leave. Or at least, it was the second chance I had to leave. If I dawdled too long, like before, more requests would arrive before I got the chance to do so.

Should we just leave tomorrow then...? Lilly would like that. The blasted owl had refused to head back west without us. Or well, without Renn. Renn had interpreted it as Lilly's love and compassion, but I had seen through it and saw the truth.

Lilly was afraid of going home alone without Renn. She was hoping, betting, on Renn to help salvage her relationship with her children. At least, the ones who she was on the outs with. Like Crown and the traveling siblings, Trunk and Seed. I also think Lilly was worried about returning home with Lellip in tow, in a way.

Honestly I had a lot of praise for the owl. I couldn't have imagined her to ever allow such a thing before. Inviting others into her family? Allowing a whole location to be built not far from her nest? Asking someone else for help concerning her own family problems...? Each one was so non-standard for Lilly that it almost made me wonder if something was wrong with her. As if she was sick and dying or something. But the reality was, Lilly was likely just desperate. Desperate enough to force her own maturity.

But I'd not complain. Not only was I glad that Lilly had finally matured, I was also glad it was Renn that such maturity was centered around. Out of anyone in this world for Lilly to rely on for such things... well... I couldn't think of anyone more suitable than Renn.

Where was she anyway...?

I paused in the middle of one of the main hallways, where it connected and diverted to all the different departments in the Animalia Guild. I spent a moment just... listening, and looking. No one was near me, but down the halls in nearly every direction I could see and hear activity. People walking around, and talking. Working hard at whatever they were doing.

In a few hours the building would shut down, and grow quiet. Which usually meant the inner housing area got loud, if but for a short time as they all made dinner and ate together.

I wasn't sure if anyone had noticed yet, but this place was growing livelier. And not just because it had gotten busier thanks to all the new business ventures they've begun. Magdalena either left to visit her new romance, or he came over here. Less and Tundra were often here, though for different reasons. And I'd begun to notice occasionally Less brought others with her, not just the excited wolf. Today I had noticed three familiar robed individuals walking around, though hadn't been able to place names to their faces.

It made me wonder if in time, maybe sooner rather than later, this place would become obsolete. Like at Telmik, would this company eventually just merge with the cathedral? Or would they continue to remain two separate locations...? If Brandy and Gerald had their way, they'd remain separated, but I knew better than to think they had much say in it. Especially as many members here started getting involved with those of Light's group, like how Magda had. Though maybe it didn't matter if they remained separated. This place was big enough that well over a hundred people could live here comfortably, as it had originally been back in the day.

A part of me should be happy... that the Society was getting lively again. But I couldn't help but fear for the worst.

So many new members meant there'd be a lot of opportunities for discord. There'd be issues with relocation, and setting up new homes. There will be small fights and discord amongst the members as they settled, as they all learned who they could live with and who they couldn't... not to mention the members who would inevitably cause issues with the humans, too.

I sighed, since all it did was make me think of the first few decades, back when I had first joined the Society. Half of my time had been running around handling such disputes and issues more than anything else.

Honestly I wasn't looking forward to having to deal with any of that again, even if it was actually a positive thing. My having such tasks to handle meant the Society was once again growing, once again being active and healthy. That wasn't a negative thing, and I shouldn't be upset over it.

Yet here I was. So annoyed over it that even after only a few weeks I wanted to run away from it all.

Really. Where was my adorable wife...? I needed her to distract me from my thoughts, before I actually thought something I'd regret later.

Oddly I couldn't find her. I couldn't sense her either.

Maybe she had left the building. To either go visit Lilly, or her human friends? Or maybe she had gone to the new cathedral... or even just out to walk around, or go shopping or something. We did plan on leaving soon, maybe she had gone to get supplies?

"Hey Vim!" Pierre and I walked past one another, but he seemed busy so I only nodded in greeting as we did. Afterwards, while walking around Gerald's office area, I noticed several of our members. Most were getting ready to end their day, either by tidying up their work areas or shutting the entrances to the building as to keep new customers out.

Yes. She was likely not here. Not only could I not sense her, I had also not seen Merit in some time too. Which meant she was likely out and about with her.

Which was fine... I guess...

Slowing a little, I reached up to rub my chin. I did it as if to hide a small smirk, though I had no real reason to do so.

I was upset. That she was busy. Too busy for me. When had I become so greedy, I wonder?

"Vim."

Turning around, I nodded at Less who was carrying a small basket. The wicker basket didn't have a smell coming from it, so I figured it wasn't full of food. "Less," I greeted the badger, and glanced around for her noisy companion. Tundra wasn't here, it seemed.

"Tundra's with your wife and Merit. The girl has finally understood she's not welcomed here, and so took it upon herself to return before nightfall," Less said, noticing my thoughts.

"Had something happened?" I asked.

Less gave me a soft smile. "She tried to make friends with a few of those here... it didn't go well. The girl has a lot of pride in her strength, but is far weaker of heart than she realizes. It's one of the reasons Light has high hopes for her," Less explained.

Ah. She must have scared someone then. Less would have told me, or someone else would have, had it been too big a deal. I wonder who it had been? "She's just young," I said simply.

Less scoffed at that, and shifted the basket she held. "Light's back, by the way. I don't know if she'll come back here tonight or not, having so much to do at the cathedral, but yeah..." Less said.

My eyes narrowed as I realized what that meant. Tundra had left with Renn and Merit, likely because Renn had gone to see Light. Just great. "So why are you still here?" I asked. Less wasn't just one of Light's bodyguards; she was one of her closest confidants.

"To get these," Less said simply as she lifted the basket a little.

I had no idea what was inside the basket, but I didn't need to. For all I knew it was just clothes or something. "I see. Well, when you see my wife remind her we'll be leaving in the morning so not to stay up all night," I said.

Less smirked at that. "I'd laugh and tease you over treating her like a child, but I now know how serious such a warning is. She really would stay up all night talking, wouldn't she?"

I nodded and sighed. "Regrettably."

"Well, I'll let her know if I see her. I have a few stops to make before I go back, so I might miss her."

You might be reading a stolen copy. Visit Royal Road for the authentic version.

Stops...? This late in the day? Wonder what she needed to do. I didn't ask though, as to not get involved. "Hm. I suppose I should ask, since we may not see one another again for a while. Anything you need of me? Or do you know if anyone else does?" I asked. She would be a good one to ask, since she was considered one of the elders of Light's group.

Less frowned as she thought about it for a moment, and then finally shook her head. "I don't believe so...? I'd ask Light though, she'd know better."

I wanted to groan at that. That had been why I had asked her, so that I could possibly avoid having to ask Light instead. I kept such a thing to myself as I nodded. "Hm..."

The badger studied me for a moment, and then smiled. "You're still the same, Vim. Even after all these years."

"You mean my aversion to saints...?" I asked.

She nodded.

"Well, it's a habit I've had for longer than you know. I doubt I'll ever be able to shake it," I said with a shrug.

She chuckled at that. "And hopefully you never do. It's kind of comforting to know even time can't change some things."

Was it? "Sadly I feel like I've been changing a lot lately," I said. I wasn't going to tell her why I thought so, since the last thing I'd noticed was my greediness concerning Renn's presence. Not only was that kind of private... it wasn't something I wanted to readily admit aloud. There were many members in the Society, even here, who would grow concerned if they thought I was blatantly prioritizing Renn over them. Even if it was somewhat expected, what with her being my wife, it wasn't something that should be admitted aloud.

"I'd disagree. You not only look the same, you seem to be acting the same. Although you're a little odd when with your wife, but that's to be expected I guess.... Oh, Ronaldo wanted me to ask you something," Less then remembered something, and glanced around real quick. Once she confirmed we

were relatively alone, she stepped a single step closer and whispered. "He'd like to know if he can rename the ship? The one you gave him?" she asked quietly.

I frowned at her, wondering for a moment why she was whispering such a question... but realized it likely wasn't the question itself she wanted to be kept secret, but the meaning behind it. "I don't see why he can't? It was his originally, anyway. Or well, his mother's. It flies under our banner, as does he, but the ship itself is his," I said.

Less nodded and hummed a little. "He seems worried to do it, all the same. Should I ask Brandy for him?"

"He's too scared to ask himself?" I asked. Ronaldo hadn't seemed that cowardly of a man.

She smiled at that. "He takes orders and whatnot Vim, but he doesn't see them as his commander. He sees you as his leader, not them."

Ah. Right... "Well, go ahead and ask Brandy. When you do, slip in that I said there was nothing wrong with it. She might throw a fit over it, but I can't see her actually doing anything about it," I said. The worst it'd do is requiring some new journals and tax documents to be made, with the new name and all. Nothing too big a deal.

Less nodded. "Thanks Vim. I don't really see the point, but it's a big deal to him I guess. Enough to bother him, at least," she said.

"Hm... How is he by the way? Or rather, how is it going? Do you plan to let Light know?" I asked.

Ronaldlo was likely what, or who, she planned to stop and see on her way back to the cathedral. I should have realized that earlier, not sure why I hadn't.

Less gave me a warm smile as she nodded. "We're fine, Vim. I plan to have him move in with me. He'll still captain his ship and all, he likes doing that, but I've asked him to leave the long ventures to Kevin for a while... for obvious reasons," Less said with a small shrug.

I nodded, and knew better than to say the reason aloud. She was pregnant, but I don't think she'd told anyone else yet. "Well... I'm happy for you. Let me know if there's anything I can do for you two," I said.

The badger seemed to soften a little as she nodded. "Thanks Vim. Really. Renn also congratulated me, and was really nice about it too. She asked me to invite you two to the wedding, but I fear I'll not be having one," she said.

"Why not?"

"I'm a nun, Vim," she said.

Well... "Yes...? But you're also getting married, aren't you?" I asked. Wasn't that what we'd talked about the other day? In fact I think she herself had used the phrase to be wed, not marriage. Plus it wasn't as if nuns couldn't get married.

"I, we, are. Yes. But I don't plan to have a ceremony. I don't like them. He's okay with it too," she said.

Huh... so she just likely wanted Light to grant them permission, nothing more. Maybe she had simply worded it that way because there was no better way to phrase it. "Well, all the same. Congratulations. Renn will likely give you a wedding present either way, though it might be some time before she gets it to you. A few years, maybe," I said.

Less giggled at that. "That's fine. I'll look forward to it. Okay, I'll be off then else I'll too late and Light will get upset with me," she said as she stepped back and away from me.

I nodded and waved her goodbye as she turned and left. She headed down the hall that led to the exit, and I sighed as I turned away and went the opposite way.

If Renn was at the new cathedral, there was no need for me to search for her anymore. Nor did I plan to go there to find her. If I went there, while Light was there, I likely would only end up getting more requests... which meant we'd not be able to leave anytime soon. So it was best if I just stayed here and waited.

I'll just walk around, I guess. Maybe I'll go make some snacks for Renn, or something. It was almost time for dinner though, which meant the kitchens would get busy...

Eventually I found myself at the bank. Or well, the hallway behind it. It was empty, being the first section of the guild that shut down and locked up. A few guards were already stationed, all sitting at a table in the center of the main hallway. It looked like they were having tea or something.

The place smelled like coins, and reminded me of Renn's recent worries over how much she cost the Society. It was a cute worry, but an unneeded one. The Society had more wealth than most nations, her

occasional expensive meal at a fancy restaurant or abundance of trinkets she purchased along our journey didn't even make a dent in the mountain of wealth it possessed.

"Hey Vim!" a happy voice made me turn and smile at Sofia. She carried a small bag of coins in her arms, likely because it was heavy, and she looked a little tired.

"Sofia. Done for the day?" I asked.

She nodded and gestured with the bag of coins. "Taking these to Brandy. I think they're fakes," she said.

"Fakes?" I asked.

She nodded again. "One of the nobles deposited them. They smell different, and feel a little off. I think they're not actually silver," she said.

Ah. "Gold is hard to fake," I said knowingly as I turned to join her down the hallway. We headed for Brandy's office, passing Lawrence's as we did. I didn't offer to take the small bag of coins, since it didn't look like it was that heavy and she seemed to be enjoying the way she was holding them. She was basically hugging the bag.

"Right? Also, I met your little human today! Mistle? She came here with a cat on her shoulder! I almost couldn't believe how well behaved it was!" Sofia said happily.

Oh...? I see. So they planned to put the young girl to work in the banks, beneath Sofia. Interesting. "It is a rather odd cat, isn't it?" I said. I could imagine that little thing just obediently following Mistle around as she worked here, staying out of everyone's way as it did.

"It's adorable, so I think I'll allow it. The girl will be fine, as well. She needs to learn how to read and write, but every human does in the beginning. I hear she's not living here but outside of the guild though?" Sofia asked as we rounded a corner.

I nodded. "Renn asked those pirates to look after her, I guess? She's worried your home is already crowded, what with the new additions," I said.

Sofia sighed but nodded. "It is a little, to be honest... but she's such a tiny thing I don't think it would have mattered. Maybe once she settles in and grows a little older she can just move in here, but oh well," Sofia said simply.

Glad that Sofia thought in such a way, I looked forward to letting Renn know that Mistle was in good hands. "Well, all the same, thank you for putting up with her. Her family had been rather brutally eaten right in front of her, so I feared she would have been traumatized but it seems she's doing fine," I said.

"Humans, especially the young ones, seem to always bounce back faster than we do. I mean, look at Tosh! Took him nearly a century it did!" Sofia said.

Well... "You're not wrong..." I mumbled as we neared the hallway to Brandy's office.

I stopped walking as Sofia turned to head down the hallway. I gave her a small nod and smile as I waved her off. "I'll go get in trouble elsewhere while you handle that," I said.

She giggled at me. "So much trouble, sure!" she teased as she nodded back and left me behind.

I watched Sofia walk for a moment, and wondered if she knew yet that Merit planned to leave. Something told me she didn't, since she hadn't said anything about it or acted odd. Sofia was really old, and thus sometimes indifferent or unaware of her immediate surroundings, but she wasn't so detached that she'd not grow emotional over her good friend leaving. At least, I didn't think she'd do so.

Maybe Merit really did plan on waiting until the place up north was built...? If so that meant it could be years before she actually left.

Renn wouldn't like that. But maybe it was for the best... So many were planning to head north with us, maybe it was for the better that they all didn't do so at the same time...

Speaking of that, when should I go get Berri and her family...? Narli's condition was still a worry, even if Stance's death had cured her of whatever had ailed her. I had promised to get them when I could. Then of course Nebi's family... they planned to at least wait and see how Lellip's love life went, but I knew better than to think it'd go bad or take time to go well. Like Less and Ronalldo, Magda and her partner, and so many more... our kind usually fell for their partners very swiftly, almost to the point it was weird.

Although Renn always brought up the fact we had not done such a thing, and used it as a way to tease me, she wasn't realizing the truth. We had fallen for one another quickly. We, or well... I, had not been willing to accept or admit it. Not until it was undeniable.

And...

My eye twitched as I realized my mind was drifting off into weird places again.

No matter.

Turning away, I sighed and decided to go find something to do. I was thinking about too many things that I shouldn't be. I needed something to distract myself.

Wasn't sure yet what I'd find to accomplish such a thing, but anything was better than nothing.

Maybe I'll go clean Renn's bathroom or something. She's been so busy lately she's kind of neglected it herself. I had noticed the other night when we'd bathed that some of her hair and fur were everywhere, from all her own baths she's taken not just the ones with me.

No one would be upset with her if we didn't, but it was still a courtesy to clean up after ourselves. Especially concerning something like that.

Plus it'd let me tease her about it later...

"Yes. Cleaning the bath," I decided happily.

It'd give me a good excuse to lure Renn into it too. If she even came back tonight, that is...

Chapter 550 Renn – A Prophecy Awoken

"Renn."

I heard myself make some noises as I rolled over.

"Renn... come now," Vim said again, gently beckoning me from my slumber.

"Vim...?" I groaned at him as I forced an eye open. I noticed the slightly dark room first, and then finally saw him. He was leaning over me, gently shaking my shoulder.

"Sorry Renn. I tried to ask her to wait until morning, but she's being persistent," Vim said.

"Why don't I get an apology...?" Merit grumbled.

I blinked and woke up the rest of the way as I slowly lifted my head and turned to look for my friend. It was a little weird to hear her voice right now, since I'd fallen asleep with Vim and not her. For a moment I couldn't find her. Had I misheard? Maybe I was still dreaming...?

Wait. There she was. Her silver-white hair was rather noticeable even in the early morning darkness. She was standing over by the door.

Vim sighed as he gave my shoulder a very tiny squeeze. "Wake up. Splash some water on your face. Get dressed. Light and I will be downstairs near the main kitchen, waiting for you," he said as he released me and stepped away from the bed.

I yawned as I sat up, rubbing my eyes as I listened to Vim leave the room. Merit huffed at him as he did, as if annoyed at him.

"Merit...? What's going on?" I asked. I was awake now, but I felt the warm bed around me trying to lure me back into that happy slumber I'd just been in. I had been dreaming about a small river, one that Vim and I had been swimming in... I had been trying to drown him for some reason, and had been enjoying it.

"Light had a prophecy. One she feels needs to be shared immediately," Merit said, sounding annoyed.

I wanted to groan at that. "Again...?" I asked as I went to dig myself out of the heavy blankets.

Merit watched me leave the bed and head for the basin nearby. Vim must have filled it before trying to wake me, since it was full of warm water. The type that made it easy and comfortable to splash myself with.

"It's typical of saints, Renn. You should know by now. Anyway, it's one not important enough to tell Vim all the whole details, but it's still important enough to ruin our beauty sleep. Figure that one out," Merit said with voice seething with annoyance.

"Well... I had agreed to be the one to handle such things for Vim," I admitted. I had told Light that I was willing to hear any and all prophecies, and then relay them in a way to Vim that kept everyone happy. And safe.

"Regret it already, will you?" Merit asked of me as I went to get dressed.

"Mhm... maybe I will after this," I admitted as I slipped on some pants. I glanced at Merit as I did, and stopped myself from yawning again. "Should I dress to leave, or...?"

"I think you can just dress for here, for now. If it was something that pressing she would have just told one of us, or Vim, I think," she said.

I nodded, glad to hear it. I didn't need to hide my ears and tail, then.

Stretching after I finished dressing, I yawned a bit as Merit studied me.

"You were in rather deep sleep, Renn... were you having a good dream?" Merit asked.

I nodded as I finished yawning. "I was drowning Vim in a river," I said. I didn't add that I was doing so playfully, that we had been having fun, not actually fighting.

Merit laughed. I smiled happily as I watched, and listened, to my friend actually laugh with all her might. It was a rare thing to hear from her. "A delightful dream!" she said once she finished.

"It was!" I agreed as Merit opened the door, and we both stepped out of the room.

She giggled, but did so lightly, as we headed down the hallway towards the stairs. It was early in the morning, so neither of us made much noise as we headed downstairs to the ground floor. We found Light, and Vim, in one of the small lounging areas near the main kitchen. Light was dressed in her typical robe, sitting in a large and comfortable looking chair, but Less who was near a table near the wall gathering up a plate of food and drinks wore a thinner nightgown instead of a robe. It was the first time I'd seen her wearing something like it, and oddly found it suited her.

"Alright then," Vim said with a nod as I stepped into the room. He stepped around one of the couches and left, with only a small glance to me. I was going to glare at him, and ask what he was doing, but I knew better.

We were about to talk of prophecies. Of course he'd leave.

I sighed at him all the same, and glanced to Light as I went to sit down across from her in one of the couches. The one that Vim had just walked around. "How was your trip back, Light?" I asked as I did.

Light's eye grew a little brighter as she snickered and nodded. "It was quiet. Though wet," she said.

Right... it had stormed a bit, hadn't it?

Merit appeared next to me, climbing up onto the couch next to me with a huff. I smirked at my friend who took her seat right next to me as Less walked over and handed Light a cup that had some steam coming from it.

"Tea, Renn? Merit?" Less asked us.

"I'd take a cup if you'd be so kind," I said. I'd just woken, and somehow I knew I'd likely need something to wash down some words here in a moment.

"I'm fine," Merit said simply.

Less nodded and stepped back to the table she'd just been at. She picked me up a cup, and after handing it to me she went ahead and sat down in her own chair a little ways from us. As she did, she yawned rather mightily.

I wonder if she'd been with Ronaldo? Or did she neglect him for Light, now that she was back...?

"Sorry to wake you, Renn. But I'm glad for your presence. This one would be a tad hard to explain to Vim without angering him, no matter how I tried to slice and dice it," Light then said after she took a small sip of her tea.

I hummed at that as I held my warm up. I didn't take a drink from it yet as I nodded. "It's fine, I suppose. I'm sure it's important," I said.

Light gave me a sad smile as she nodded. "It is. One of the ships on the way here will be sunk. By what I can only think is a monarch," she said.

I sat up a little straighter, as did Merit. "One of our ships...? You mean like Ronaldo's?" I asked as I glanced at Less, and wondered why she didn't seem too worried. Maybe she figured Vim would handle it or something?

"Ah. No. I meant a ship from the other world. One of the groups is coming back, from the other continent," Light said quickly, waving her hand gently at me and my misunderstanding.

This story originates from Royal Road. Ensure the author gets the support they deserve by reading it there.

Oh...

Oh!

"You're kidding!" I said, a little loudly.

That'd be terrible! From what I had gathered, they had come over on a rather large ship. All five hundred of them had been on the same one. That meant if one of those same ships was to be sunk...

"Regrettably, no. In fact this isn't just any ship either, but the one that has the most women and children upon it," Light said.

Merit groaned as my tail squirmed. "Why... why can't we just tell Vim this? This seems like one of those instances that fits his rules, no? A life and death scenario? Especially with a monarch and all?" I asked.

"If anything you could just tell him one of the ships is danger and set him loose. He'd sense and find the monarch well enough," Merit added with a nod.

Light sighed and nodded. "Usually, yes. However there's a problem. One I can't understand," she said.

"Hm?"

"They're not meant to be arriving yet. They're supposed to wait until we send word, or five years from now if they don't hear from us. To give us time to prepare for their arrival. We're not ready yet for them," Light said.

I shifted a little, and wanted to ask why and how that meant Vim couldn't be told of this prophecy. But knew better than to ask, since I knew she was about to continue her explanation. She did so after taking another drink of her tea, though.

"To make matters worse, they're not only arriving before their set time... I actually saw Vim in the prophecy. Meaning he will indeed go and handle it, which means all will be well," Light said.

I frowned at that. "Huh...? So you saw Vim already dealing with it?" I asked.

She nodded.

"Then..." I was about to ask why we were even having this conversation, but Merit chuckled and gently nudged me with her elbow.

"She's not telling you the full story. She saw something else, something that makes her unable to tell Vim of what she saw," Merit said.

Glancing at my friend, and her knowing smirk, I looked back at Light and found her begrudgingly nodding. "Yes. If I inform Vim, maybe even of something just as simple as the event itself, it could result in the ship being lost. Over six hundred souls are on that ship. I will not risk it, not if I don't have to," Light said.

For a moment I pondered that, and realized what they meant. They were basically saying that if they told Vim of the prophecy, there was a chance something bad could happen. And that very something was likely what she had seen. Light had not just seen the monarch sink the ship, but had witnessed Vim there as well. Yet it still had sunk...

"So... Vim was already there, and it sunk anyway. Is what you're saying," I said carefully.

She nodded.

"So we need to get Vim there, and change that future. Without causing it to happen inadvertently," Merit said knowingly.

Light frowned but nodded again.

Gulping, I realized my mouth was dry so I went ahead and took a drink of my tea. It was still warm, but I couldn't taste it. My mind was focused on other things, things more important than tea.

"What I ask of you Renn, is to find a way to get Vim there. To get to the ship, before the monarch sinks it, and do so in a way that keeps him from..." Light then flinched, as if something had just bit her on her tongue.

"Light?" I asked, wondering what was wrong.

"She almost just admitted it. Vim sinks it, does he?" Merit asked.

It was my turn to flinch as I realized that was likely it.

"He doesn't. No. But there's no denying it happens while he's there. I'm... honestly not sure how it happens. It could just be an attack from the monarch itself, I'm not sure, but during the middle of the event the ship sinks. Rather spectacularly," Light said.

That wasn't good... "So... wouldn't it be best if we just avoided that scenario completely? Why not just send them word, or warning? Have them wait a year or something as to avoid it completely? Maybe even have Vim hunt the monarch first? Before it has a chance to do anything?" I asked. Wasn't that a better method?

Light shook her head, but it was Merit who spoke. "It's normally far worse to avoid fate in that way, Renn. Trust me. My kingdom can speak for that," Merit said with a stiff voice.

Glancing at my friend, and seeing her serious expression, I decided to take her word for it. Especially since Vim had said similar before. He had mentioned before that the only reason he dared doing such things, was because he was capable of surviving the repercussions. Although he and I had never really spoken in depth over such things, for obvious reasons, I knew better than to take his small little comments heedlessly. "So... we need to avoid this outcome, while also allowing the ship and all aboard it to risk their lives by encountering a monarch," I said.

"Yes. Thus my hope for you to fulfill your role as his wife, his partner. I'd like you to be the one to send him to the west coast, to interfere with the monarch's attack, and to do so in a way that is different than the future I foresaw," Light said.

Gosh... and how was I supposed to do that, exactly...?

"Is this why you knew they'd be here still? That you'd meet them before they left...? Why not tell Renn earlier, in case Vim made them leave before you could warn them?" Merit asked as I tried to grasp the new task before me.

"I had the prophecy last night, on the way back here. The reason I knew we'd see each other before they left is because I foresaw Renn teasing Less about something, as she picked up her bags and Vim ushered her out the door. Basically I foresaw something that should happen here in a few hours," Light said with a small gesture to Less.

Less perked up at being mentioned, and she glanced at me worriedly as I smiled. "I likely teased you over Ronaldo," I said.

"Renn!" Less groaned, and I frowned at the way she had done so. Why did she look like I had just slapped her...?

"Oh my! Is that the sailor's name? That one? Really?" Light perked up too, for a different reason as she hurriedly looked over at Less.

Less groaned some more and covered her face, and I realized I'd just ousted her and her relationship.

Oops. "Sorry..." I apologized as Merit chuckled.

Light giggled at Less's obvious embarrassment. "I've known for a long time, Less. You'd think you'd know that by now," Light said. Light had indeed told me of Less's romance, but she hadn't known his name. Since she had never met him before.

"Knowing it isn't the same as experiencing it!" Less complained as she wiggled in her chair.

"I agree there," I said with a hearty nod.

"I look forward to meeting him, Less. In fact I hope to do so today... though let me have a nap beforehand, please," Light said, and then yawned.

Smirking at that, and the way Less sheepishly smiled and nodded, I wondered if that meant Light hadn't slept at all yet. Odds are she hadn't, since this was that important.

And it was important. It really was. A ship full of our people were in danger... and most of them were women and children...? Yes. Important indeed...

Important enough that I probably shouldn't just be sitting here and giggling, at least.

"So... we're to head to the coast, are we? Where to exactly?" I asked Light, as to get back on topic.

Light nodded as she lifted her cup, preparing to take a drink. "Please. Vim will know the ship; it'll have our banner upon its sails. Its intended landfall is at a small cove not far south from Vorli. A few of our members should already be there, preparing for the ship's arrival. Vim should be able to calculate the ship's path, knowing its port of sail from there," Light said, then took a drink.

"Then we'll leave today. Do you know the exact day it will happen...?" I asked. We were a couple weeks from the western coast, even if we headed straight there without any stops. I didn't know where this Vorli was, but I assumed it was not far from where Kaley lived. It had to be south of her, since I knew most if not all of the port cities north of Nevi. I also couldn't imagine them docking too much farther from the Nation of the Blind than that. If this supposed monarch attack was to happen soon, I might not be able to accompany him the whole way. He might need to rush there.

Light slowly shook her head. "The only reason I know it's happening now, and not later as it should, is thanks to a... certain reason I can't explain right now. I can't say it will happen in the next few days, but I can for sure say it will happen in the next month or two at the latest," Light said.

Oh...? I wonder how she came to that conclusion... maybe something she had seen, or heard, during the prophecy...? Maybe someone on the ship, their presence or appearance, had helped her ascertain such a thing. The fact she wasn't bring it up here and now was likely for good reason, so I knew better than to press it.

"Then we should leave as soon as possible, and likely let Vim travel ahead on his own. I'd not risk dawdling, unless you foresaw Renn there as well," Merit said.

Glancing at Merit, since I'd noticed something she'd just said, Light cleared her throat and nodded. "I hadn't seen Renn, no. So yes... I'd recommend haste in this," she said.

"Merit...?" I said my friend's name gently, and wondered if I had misheard.

Merit slowly looked at me, and with a small frown shrugged. "What...? It's your fault, Renn. You've changed Vim so much he's become easier to manipulate. I got him to agree, so you're stuck with me now," she said.

Although not sure exactly what she meant, I didn't care. I excitedly leaned over and wrapped my friend in a hug. "You say that as if it's a threat!" I said happily.