

## Non Human 631

### Chapter 631 Vim – Again, A Road Must Travelled

I'm never letting her hold a heart again. Ever.

Grinding my teeth as I bent down to give my hands something to do, by checking my boots laces, I wondered what I was going to do with her.

That wasn't just any heart she had absorbed! Far from it, in fact. That had been a firstborn heart. One of the most powerful ones left, in fact. Of all the hearts that still existed, that I knew of, which I could comfortably say held more divinity within them could be counted on one hand. Miss Beak's and the Blue One's heart were amongst them.

Obviously it was my fault. I had left it with her when confronting Tor... but by my parents I should have known. Because right now my life was one where if anything could go wrong, it bloody did!

"This will cause issues, Vim."

I ignored the woman talking to me for a moment as I gave one last tug to my laces, and was glad I didn't just tear and rip them as I did. I was not in the mood at the moment, for anything, let alone this fake nun.

"Yep, I already have issues. One's I can barely handle as it is. You're just going to have to bear the burden like the rest of us," I said as I went to messing with my other boot.

The nun shifted a little, her silk robe sounding odd as she shuffled around. Was she wearing another layer underneath it...? Sounded like she was wearing leather underneath the silk. Which was odd, since unlike several others of her kind she didn't have a skin issue. Yepl, though a jellyfish, was as human in appearance and physically as one could be... though she did somewhat share in her sea-folk kind's size issue a tad.

"You were supposed to wait until the others showed up before confronting him! Light had been very clear about it!" Yepl whined at me.

I sighed at her as I finished messing with my other boot and then glanced up at her. I hadn't needed to glance far, she was taller than Merit and Sharp but not by much. "And unless you give me a genuine reason, or give it to my wife, that matters little to me," I said.

Yepl gave me a worried frown. "It... doesn't cause any real problems, as far as I'm aware... but..."

"But nothing. I was given a letter, one that had been clear... and it turned out to be true. Tor had betrayed us. So I dealt with him, just as I do any monarch that breaks its agreement with the Society. As I always have and will. If I did so a few days or whatever before certain people were meant to show up, that's on them not me," I said.

"But Vim..." Yepl groaned softly as I stood up and brushed my hands off, as if my boots had been dirty or something. They hadn't been.

"We lingered two days already, Yepl. There are no more requests, and no more threats, at the moment... it'd be ill-suited for me to linger longer," I said gently to the jellyfish.

Yepl gave me a worried look as she begrudgingly nodded. "I know... and I know you need to report to Light as soon as possible, but still...!"

Usually this would be where I'd tease her for not having a spine, but Yepl had never seemed to understand my joke when I said it. Not that she ever really took offense to it, but her lack of understanding it made me feel bad. It made me feel like I really was insulting her, even though I really wasn't.

I didn't blame her for her tendency of panicking, even over the smaller things. Especially right now, when I felt like I needed to panic too.

"Plus what if they arrive tonight, or tomorrow morning and..." Yepl kept on worrying as I glanced over her shoulder and down the path behind her.

A small home was at the end of this path, one that Frerit and her younger brother lived in. They had been kind enough to welcome Renn for the few nights we'd been here, and now were bidding Renn their farewells. The younger brother, a young man with a lame leg, had a crutch that he relied on to move around. He reminded me of that saint in Lumen, the one with... Glasses. Yes, her name had been Glasses. She too had a leg like him.

It was a little odd for there to be so many children recently being born with such deformities... such children were born all the time, but so many at once...?

Another odd thing to notice. I'd add it to the long list...

"And I don't even know what to do about the cave! Should we seal it, Vim? Or let it be? Is it cursed now?"

I blinked and bit back a sigh as I glanced back down at the jellyfish who looked as if about to cry. "The cave is fine, Yepl. It's not cursed or haunted or anything, no," I said calmly. Did she think so because of the rumors of ghosts at the Crypt...? Last night during dinner, since so many had joined us, I had overheard some of the current rumors amongst the Society. That one had been one of the biggest... and had been the source of many questions thrown my way. They all wanted to know when I was going to go and deal with the ghosts, as to keep them from spreading as if a disease.

If it wasn't the religious it was pagans. I swear.

"And the statue? They want to build an effigy, Vim! Should I allow it? What will Light say?" Yepl kept finding new things to worry over.

"Think of it as a grave, Yepl. A place to bury their grief and to honor his memory," I said simply.

The jellyfish's eyes shivered as she made a tiny noise of complaint as she nodded reluctantly. "I guess that makes sense... but what about!" she was about to continue, but Renn finally showed up.

My wife handed me one of her larger bags as she smiled and turned to Yepl, who startled slightly upon noticing her. "Ah! All done saying goodbyes, Renn?" Yepl asked happily, as if no longer worried about anything.

Renn smiled and nodded. "Yes. Frerit is adorable, I almost want to take her home with me."

Please don't.

"She is... it's too bad she's a pagan, huh?" Yepl said with a sigh.

Renn's ears fluttered as she glanced at me, and I smirked. "So are you, Yepl," I said to the fake nun.

"Yes, but only you know that. No one else does!" Yepl said quickly.

"Well... I do too now, I guess..." Renn said, speaking a tad sheepishly.

This tale has been unlawfully lifted without the author's consent. Report any appearances on Amazon.

Yepl startled, then quickly glanced at me with a huge look of worry... and then once she saw Renn's gentle and apologetic grin, she sighed in defeat. "At least it's you, I suppose..." Yepl said dejectedly.

"I won't tell anyone, promise...! Though I now wish you had told me earlier, now I have a bunch of questions!" Renn said.

The jellyfish made a tiny groan as she shook her head. "Now I'm glad you are leaving, Vim," she said.

"Then I'll make sure to always tell Renn one of your secrets whenever I need to run away from now on," I said.

Renn laughed at that but Yepl's worried expression told me she had not found it funny at all. "Goodbye then, Vim! Rennalee...! Please make sure Light gets my letter, if you will," Yepl said, deciding to end the conversation here and now. Finally.

"Of course... goodbye Yepl, see you again," Renn said as Yepl gave Renn a gentle bow and then stepped away.

"Farewell," I said simply.

The fake nun nodded and turned away. She headed back down the path Renn had just come from, back to the house we'd left. She had not stayed the night there while we had been here, but something told me that had only been because Renn had taken the only free room available. Odds are Yepl had been staying there before we had arrived, and would now return to staying with the village priestess from now on.

Renn watched her go for a bit, then after a few moments she hummed and glanced at me. "Fake nun...?" she asked with a whisper.

"Yepl does not believe in the faith of the church. As far as I'm aware she's as much a pagan as those here are. She's from a village of sea-folk from one of the islands south of here, though they're not around anymore. They used to worship a huge squid," I explained.

"A monarch? Like how Tor was here?"

"No... their village might have at one time been near such a monarch, but I'd never seen it. Or heard of such a thing. I think they just... worshiped the biggest creature they knew of, which in their region had been squids."

"What's a squid anyway?" Renn asked as she turned and started walking, allowing me to do the same.

I was glad to finally be leaving. We'd stayed these last couple days to handle a few issues, and to keep the village calm as much as we could considering I had just basically killed what they considered to be their guardian deity. It had strangely not been too big of an issue. There had been a few people shocked and, now understandably, concerned... but most of the village had simply shrugged and gone about their day after being told of the events. Odds are most had known this was coming for some time, especially since Yepl and some of her fellows had been here for months already.

"Remember those dangly creatures with lots of limbs? The ones the camels were using to find new dyes and colors?" I reminded her. The camels, or rather the horse who had married into the camel family, had a penchant for fishing. And a desire to find new colors and dyes, and as such the two interests always combined with one another. Last time Renn and I had been there he had been busying himself with squids and their inks, in hopes of making new colors. And as such had several caught and even preserved, alive, in a jar while we had been there. So Renn had gotten to see some.

Renn perked up at the memories. "Oh! Right, those!" she said happily as she giggled. "Those hadn't been big at all!"

"They get a lot bigger..." I said, as I realized I'd just made her misguidedly assume the size of the creature I was talking about.

"Hm..." she nodded, though didn't seem to really understand or care to. She just seemed to be happy to have remembered something so interesting, from something so long ago.

I enjoyed her happy moment as we headed out of Tor's Canyon... which I now realized might not be called such a thing much longer. I wonder if they'd rename it or leave it be...?

"You were rather abrupt with her, Vim... what for?" Renn then asked.

I glanced at her, and she gently gestured behind us with her tail and a flutter of her ears. At those we just left behind, or rather someone particular. Yepl.

Renn had overheard me then. Even as she had been a distance away, saying goodbyes to the others, she had been listening into my conversations with the jellyfish.

"Yepl is a worrywart. She'll stress over anything and everything. If it's not one thing it's another, endlessly. So there's no need to indulge in it."

Renn didn't seem to like that. She slowed a bit and glanced back behind us. "That's not nice, Vim... what is she worrying over?"

"The fact I had killed Tor too early. Whatever she had been told by Light, or relayed to her at least, had involved me showing up after others did. People who aren't here yet. Well... that's their problem not mine. I wasn't going to wait to confront Tor for no reason," I said. Maybe she had not listened too

closely? Or maybe, even with her better hearing, such a distance had been too great for her to make more than a few words out at a time?

"Hm..." Renn hummed at that. "What if it was for good reason though?"

"She herself said it likely didn't matter. She just worries she'll get in trouble over not properly controlling the process. But those like her, and Light, should know by now that I don't play by such rules. Never have."

Renn sighed at me. "So you're just being mean because you can, thanks to it involving prophecies," she realized.

I frowned at that, but couldn't really argue against it. After all, it was indeed one of the few times I could specifically voice my own distaste and opinions on certain things and get away with it... so it wasn't a lie to say that sometimes I did use such opportunities to vent a little...

But honestly I hadn't been doing that in this instance. My annoyances had not been over Yepl, the prophecies that led to this... or even Tor and his betrayal. Instead my source of discord was a bit more personal...

Glancing at my wife, who was frowning at me still since she thought I was simply being mean to someone for no real reason, I studied the feel of divinity that emitted from her.

It was steady. Strong. As it had been since her heart had formed. She felt much alike Tor did, and others like her... though unlike a monarch she didn't make me feel uneasy. She did not leak divinity as they did. She simply radiated the heat they gave off. Like a hot coal.

At the moment I could not tell if there was any real difference between her now and this morning, before she had absorbed the heart of Tor's ancestor, but I knew soon it'd happen.

She'd likely be fine. If it was to be outright rejected, she'd not have absorbed it in the first place. And if she was to not be able to absorb it, and not be able to handle it, she'd also not be walking around all happy-go-lucky as she was. She'd by now be feeling off. She'd start slurring her words, tripping over nothing, or acting airheaded... as if sick or drunk.

Odds are Renn would absorb the heart, adapt to it, and become stronger without worry. Which was... terrifying in a way.

That had been a firstborn heart. Akin to Miss Beak's. And...

"Vim? Are you listening?" Renn huffed at me, and I realized I had not heard her say something. Likely a continuation of the earlier topic.

"I'm listening to your heart of hearts, Renn, yes," I said gently.

She slowed a bit, her frown deepening as she considered my words... and then she grinned at me. "That's cute! And it actually makes sense!"

Yes. It did. And it was. As was she. "Do you feel okay?" I dared to ask.

"Yeah? I know you said to let you know the moment I felt anything off at all, but I've not felt weird at all. If anything I almost feel weird because I don't feel weird... I've been expecting something to happen you know? Like a tingle, or something," she said as she glanced down at the palms of her hands, as if it was there she'd find something odd happening.

"If it does happen, if anything happens, it'll happen suddenly and likely without you really noticing... I'll let you know if you suddenly grow weird whiskers or something," I said, teasing her a little.

Renn's ears fluttered as her eyes went wide. "Really!? Is it possible!?" she asked loudly, stepping closer as she did.

I narrowed my eyes at her as I realized her outburst was not from sudden shock or worry... but instead excitement. Utter glee was gleaming in her eyes as her ears fluttered and her tail wiggled behind her, expectantly.

Gosh my wife was weird...

But that was fine. Being weird was fine.

Far better than dead or transformed, for sure.

Chapter 632 Renn – A Conversation Leading To...

We were on a familiar path... though it was one I'd only ever been on once before.

Following Vim through thick undergrowth, I tried not to let my thoughts worm their way onto my tail or face. I knew if I let them do so, Vim would notice... and then he'd either tease me over them, or do something worse.

Ignore them completely.

"I've been wracking my brain, but I can't remember," Vim said as he trail blazed a path for me. We were heading through thick underbrush, the kind that even I struggled to walk through without snagging and ripping clothes. Vim though didn't care; he just walked straight through the stuff... breaking bushes and tree limbs without worry as he did. I followed in his wake of destruction, before the greenery had a chance to reform and close back up... as it seemingly did after a few minutes of Vim walking through it. It was that thick, where even he doing such damage was quickly brushed off.

"Has your memory been off lately, Vim...? You've been forgetting stuff lately," I asked.

"Like what...?" he asked with a small glance behind me.

Oh, I don't know. Your promise to try again, maybe...? "People's names, mostly," I said simply.

"Hm... I assume you mean your recent comments about those like Rivonne or the other humans," he said.

"Well... yeah. You've always been somewhat forgetful of such people, but usually it's not so blatant and quick. You forgetting a simple name months or years later is one thing, but hours?" I said. I had heard him talk to Rivonne, hear her tell him of one of the owners of a restaurant in SilverCreek she had been recommending... and not even an hour later he had invited me to go eat at it but had forgotten the name of the owner. It had made me laugh, but it was starting to get concerning. He never outright forgot names of our own members, even the human ones such as Liora or something, but it wouldn't shock me if he suddenly started doing so at this rate.

"My mind's been distracted lately, I'll admit..." Vim said lightly as he returned his focus ahead of him.

I frowned at him, and went ahead and glared at his back as he pushed aside a large branch. That was in our way. It was hanging low, burdened by huge leaves, and he held it up for me so I could easily walk under it as well. "I mean... I get it, but still. You're usually a bit more alert than that," I said.

"I try to be," he said.

"Do you forget god's names too?" I asked. He sometimes had to pause and consider them, but I was never sure if it was because he actually was struggling to remember them or if it was because he simply didn't want to talk about them and was instead trying to figure out how to not do so. As if he was searching for a method to change topics, instead of simply foraging his memories for names and stuff.

"Well... to a point. If you asked me to name each and every god I've encountered, or killed... yeah, I'd not be able to do that. Not a chance," he said.

"Killed that many have you?"

Vim simply shrugged as he returned to walking ahead of me, as to once again push aside bushes and stuff for me.

I kept pace behind him, as to benefit from his trail blazing as much as possible... as we headed deeper and deeper into the thick forest. In search of his little cave of crystals.

From memory I could remember this area, though not this direct path. And if I remembered correctly, we were likely not far from it. A few hours away at most.

I wasn't... sure what I was going to say or do once we got there. Vim planned to just deposit a few things, and pick up other things, while there... but...

I mean...

Should I try...?

If I had known he was going to bring us this way I would have brought some candles or something...

"Honestly I probably can remember more than I want to admit... I recalled Stance and Havoc, their names at least, pretty quickly... but I actually struggled to remember some of the finer details, such as their abilities and the times I'd encountered them or fought them before. Though if that was because of my bad memory or because I was enraged and unable to think straight, I can't say," Vim said, continuing the conversation.

I narrowed my eyes as I ducked under another lower hanging branch. It hadn't been so bad though that Vim had needed to move it for me.

This conversation was actually important. Especially since it was so rare that Vim was willing to talk about such stuff so openly with me... but gosh, I was having a hard time concentrating on it.

All I could think about was the cavern we were about to reach...

"Would it... be okay if I asked why you killed so many of them, Vim...?" I dared to ask.

"Yes. But not today," Vim answered calmly, as if I'd just asked how far away we were from his cavern.

My stomach felt a bit odd, squirming a bit, as I groaned and nodded. "Okay... how about, instead, what I should know about this god who has an interest in me...? Tor's god?" I asked, changing topics.

Vim was quiet for a moment, but then spoke up. "It's likely one of Havoc's companions. If it's someone who's abilities focus on illusions, they're one of the weaker ones. Still a god though, so not to be underestimated. Them being weaker would explain why they'd never dared to even meet Tor, even after hundreds of years of speaking with him and giving him orders. They hadn't dared to get too near me, and risk encountering me or me noticing them," he said.

"Doesn't help me much, Vim," I said.

"Right... basically they'll be humanoid. I'd dare say they'd likely look human entirely, but it's possible they might have a few non-human traits. As I've said, a few of them had changed their appearances for whatever reason. A few even did so outlandishly, such as Stance becoming different colors on purpose," he explained.

Different colors... Vim had mentioned that once. That Stance had red and blue hair or something. Wonder what that had looked like, it must have been striking for Vim to call it odd as he did. "Would... stabbing them with your spear do anything?" I asked.

Vim was carrying it right now, since I'd get it stuck on stuff as I walked.

"Actually yes. To a degree. It wouldn't likely kill them, from a blow dealt by you, but it'd do enough damage to hurt them. Maybe even enough to make them back off if you pestered them with it," he said.

That was... surprising to hear. "Not very god-like then, are they?"

Vim chuckled. "Right?"

I smiled at his laughter, since I enjoyed hearing it... and it told me our conversation could keep going. Every question I asked I dared ruining the moment, as I had likely almost done earlier by asking why he had killed so many of them.

Wonder why he was in such a good mood...? I'd, excitedly, say it was because of where we were going and whatnot... but the truth of the matter was ever since he had killed Tor Vim had been in an upbeat mood. He had been itching to leave Tor's Canyon, but had not been doing so out of anger or annoyance. He had simply desired to get on the road as to move on to the next task at hand.

Maybe Vim really did feel better after killing, or slaying as he called it, gods and their creations...?

If so then maybe I should just let him go around killing them all. Rather him be in a good mood than not, plus it'd let him relax and not to mention make the world a safer place... at least for me.

I honestly wasn't sure still what to think of a god, or many gods, being interested in me. I, like Vim, simply assumed it was just because of his affection for me. And as such, they'd likely show up one day to kill me just to spite or hopefully hurt him... but in reality any enemy would do that. Gods or no.

Vim was too... dangerous. Too deadly. Too unfair. He could regenerate. Was strong beyond belief or understanding. And had more experience in battle, or wars, than likely anything alive... there just wasn't an even playing field when dealing with him. And as such any enemy, god or no, would likely focus their efforts on either myself or the Society. So it was not too shocking to know that such enemies were doing so.

This book is hosted on another platform. Read the official version and support the author's work.

But I knew that if I said such a thing Vim would give me an odd look... but I mean... what else was I supposed to do...?

It wasn't as if I really even understood what a god even was. Or why they were what they were, or what they were capable of... or anything else, really.

Plus I had far more important things to worry about.

Like consummating our relationship... and the very obvious opportunity that was about to land on my lap here in a short moment...

"In your case Renn... it's best to just imagine a god as you know them. All-powerful beings capable of nearly anything and everything," Vim then said, completely oblivious to my real focus.

I frowned at that. "You keep saying they're not real gods though," I said.

"Because they're not. Yet... I'll not lie to you. They're fully capable of acting the part."

Great. "So how do you fight such things, Vim? Really?" I asked.

"You've asked that before. I've told you, I'll tell you one day... just not right now."

I was about to sigh at that, but before I could a sound drew my attention upward. I smiled up at a colorful bird perched in the tree above us, one with a huge beak, and watched it for a moment as I walked under it.

"Has a monarch ever betrayed their god?" I asked as I studied the colorful bird. It didn't even look down at us, indifferent. I wonder what kind of noises it made when it sang or cawed, or whatever it did. I'd only heard it tapping its beak earlier.

"No. Not a direct one, at least."

"How many... children, or generations, does it take? To break the..." I frowned as I realized I didn't know what to call it. Connection, maybe?

"Connection with their creators? It doesn't break until either a child without a heart is born, or a human child is born," Vim said.

Human child... "Human as in... human, human? Or one of us?"

"One of you. I should have phrased it better, but yes basically one of you," he said, expanding on it.

One of you.

It wasn't often Vim spoke in such a way. Usually he included himself in such phrases and topics... yet occasionally... the truth slipped out. Without him even realizing it.

"Would I sense one? A god?" I asked.

"Yes and no. Haven't you asked this before...?" Vim didn't wait for my answer and continued anyway. "You'd tingle, as you do when near or touching Liora or a heart, or someone like Sap. But it'll be... different. To me the difference is akin to the different feeling of heat and coldness. I'm not sure what it'll feel like for you, but it will be noticeable and you will indeed notice it without being told. But it won't be so bad that it will hurt or anything," he said.

"Heat or coldness...?" I asked.

Vim slowed... and then turned to look at me. I stepped over to him, and watched him lift his hands up and gesture lightly as if weighing things in his hands. "A monarch makes my skin tingle as if I'm in a blizzard. As if I'm feeling a cold breeze... a god though feels hot, as if I'm lying under the blazing desert sun. Naked. While covered in cooking oil. And there's ten suns not one, and they're all right next to me."

I smirked at him as I imagined such a scene. "So it hurts you, at least," I said.

"Not really... I just meant I'd notice a god instantly, but... at the same time, not always? After all even when in the desert sun, if you've been in it long enough you can eventually not notice its heat... or even its brightness either," he said.

I doubt that. That was likely only something he was capable of. "How far away can you sense a god from?" I asked him.

"That's more of a matter of mana." He then flinched a little, as if suddenly bit by a bug on the back of his neck. "Divinity thing, I mean. If a god is using their abilities, or spells and stuff, I'll sense them more clearly... and occasionally even from a very far distance. Miles and miles, even. But then other times I'll not sense a god until they're right up upon me, about as close as you are," he said with a point at me.

Mana... "What is mana, Vim?" I asked. He's said that word before, but only a few times. And usually only like that, on accident.

In fact he's only ever said it twice in front of me, as far as I was aware.

"Can't shrug that one off this time, can I?" he asked with a sad smile.

"Of course you can Vim..." I said softly, giving him a sure enough smile back that I knew he'd believe it.

I wanted to know more. Really badly. But I also wanted him to tell me such stuff on his own. I didn't mind giving him little pushes occasionally, but I genuinely wanted Vim to share with me out of his own desire to... not because the moment simply called for it. I wanted to be his friend, his lover... and most importantly someone he trusted completely. And I'd not become those things until he was willing to share such secrets without any hesitation.

It'd take years. Hundreds, likely. But I knew I'd get there... and I was okay with waiting. It was one of many things I expected to take a lot of time, and I actually looked forward to enjoying the slow progress.

Though hopefully I'd not be waiting that long for children, too...

Vim though didn't seem to agree... he sighed as he nodded and went to rubbing his nose, as if it was runny. But of course it wasn't... I don't think I'd ever seen Vim sick, on any level. Not even a runny nose.

"Mana is what they call divinity. And... what I was taught to call it too. By my parents," Vim then answered, without missing a beat.

I perked up, and tried to not let my tail squirm too much. I felt it wrap around some kind of thick stick, a bush of some kind, and I kept it there for a moment as I nodded... and watched Vim cross his arms and sigh again.

"It's their power. Or at least, the source of their power. In all truth, Renn, it's quite literally magic. Beyond the realm of normalcy. It breaks reason and all laws of physics. The reason however that the word has been lost to time, is of my own doing," he started to explain.

"Your doing...?" I asked, fascinated.

He nodded. "After the first war... my first real attempt at bringing them low, I realized they had started changing tactics. They had started to... hide. Not just themselves, but... everything they did. Their worlds, their armies, their cities and stuff. Basically they realized they couldn't face me openly and so switched tactics as to fight me on a different field. One of subterfuge and with schemes, not pure power or force," he said.

I slowly nodded, transfixed as Vim then gestured at me. "I realized then, after a few instances of betrayals and stuff... that I needed to start... adapting as well. Just as they did. One of the first things I did was change terms and vocabulary to describe them and their powers. For instance back then they had not been called gods, not just by me but by anyone."

"What had they been called?" I asked.

Vim shook his head. "Just a different title. Anyway, mana is one of those things. You see, the only beings capable of using mana are gods or their creations... basically only people with connections to mana and the source of it. Divinity," he said.

I slowly nodded. "But why would changing the name of it matter, Vim? Mana, divinity..." I shrugged as I said them; to me it made no difference. Other than one had religious undertones to it.

"Two main reasons. First off, it allowed me to weed out the spies. If someone appeared before me, using words only the gods knew but no one else did... then..." he gently waved at me to finish for him, so I did.

"Then you knew they were connected to the gods. No matter the way or severity, they at least were connected to them," I said, understanding.

He nodded. "Exactly. The second reason was more nefarious... and honestly kind of backfired on me. I had intentionally tried to plant the seeds of faith in the people back then, for the gods themselves. So calling it divinity, and thus divine miracles and such, helped that."

I frowned at that, since it was exactly the difference I had noted... but I had not expected it in that way. "Why...?" I asked. He himself had furthered the spread of faith? Not only did he not like such religious stuff, he also hated the very idea of forcing or influencing people in such a way... that was twice the sin for him to commit with a single act!

"Back then many of the gods had gone into hiding, as I said. And I was struggling to weed them out. So my plan had been to force them into action by spurring their follies. Some would hear and see the worship, and swell with pride and what not and act on it. Others would feel disgust or indifference... but would act on it too in their own way. Basically by teaching the people back then of miracles, and who

was capable of them, I was able to track down and kill many gods because of it. They revealed themselves not to me, but those who either with veneration or their doubts forced them into action. Basically a domino effect that resulted in gods doing things they usually wouldn't do, which then allowed me to do what I could do best... which was kill them," Vim explained.

I frowned at him, and not just because he had used a few words and phrases I didn't completely understand.

"So... make sure not to use it, Renn. Don't let it be learnt or spread by anyone. If you can, at least," he asked of me.

I nodded softly... though promising to do so, I was also focused on something else. "You used normal people as bait," I said, understanding his real meaning.

Vim blinked... and then slowly nodded. "Yes. One of my first mistakes, yes."

Taking in a deep breath, I sighed softly at the man who had a history I still couldn't grasp... at all, even after all this time. "That wasn't even your worst mistake, Vim...?" I asked.

"Far from it, Renn."

Great...

As Vim turned around, having obviously decided the conversation... at least this topic, was through and done... he returned to walking. And I returned to following.

Now though I did so without as much pep in my step... because now instead of pure joy and excitement, I now had a strange sense of dread and sorrow inside of me.

I kept wanting to learn more about Vim. His past. Yet... it felt as if the more I learned, the less I wanted to know.

And that didn't bode well... since I knew I'd not even scratched the surface yet.

But this was my purpose. Or at least, one of them. To be his mate. His partner.

Just as he was to know every little detail about me, even all the bad stuff... I was to know all of his.

It was a kind of unfair how uneven the scales felt, at least at the moment, however...

Chapter 633 Vim – A Cave of Distractions

Wish I had Renn's memory...

Lifting the crate, I stepped aside to put it on the bigger one I'd just gone through. After stacking it there I went to open the next crate, and as I did I immediately knew this one didn't have what I was looking for either. Which was starting to get a tad annoying. I'd already gone through half the crates here in my hideout and I'd still not found half the stuff I was looking for.

Closing the lid to the crate I sighed as I went to the next stack. I reached up to grab the one on top and brought it down to the floor as to open it. This one too wasn't what I was mainly looking for... but it did have something else which I did want.

Reaching into the crate, I dug out the larger box of jewels from under some cloths. Lifting the pearl encrusted box, I smiled and wondered if I should let Renn take a look at them too... at least, after I found and removed the jewels I planned to make her wedding band out of.

Glancing at the door, I listened for a moment to make sure she was still in the bath. It didn't take long to confirm it, since I heard some splashing, and I went to open the jewelry box. It was a larger box, with several rows of smaller drawers, but it didn't take me long to find the jewels I had in mind. I pocketed them, wasting no time in case Renn chose to run out of the bath and come over without warning, and then went ahead and closed the box back up. I set the jewelry box aside, as to let Renn take a look at it before we left again, and then returned to my search.

The house I'd long ago built here in this crystal cavern wasn't very big... but it did have several rooms worth of supplies. Things that over the years I'd collected, either on purpose or accident. And although the supplies were mostly stored in environment-proof containers, there really wasn't any rhyme or reason to their sorting. One crate had jewelry and clothes, then the one stacked beneath it would have weapons... and the one next to it could have books while the one above that held pots and other cooking tools. It was obvious I had not planned this storage setup properly, but that was simply because all of it was stuff I'd gathered over hundreds of years without any real pattern or purpose.

Honestly most of it was worthless. At least, in the grand scheme of things. Like the jewelry... why did I even have boxes of such things? Sure some were priceless, either stuff made by gods or one of kind jewels and gemstones I've encountered over the long years... but in reality they held no value. At least, to me. Maybe Renn and her children could put such things to better use...

"Achoo!"

I paused a moment to listen to Renn sniffle a sneeze, and I frowned as I realized the likely cause of it. Although this was a cave, a real one deep in a mountain, it wasn't dusty or dirty. And the air was fresh, thanks to the plant-life and ecosystem here... plus she was not sickly, at least not as far as I could tell. Which meant the source of her sneeze was something far simpler, and rather apparent.

She didn't like this place. To her it stunk... or rather this place had a unique scent that reminded her of memories that were unkind. To her this place smelled like the bottom of a well, or a similarly dark and damp pit. The kind she had, long ago, been forced to spend long cold days alone in by punishment from her family.

In other words this place was not one she could truly feel comfortable in. Never would. She could visit, and even linger for a bit as we had last time... but this would never be a place she could comfortably live in for extended periods of time. Which was too bad, honestly. I would have enjoyed staying here if even for a few weeks with her. It would have been... relaxing.

Opening another crate, I found myself ignoring its contents for a moment as I imagined such a small moment. A few weeks was... nothing. To me. I have lived countless weeks, and would live countless more. So I shouldn't feel too troubled over not having them. Especially since I both would eventually, in time, have many such weeks with her but also because I had important things to do. There was a lot of chaos and drama in the world right now, and I had duties. Ones that demanded I address that chaos as fast as possible and not neglect the importance of them... yet...

I found myself very disappointed I could not enjoy them.

If only the world would have been peaceful enough. If only I was better and had been more proactive. By now we should have a home. A real one. One that was just for her and me... even if just somewhere small and quiet. A place we could go to just...

"Vim?"

"At the end of the hall," I said, raising my voice a tad to let her know where I was.

Before she found me, I knew what I'd find once I turned around and faced her. The sound of her bare, slightly still wet feet, made it obvious... so I kept my focus on the crate and its contents for as long as I could as Renn stepped into the room.

"Whoa... you've made a mess, what are you looking for?" Renn asked with a happy tone as she studied all the boxes and crates I've re-arranged in my search.

"Just a few things..." I said as I did my best to not make it obvious that I knew she was naked.

Why was she so... well... herself, sometimes? I was very happy, and humbled, she found herself so comfortable with me that she didn't even think about being naked around me but at the same time...

"Hm... want any help? I wanted to go through some of these again too, anyway," she said as she stepped up and next to me. She joined me in looking into the crate, and out of the corner of my eye I saw her ears and tail flutter happily as she did. Like her bloodline, she enjoyed such things as this. To her it was likely the same as hunting something, since in a way it was.

"I'd welcome it, yes. Did you enjoy your bath?" I asked as I dared a glance at her.

Gosh she really was naked. And hadn't even dried off much by the looks of it...

"I did and didn't. I really like how nice it is, and I like that the water doesn't stink... but when the steam really gets going it makes the stink of this place more apparent and worse," Renn said as she reached into the crate. She grabbed at one of the smaller wooden boxes and opened it, revealing a bunch of pens and pencils.

Watching her as she, with great interest, went to studying the different pens and pencils... I again found my eyes drifting downward. "Sorry," I apologized. Both for the stink, and my thoughts at the moment. If I wasn't careful I'd forget why I was even here thanks to her and her body.

"Hm... it's okay. It's bad, but I might be getting used to it. Or rather, maybe I can eventually...? How's this work Vim? What does, oh!" Renn's ears went stiff as she clicked the top of one of the pens, causing the point of it to emerge from the other side. It did so with a click sound, one that was likely very odd and loud to Renn's ears.

She clicked it again, and then again, and I couldn't help but smirk at her as she put the box of writing tools down as to focus on the pen and its mechanism's noise. Sometimes I forgot how... primitive the current era was.

"A pen. It uses a tiny marble like bead and ink in a capsule, which uh... may or may not be dried out depending on how well it had been stored," I said as I watched her mess with it.

This story has been unlawfully obtained without the author's consent. Report any appearances on Amazon.

"Bead..." she mumbled as she stared at the writing end of the pen, rather intently too. She seemed fascinated by it.

"The clicking you hear is just a tiny mechanism, one that interacts with a spring," I explained further.

She went to clicking it a few times, smiling happily as she did. "What an odd sound...! So it has ink inside it?" she asked as she then glanced around mischievously.

"There're books in this one... I'm sure you can find a few empty pages to test it with," I said, knowing what she wanted. I stepped over to the crate I'd seen some in and opened it for her.

Renn wasted no time. She pulled out one of the many books, but hesitated once she opened it.

"Hm...?" I watched the way she studied one of the random pages she'd just opened it to. She suddenly didn't look very interested... or rather, now she looked worried or maybe even upset.

"Aren't these special, Vim...?" Renn then asked with a glance at me.

Oh. "Some are, I suppose... but you doodling on a page or two isn't going to destroy them, Renn. Plus some are likely worthless now, too," I said. I knew I had a few special books and tomes here, things I'd

deemed important for one reason or another... but honestly most weren't that special. I had destroyed, or Miss Beak had destroyed, all the very important books over the years that I had not trusted. The ones that had been made by gods, and such, were all gone... all the ones here were either ones written by people I'd known or myself, and as such not so important Renn couldn't doodle on them.

"What's this one about...?" she asked worriedly.

I glanced again at it, and spent a longer than I should have moment to remember the language it was written in. "A book of math. The author, an old man, had helped me figure a few things out a long time ago. It's his journal, one of them at least," I said. Funny, I'd not thought of that man in forever. "He had been like Hands is, a man of focus for the things he found interesting," I explained further as I thought of him.

"Hm..." Renn's tail coiled nearly, almost close enough it had bumped into me. I dared a glance at it, and as I did I noticed her naked rear again.

"It's fine, Renn. Give it a go," I said as I stared at the base of her tail. It sure did wiggle a lot...

"But..."

I smirked, and was about to make my typical joke when she said such a thing... especially since I wasn't able to keep my eyes off it, but decided against it.

Not now Vim. No flirting in that way here. She didn't want anything to happen here.

"If it worries you too much... I suppose..." Both to quell her worries and to distract my own desires I went ahead and rummaged through the crate and found one I could confidently let her ruin. I exchanged the book I found with the one she had grabbed, which she hesitantly opened as to check.

"Vim..." Renn groaned at me as she realized what it was.

"What? You should be comfortable ruining that one, they're everywhere, so it's not a big deal," I said with a smirk as she studied the very first bible that Celine and her sisters had ever printed.

Renn though didn't find my words amusing... nor comforting. Instead of agreeing, or even disagreeing, she instead seemed to grow far more focused as her eyes narrowed and she went to reading the words on one of the first few pages. I hesitated as I realized I had likely just screwed myself as I noticed her tail start to really squirm and wiggle behind her, in the way it did when her mind suddenly went into overdrive and became noisy.

Woops.

"This... Vim this is Celine's bible..." Renn whispered as she flipped to the front of the book, to check the first few pages.

"Well, no. It's the one I made for them in the beginning. When I first made their first printing press," I said.

Renn's ears shuffled a bit as she glanced at me with an odd look. "You... did do that for them, didn't you," she said softly.

I nodded, a tad offended. "Have I ever interfered or harmed religion, or someone's desire to preach it Renn? Really, you should know better by now," I said.

"Well... yes, but... you kept one? Or was this just something you forgot you had or something?" she asked as she read the little scribbles on the first real page. They were likely Celine's little notes; I'd never really checked it as far as I remember. Odds are since it had been the first real finished product we'd made she had likely gone over it to make adjustments and stuff.

"If you're asking if I had kept it for a greater reason, then no not likely. It's probably just something I tossed in with other stuff at one time. I'm not one much for sentimentalism, Renn. As you know I only have a few things from my own parents even, and the only reason I have those is because one is too important to not keep and the others are quite literally indestructible. They'll outlast me, so they're easy to keep," I said.

"Hm... you once said there was more, is another here?" she asked as she glanced around.

Had I told her such a thing...? Probably. "Not here... the only other item my mother left me is under the inland sea in a sealed tomb," I said, feeling a tad odd as I spoke. When was the last time I had been so... open with someone? Miss Beak was likely the only one, but even she I had not been so forthcoming with...

"Ah... you told me of that one once. You said it's somewhere I'd never be able to get to," she said as she nodded.

Well... "Not entirely. There is a way, it's just... difficult," I said carefully.

She hummed at me, and I noted again my eyes drifting to her rear. This time though it wasn't to appreciate it, but instead to watch the way her tail twitched and coiled in the air nearby. She was happy, it seemed, based off that movement.

That was good. It meant even though she was still bothered by the smell of this place, she was able to still enjoy herself.

Patting the edge of the crate, I smiled gently and nodded. "I'm going to find the few things I'm looking for so we can leave in a bit, if you're okay with that," I said as I stepped away.

As I returned to the crate I'd been messing with earlier, I noted the way her tail squirmed a bit differently as I did so. As if now upset its tip twitched downward not upward.

For a small moment I wondered if I had upset her, either by forcefully ending our conversation or my mentioning us leaving tonight and thus not staying here any longer than we needed to. Or was it something different...? Maybe she was hoping I'd have brought up dinner or something. I did plan to have us eat before we left, but hadn't planned to make anything too fancy. I knew for Renn eating in this place that stunk was more a chore than anything else, and for her who enjoyed food so much that was a big deal.

"Not enough, huh...?"

I nearly paused upon hearing her tiny whisper, but luckily didn't do so. I pretended I hadn't heard her, since she had whispered so softly that it was clear she had not been trying for me to hear her. Reaching into the crate I'd been searching earlier, I occupied myself for a moment as I re-arranged some stuff as I continued my search.

Renn sighed very gently, which made me feel a bit bad. Since I knew what she had both spoke of, and sighed over.

But what did she want from me...? She hated this place, or at least the smell of it... yet she was at the same time trying to get me to do something...? Did she not remember how firmly she had asked me to not try anything again in such conditions? She should know well enough by now how firmly I held myself to such promise... she was typically not one to be so contradictory. Or was I misreading her? Or maybe she had just wanted me to show some kind of emotion or something over seeing her naked body...

Ah. There it is.

Glad for the distraction, I picked up the small object and felt a bit of relief wash through me.

So it was here. Good. There were only half a dozen or so crates left that I'd not checked yet, so I had been starting to think it wasn't here. Which made me start to wonder where I'd put it... Or maybe lost forever, even. So to find it was relieving, greatly so.

I glanced behind me, to tell Renn I'd found it... but stopped as I found her reading the bible I'd just given her. She had an odd smile on her face as she read one of the first pages, likely Celine's notes and not the religious texts... so I decided to just stay quiet.

I'll just let her know I'd found it later.

"I'll make us something to eat, do you want soup or...?" I gently asked as I went to putting everything back into place. Now that I'd found the few things I'd been looking for I would be able to focus on other things. For better or worse. It meant once I was done putting everything away, I'd only have a few things left to distract me. Hopefully she'd get dressed before I ran out of excuses, at least.

"The stinkiest soup you can make," Renn said happily, perking up as she did.

"Good to know you hate the smell of this place more than you do my cooking, I guess," I said with a small laugh.

Chapter 634 Renn – An Awkward Lunch Date

"How long does it last, Vim?" I asked as I scribbled a small drawing onto the parchment.

"Hm... probably a couple dozen pages worth at your style of writing? If you draw with it like that though, maybe less?" Vim said, answering a bit off-handedly as he read the newspaper.

I glanced up to frown at him. But not because he had not given me his full attention... rather it was upsetting that he seemingly had known such an answer so readily, off the top of his head. Sometimes Vim seemed uncaring, and as if he didn't pay attention, yet other times he showcased the exact opposite traits. I'd been doodling, as he called it, with one of the pens I'd taken from his little stash at the Crystal Cavern since we left it a few days ago, and it seemed he'd been keeping a tab on the stuff I'd been drawing and writing with it.

Considering I'd not really shown him directly the stuff I'd been doodling, it was quite interesting how he seemingly knew them well enough to be able to calculate such a thing as the pen's ink capacity to my

own writing and drawing. I liked it when Vim paid such attention to the things I did, even when he both hadn't needed to and also was busy himself. We'd been traveling, rather quickly, to Telmik and as such only stopped on a few occasions. In fact this small stop, at a smaller town only a day away from Telmik, was our longest and what Vim would likely consider the most wasteful stop we'd made so far.

I wasn't sure yet if Vim planned on letting us stay the night here or not, but right now we were waiting for food. We sat at a smaller than usual table, but we were alone in our little quiet corner of the building. Alone enough to let us talk without much worry, especially since the rest of the place was noisy in their own corners. We'd already ordered, and Vim was reading the newspaper that was distributed by the church here in the Nation of the Blind. He had gotten two, one for him and me, but I myself still couldn't outright read the language here. I was only able to recognize simple words like what were on signage and stuff, so had chosen to draw on the newspaper instead of reading it.

"Anything neat going on?" I asked as I paused in my doodling. I'd drawn a small duck. It wasn't like painting with paint though, so it looked a tad... off. I'd need to draw some more with this pen to really get a feel of it, though how far I could get proficient with it I couldn't tell. It was a good thing I had several dozen now.

"The wars are still going on down south... the plague seems to be over, since I see no mention of it anywhere. But that might just mean that society as a whole has simply accepted it as normal and natural, like one would bad weather. There's a big political statement by one of the nobles, takes up nearly half the page, too," Vim said as he calmly kept reading.

"What kind of statement...?" I asked with a frown. Didn't the church, thus our Society, basically rule and control the nobles here?

"Another noble committed a crime. They're basically just condemning them and such."

Oh...? "What kind of crime? Who did it?"

I watched Vim blink, but slowly. And then I watched his eyes move ever so slightly as he... read what was likely the very thing we were talking about. "Harvard. The head of the noble family that runs businesses in the north of Telmik. The man was caught selling shoes and other clothing to the populace from the dead and buried. Basically they're saying he was stealing the clothes off those meant to be buried in peace and then re-selling them, he must have been running or owned some kind of caretaker business or something," Vim explained as he basically either reread the article or read it for the first time. Which made me wonder if he did that for all the articles or not. Did he just check these while we traveled occasionally out of habit, or was he ever looking for specific things?

Unable to contain my curiosity, I smirked softly as I nodded at him. "Did you reread it for me, or...?"

"I had only glanced at it before you asked. I checked the contents and found it unrelated to any of us, and not something to worry or care over, so had not read it in full," Vim said, confirming my suspicion.

"What is it you normally look for anyway...? When you read them?" I asked as I glanced down at my own newspaper. I had doodled all over it, so even if I could read it I doubted it'd be something one could reasonably do. Some of my drawings had even used the little printed words as a part of the drawings, so they became even more unrecognizable in certain areas.

"We have control over the printing press, as you know. The family that runs the newspaper is one that has been in the Society since the beginning. But over the last few decades they've started hiring out for their little articles. Stuff that to them, and the one who oversees them in the Society, deem insignificant. I though find the little stuff very telling of a nation's health, and good smoke signals," he said, explaining.

"Little articles? And smoke signals?" I asked as I mindlessly started drawing little smoke clouds on one of the edge spots of the newspaper before me.

"Basically I look for articles that signify something might be amiss. The old adage where there's smoke there's fire, and stuff," he said as he lowered the newspaper... then went ahead and slid it my way, likely as to let me draw on it too.

"Smoke..." I whispered as I glanced to the other side of the building, where most of the other customers were waiting for their food too. There were a bunch of people smoking stuff in pipes over there, and as such it was cloudy in that area. Luckily our side of the building was the one with windows, and there was a nice gentle and warm breeze at the moment so I wasn't suffering because of it.

"There's a hotel a bit outside of town, one where we can rent a private house for the night. I plan to stay there, not here," Vim then said.

I perked up at that. "Hotel?" I asked.

Vim's left eye twitched, in the way that told me he just realized he had used a word he hadn't meant to. "Just another term for inn. I suppose I had called it that because I'd been thinking of the quality, and the privacy. You don't get just a room, but a whole house... and they provide breakfast and stuff too if you want it. I've stayed there a few times over the last decade or two. When I'm alone. Sometimes I need to stop a moment and clear my mind before getting to Telmik," he explained.

"And this is one of those moments," I said, realizing now why we were even here. A part of me, for a tiny moment after hearing him mention a private place, had made me hope for something a tad... different. But this was fine too.

Vim nodded his head slowly as he leaned back a bit in his chair. It creaked, but not because he wasn't keeping his weight in check. It instead was just because it, like my own chair and the table we were sitting at were a tad old. "If you're okay with it. We can just hurry to Telmik if you'd like," he offered.

I frowned as I quickly shook my head. "No, it's fine!" I said, a tad too quickly. He blinked in a way that told me he had obviously heard the odd crack in my voice just now, which made me squirm in my seat as I glanced away from him.

Hopefully he hadn't interpreted that oddly...!

Why'd he have to say a private house like that just now, anyway? Why couldn't he have just said a place to sleep, or whatever? Why point such a thing out like that here and now...? It was almost as if he was completely unaware just how conscious I was of him lately, and it was really starting to...

I groaned as I leaned forward a little and pretended to focus on my doodling. I just drew circles and stuff as I tried to contain my squirming tail beneath my pants. I was acting foolish and I knew it.

He hadn't been implying anything frisky, but instead something more serious. He genuinely had things he wanted to ponder and weigh, and they were important things too.

Stolen story; please report.

Vim's head was elsewhere. With Tor's betrayal, and his death, and the stuff he had learned because of it... Vim was not thinking of me in that way. Not here and now, at least. He had far more important things to think about and focus on than my weird desires...

He hadn't even really noticed my naked body the other day, back at his stupid smelly cave...! Even when I had tried to make it obvious! That was how distracted he was at the moment. So why had I, even if for but a moment, thought he had meant something else just now?

"You okay, Renn...?"

I flinched as I glanced up from my wiggly circle doodles, and wanted to kick myself. He looked... worried. Likely because I had my feelings on my face, and he wasn't aware of the obvious reason for them. So he likely just thought I was upset. I was, but not for why he likely thought so.

"I... am," I said honestly.

"Quite a pause," he noted.

"It had been...!" I groaned as I bit back a laugh. I had paused a bit longer than usual there!

Vim chuckled at me for a moment, which made me smile back at him and relax a little. I was about to tell him the real reason I had been acting odd, as to make him laugh a bit more... but before I could one of the waitresses walked over and placed a plate of breadstuff onto our table.

"Here ya go!" she said with a bit of a happy tone, but I frowned as I studied what looked to be some kind of toast.

"I'm sorry, I think you got the wrong table," I said quickly since she was about to run off back to the kitchen.

She paused and grinned as she glanced back at me. "It's on the house! One of the drunks ordered it and left before it was ready, so you get it! I'd rather you two have it than any of those jerks who make this place smell like a goat's butt," she said with a gesture to the other side of the room.

Oh my! "Thank you so much...! You should have some of it too though, before you go!" I said as I went to grab the plate and move it to the edge of the table, so she could easily take some of it without having to reach across us to do so.

The waitress giggled at me and stepped closer and leaned down a bit as to whisper. "I already ate the other one with the others, he had ordered two! Don't tell anyone," she said happily and then stepped away before I could say more.

Watching her go, and the happy step in her stride she had... I felt myself slightly giddy all of a sudden.

"Vim, she's so nice!" I said happily as I looked at him.

Vim had a soft smile on his face but looked unimpressed at the same time as he nodded. "She was, wasn't she?"

Was...? Oh. He's teasing me... she had been pretty, hadn't she? I hadn't really noticed, I'd been more focused on the food. "I also like how she ate the other one too, that's something I would have done," I said as I went to tear a piece of the freshly toasted bread for myself.

"I bet. I've always figured if you ever worked in such a position you would either eat the owners out of business, or instead double it since everyone would always buy you food as a tip and stuff," Vim said as he watched me eat a piece of the bread. It had some kind of spice or something on it I didn't right away recognize but it was warm and tasted really good.

"I've worked in such places before. Before I realized it was too risky... no one ever bought me food then," I said between bites.

He frowned at that. "Not once?"

I shook my head.

"Hm... really..." Vim seemed to find that very odd for some reason, but I couldn't see why. He might be the kind to flirt with food but from what I understood very few other people did. Plus I mean...

As he knew, before joining the Society I'd never really had anyone try to vie for my affection before. Not directly, or seriously, at least.

Though I'd not thought such a thing in a long time, I was pleased to realize I had a few recent memories of people trying. Haggio had sent me a small gift basket a few days before Sap had showed up and had called me back to the Owl's Nest. He had sent it as a thank you gift, for bringing more business to him,

but the others had teased me over it all the same. I don't think he was actually flirting with me, but I liked to pretend he had been.

Plus I've been told that one of the twins had fancied me too, though I wasn't sure as to yet which one people spoke of. "Did you know one of the twins found me attractive?" I asked Vim as I tore another piece of bread off.

"I was told, yes. Why'd you say it like that, do you not know which one it is?" Vim then asked, immediately noticing that I didn't know somehow.

I groaned as I swallowed. "Why'd you figure that out so quickly? I wanted to tease you about it," I said.

"Because I'd be more concerned if it had been Coin? Well, you're right. Ledger is a buffoon. A good-hearted one, but an idiot all the same. Coin would have made me wary though," Vim admitted.

I chuckled at that. "So it had been the brother!" I had kind of figured, since he had acted a tad odd when we met, but it was nice to hear confirmation of it.

And also to finally find myself with another man that I've caught the eye of! I of course had zero interest in him in that way, but it was... rather comforting to know someone else other than Vim finally looked at me and actually found me appealing enough to even consider it.

Many people have said I was cute, or pretty and whatnot... but none had meant it in the way Vim was teasing me about. So it was... different. Special. Maybe I should flirt with him next time I see him, just to see what Vim would say or do if he saw or heard about it...

"Don't act all smug now. Pulling Ledger like that is not much of an achievement. Now, Lamp? Or Sap? They you can stick your chest out with pride and brag about," Vim said with a sigh.

"Wait what?" I paused right as I was about to stuff my mouth with a huge chunk of bread.

Vim frowned at me, and for a very awkward and long moment... we just stared at each other.

"Wait, you didn't realize?" Vim then asked, sounding odd as he did.

"Realize what! Are you saying they...?" I sat up as my mind tried to keep up with my now fast beating heart. Surely he was just teasing right!? Or making one of his weird little jokes? Right!?

He though wasn't. His frown deepened, and not in the joyful way as he rolled a shoulder and suddenly looked uncomfortable.

"Vim..." I groaned at him, half tempted to throw the piece of bread I had at him. But I wouldn't, because I didn't want to be so wasteful with something that was tasty and also a gift.

But I could throw my doodles...

"I uh... thought you realized it. Though I guess I should specify, Lamp's from a culture where it isn't that weird and Sap is uh... like her mother. Archaic. She doesn't see you the way I do, but well..."

"Oh no..." I groaned as I dropped the piece of bread back onto the plate and covered my eyes. What was I going to do!? What would I tell Lilly!?

Vim chuckled at me. "You should be complimented, Renn... do you know how many women like them I've been spurned by in my long life? Actually don't ask that."

"You just keep digging your hole deeper, don't you...?" I asked with a laugh as I calmed down a bit.

Right. Vim was right. Even if he was telling the truth... which obviously he was, since he didn't have that joking tone he used during such moments, it was exactly because of his seriousness that I knew I shouldn't worry too much over it.

Lamp had settled down. Married. Had a child. Which meant she had simply... found me attractive...? And Sap...? Was Vim saying she was like Lamp? That she didn't see me as if I was a potential mate but instead just...

"Sap... likes me like that?" I asked, a tad embarrassed to say so.

"She already promised her mother that she'd never try anything or ruin your friendship. Which is how I figured out by the way, I hadn't realized it either until Sap told me too," Vim said with a grin.

For a long moment I recounted the time I'd spent with the owlet... and very quickly realized he was likely right. Sap had on a few occasions acted a tad odd, or had...

"Is that why she hadn't wanted to sleep with me?" I wondered. I had invited her once, she had so adamantly refused I had actually been a tad hurt over it. But if she instead had refused because of...

"For the opposite reason as you had assumed, yes," Vim said, clarifying my thoughts.

Gosh... I took in a deep breath and sighed it out as I re-grabbed the piece of bread. "I wish you hadn't told me," I mumbled as I stuffed it into my mouth.

"Funny, I think the same thing about your stupid little fish friend too."

"Not Merit too!?"

"What...? Oh... no. Not in that way... actually you know what? Just forget I said anything," he said, suddenly looking unsettled.

I was about to complain, but the obvious reason why he no longer wanted to talk about this showed up as our food arrived... and I was forced to eat in awkward worried silence afterward, as I panicked over his real meaning.

Chapter 635 Vim – A Duck's Request

"I've made my decision already," I said simply as I studied the tally.

It wasn't complete yet. About twenty odd percent of the Society had not voted yet, or at least had not filed an official vote, but it was enough. Almost eighty percent of the Society had voted already on my fate. And... somehow had voted in my favor, so far at least.

I tried not to do the mental math, as to keep myself from internally admitting that even if the remaining votes voted heavily against me I'd still be given a favorable result. Because it annoyed me, now for more reasons than I had expected it to.

Without me realizing it seemed I had grown... anxious over this vote. And not for good reason. I had not grown worried over being removed as protector, essentially betrayed, but instead had found myself doing the opposite.

Upon seeing the expected results of the upcoming vote, and for it to be in my favor, I found myself upset. Betrayed, even.

I had wanted them to vote against me. Deep down. As to justify my doing so. Because if it had been their will, and not my own, it would have not only been valid but would have allowed me to step down without feeling as if I was abandoning them on my own volition.

"What decision is there to make, Vim...? The Society has chosen to keep the status quo, isn't that what you wanted?" The Chronicler asked.

No.

Half tempted to end the conversation and leave, I spent a moment to just... keep calm.

I was alone with her in her office, thankfully. Here in the Church in Telmik. Renn had been with us a moment ago but had somehow or another gotten pulled away by Mapple and the others. I wasn't entirely sure why they had left, but I was now glad for it. This current conversation happening with Renn would have been even more difficult and annoying than it already was otherwise, which was saying something.

How was I supposed to actually feel about this? A part of me was glad that Light had kept her word and had influenced enough people to keep their vote in my favor, yet...

Glancing down at the two sides of the scroll, and the many names listed on the side that was voting to keep me as Protector of the Society made me feel a bit wary.

Why were people so fickle? Why was a simple comment, or a suggestion, by Celine's daughter or her associates enough to make people change their votes? It was almost disgraceful... especially since it went against everything I stood for.

Changing people's opinions? Through sly tactics and suggestion...? It was the kind of thing that had made me disgusted with Celine. To the point I had nearly abandoned her in her final moments. The mere thought of benefiting from such manipulation made me disgusted with not just them but myself.

Maybe I could use that emotion, this disgust at them manipulating people, to my advantage. Maybe I could use that as enough of a reason to justify stepping down, regardless of how the actual vote went in half a year during winter. Maybe.

"Here I thought you'd be happy, Vim," The Chronicler then said, a tad gently. It seemed she was genuinely surprised by my reaction to being told I was in the clear, and that my position and my being in it was in no danger anymore.

"I've been told that several people have begun to alter their votes, is this the updated list?" I asked, searching for an excuse to be angry. One she'd actually believe.

"Yes, the most current to date," she said proudly.

"So it's the one most manipulated," I said with a huff.

The Chronicler sat up a bit straighter, as if suddenly offended. "Quite an accusing tone you just used," she said defensively.

"And you're quite defensive upon hearing it," I said with a leer.

She didn't even flinch as she waved me off. "Only a few people changed their votes, Vim, and pretty much all of them were in your favor!"

"Something tells me they had not done so with enthusiasm," I said back.

"You've become ever so snippy since you found Renn... here I'd been expecting the opposite!" she said with a small huff, as if offended.

I wanted to roll my eyes but didn't. Because I was too busy glaring at her.

Why were they so obvious with their snide comments lately...? Did she even realize who she was talking to? She basically just admitted, loudly and blatantly, that she and everyone else have been expecting me to... change because of Renn.

Renn's made it clear that Celine and the rest had been expecting her for years. Maybe even since the beginning. But...

Did it really go that far? What if it wasn't just her arrival they had gotten wrong, but something else...

For a tiny moment I was a bit shocked at the realization, since it came at such an odd moment, but before I could really focus on it and compartmentalize it the door to the office re-opened... and a familiar face walked in.

"Ah! Vim!" Tressi greeted me with a kind smile as she entered the office, a long white robe dangled behind her... It was made in a similar fashion as to what one would find maybe on a wedding dress, but they had made it to look like a simple nun's robe. Sadly though, thanks to the fact I knew what was under the robes, it was very obviously not doing very good at hiding them. I could even hear the feathers rustling beneath the robe as she walked in.

"Tressi..." I greeted the duck, Nasba's cousin, and wondered if they were all still here. I had thought she and the rest had said they would be heading elsewhere, only staying in Telmik for a short while. Well,

it's been a little over a month since I'd last seen them so I had thought they'd be gone by now. I'll have to let Renn know, then... she had wanted to meet them, not just because they were Nasba's family but because she had heard from someone that Tressi's daughter, Fressi, had a crush on me.

"Oh my, he looks grumpy. Is it Renn's doing or someone else's?" Tressi asked with a smile, the kind that told me she had very likely already met my wife.

"Met her did you?" I asked.

She gave me a happy nod. "She's adorable, Vim. Well done."

A bit of my wound up anger and annoyance unraveled at the complement, and I shifted a bit unsteadily as I felt a weird sense of pride feel me. "Thanks..." I said gently, unsure as to why I had so deeply been pleased to hear such a thing. Maybe it was because she had been completely genuine just now, and had spoken without a hint of teasing or sarcasm.

"I fear though my daughter may not like her much... for that I apologize and pray you and her will overlook her uh... well, any antics or anything she may possibly cause..." Tressi's smile then changed a little, become a tad embarrassed as she reached up to scratch the side of her head as if perplexed.

"I've no doubt Renn will find her antics adorable, so worry not," I said. I on the other hand wouldn't find them so, but I'd put up with them. I always did.

This book was originally published on Royal Road. Check it out there for the real experience.

"What's this now?" The Chronicler asked.

Tressi glanced at her and nodded. "My young duckling has a small crush on Vim, though I'm not sure how or why..." she said with a gesture at me.

Rude.

The Chronicler chuckled at that. "Funny," was all she said about that.

It was, in a way, I suppose... "I figured you'd be gone already, Tressi," I said, glad that she had given me an easy out of my previous conversation concerning the upcoming vote. Maybe I'll get lucky and just... ignore it until it doesn't exist. Such a thing had never worked before in my long life, but there's a first for everything wasn't there?

The duck looked back at me and gave me a slightly serious look. "That's exactly why I came to find you. I've been told you plan to go see Light? In Lumen?" she asked.

Hm? Did she want to accompany us or something? "Well... it's a current idea, not really a full blown plan just yet," I said. Renn and I had given a brief update to the Chronicler earlier, but we hadn't gone into much detail about it or after it. Since the Chronicler had already known of Tor's betrayal for a long time, and as such wasn't shocked or disturbed over it. They already had people in motion to ensure the safety of Tor's Canyon and the village within it. Most of the people being sent there were from the other continent, new arrivals.

"I see... If you do happen to head that way next, would it trouble you if I and my daughter joined you? I wish to take her to see her family, those who are left at least, but unlike me her tail makes it... difficult to travel safely," Tressi said.

Unlike her...? I glanced a moment at her feet, and the huge robe dangling around her. That might work here in the inner-sanctum of the church, but it'd not work on the road. At all... but she was right. Her daughter had oddly bigger tail feathers than typical for her kind. To a point it was a bit odd, even. Which meant it would indeed be difficult for her to travel safely, nearly anywhere even.

"Of course, Tressi. I'll make sure one way or another to help you, no matter my eventual path," I promised. It was easy to do, since odds are we would be heading eastward to Lumen. I didn't want to admit it, but... well...

Light and I needed to talk. Or at least, Renn and Light did. Again. A bit more honestly and openly, this time.

I'd not brought it up to Renn yet but my plan was to have her... indirectly ask Light some questions for me. The kind that would help me figure out a bit more of our upcoming struggles. Not just with the Society, but... my own too.

"Thank you... I know you come and go swiftly, thus why I sought you out so quickly. I apologize if we're intruding Vim, but..." Tressi then hesitated, and with an ever so tiny glance that she gave to the desk and the woman who sat behind it told me why.

"Think nothing of it. I'll likely know what we'll be doing soon within the day, if not here in moments once she tells me of some blasted prophecy or something," I said, giving the Chronicler a chance to intrude into the conversation once more.

"Actually I too would like you to go see Light. I have some letters for Renn, if by chance you chose not to head to Lumen... but if you instead do head that way I can just keep them for now and let Light direct you," she said.

Great. I lose no matter what path I take then.

Sighing softly, I nodded gently at Tressi. "See? I'm not sure how long we'll be here... Can you and your daughter be ready to leave in a day or two? If we can get on the road that quickly, I'd like to," I asked.

"Yes! Thank you! And thank you as well, Hyacinth! I'll go start getting ready right away!" Tressi happily perked up and didn't wait for a response back as she hurried to the door and left the office. She left the door open as she hurried out, and I smirked at her as her huge robe shuffled behind her.

"Our returnees have no concept of tradition Vim..." The Chronicler said with a sigh.

I frowned at her. "You should be happy that there are still those out there who remember your name, and can say it with such a happy tone to boot," I said, defending the duck.

"Still...!" The Chronicler didn't seem to agree. She fussed a bit as she went to rolling up the records of the vote tally, obviously realizing the conversation was over.

"Well... I suppose I'll go let Renn know. For now I'll plan to have us leave in two days, unless you disagree?" I asked.

She shook her head. "That should be fine. I'll send notice out for you, we have nearly a hundred members here now Vim so you might get quite a few requests for once," she said.

A... "A hundred? Really?" I asked. Even after they'd all been split so much? Some had even gone up north to SilverCreek, such as Kapni! I hadn't realized there were still that many here...

"It's nice isn't it...? I like how it feels lively again, even if so many are like those light-headed ducks..." The Chronicler said with a small smile and sigh.

"Hm... It is, yes... does that mean the mansio is full?" I asked.

"It is. You'll have to take a room below, though good luck finding one. Most of the newcomers are scattered all over down there," she said.

Great. Renn will enjoy that, though I won't.

I sighed as I stepped away with a nod.

"We'll continue our conversation next time, Vim," The Chronicler reminded me.

"Hopefully not," I whispered as I left her office, though unlike the duck I at least closed the door behind me as I did.

Stepping away from the office, I frowned as I tried to ignore the rather... startling fact that had just been slapped against my face.

A hundred members. Here. In Telmik.

How long has it been since so many were here...? At one time...?

Supposedly, before I had realized Light and the rest were back, they had been here too. But there had only been a few dozen or so... and they had been coming and going, so I'd been told. It was why I had never noticed them, not even the saints. They had known better than to be here when I was, and had kept themselves at a distance. Though they could not directly foresee my existence in their prophecies, they could... see...

"Renn..." I stopped walking near a corner hallway, and sighed as I realized how Light and the others had hidden themselves from me for what had likely been years. They had most undoubtedly used the existence of Renn and others around me to keep tabs on me... a saint could not see me directly, but they could see me indirectly. By seeing someone, or something, else as they interacted with or spoke of me.

Though...

For a tiny moment I considered my earlier thought, about how Renn was supposed to have been here a long time ago. I of course could think of many... many, many, instances of such a thing. Of Celine or

someone else acting... odd, or saying certain things that back then had been strange but now made sense. They had been hinting at Renn this whole time... but...

If that was the case, why hadn't they just... found her?

I interfered with prophecies. That was what my existence did. Thanks to my parents' blessings... but Renn was not like me. Or if she was, she had not become like me until we had gotten together. Since before then she had been... normal. A typical non-human. A thick in the blood, older and strong one, but still one within the realm of normalcy. Even now, today, she was still a creature of normalcy. Though one with a heart, her source was still normal. She was unique, but only to a single step farther than a normal being was. She was not like me, or a firstborn monarch. She had a connection to divinity, either through me or her heart, but was not divine herself.

So... why?

Why had they not found her? If they had actually foreseen her with me long ago, possibly hundreds of years ago... why had Celine just... let that be?

She had spent her whole life trying to make prophecies come true. Dedicated her entire existence to it. The whole reason the Society even existed in the first place was to fulfill her first prophecy. Her main one. So...

"Should I ask Renn...?" I wondered.

She might know. She had hinted back in SilverCreek that she had learned things she likely hadn't meant to know. Merit had said it too. That they had found Celine's private journals and stuff... so odds are Renn might very well know the answer to my question.

But did I want to know it too...?

If she did know it, and yet had not brought it up at all with me... that meant there was likely a good reason for it. Renn was very good at separating her secrets. She told me everything and anything, except and only except the things that went against my rules.

Which meant if she did know the answer... I likely didn't want to hear it.

But... the answer might lead me to another one...

Such as why the gods would be so...

I blinked... and before my mind even registered what I was feeling, my feet were in motion.

Running forward, I felt my stomach fall. Into a pit. As if suddenly teleported by my mother to that realm of space. Where black holes lurked. Where she had sent me to experience true fear, back when my training had first begun. Although the fear of that dimension was long gone, since I now understood it and knew I could survive it... the feeling was unmistakable. And it was one I'd not felt since. Not even during the wars, or any time before or after. Even when I had made my mistake and killed nearly every living thing on this planet I had not felt so terrified.

And somehow, that feeling of despair was justified.

Because I felt a god. Here in the church. Not far from me.

Right next to Renn.

Chapter 636 Renn – A Golden Bell

"Hey Renka!" I happily greeted my odd little human friend as I glanced behind me. Down the hall I'd just hurried through were my friends. Old and new ones. Mapple was standing with Fizz and an adorable little duckling that for some reason seemed to absolutely detest me, which was hilariously adorable since she kept trying to be mean but whenever she did it fell flat. As if she didn't have a mean bone in her body.

I'd left them behind since Fressi, the adorable young duck, had been summoned by her mother. I was going to join them, and planned to later, but had seen Renka at a distance... who was staring up at me with an odd frown. One that looked cute, thanks to all the freckles on her face. The many little dots reminded me of the little doodles I'd made a few days ago, when I had drawn lots of little squiggles and circles absentmindedly while talking through the night with Vim about little unimportant stuff.

"You hadn't needed to abandon your friendly chat, Renn, I could have waited," Renka said gently.

Oh...? "I know... but I've been told we might leave any moment, and I didn't want to miss the opportunity to talk to you again," I said, relieved a little. I had been hoping to see her again on this visit, and so had been on the lookout since I had arrived. I had been worried I'd miss her, since last time after parting I had felt... a bit awkward, since I had felt as if things had gone unsaid between us. Though I wasn't sure why I felt so... I did know for a fact that she was obviously human. Especially now that I was able to better tell my own kind apart, and thanks to the fact I didn't sense her at all. She didn't make me tingly in any way, which meant she was both human... and thus would likely not live very long.

It had troubled me that I would not get to see her again before she disappeared or died, and thus I'd end up forever remembering the odd little girl who had spoken to me and left me feeling anxious. It was the kind of worry that would have kept me up at night even a thousand years from now.

"Off to Lumen are you?" she asked.

I blinked, and for the tiniest moment wondered how she had known... but she had likely just overheard my conversation with Fressi and the rest just now. We had been talking about it not long ago. "Yep. At least for now... then likely elsewhere," I said. From what I could gather after we went to visit Light we were going to head eastward again. Since Vim had a few requests now, especially in that region and they were starting to pile up. Not only did he have to go handle ghosts at the Crypt, he also now had the ducks to worry about and on the way here he had also mentioned Narli and her family. He wanted to check on them.

And... since Vim was now very adamant that we would be staying together for the foreseeable future, well... that meant I was to join him. And although a tad upset over it, since it meant it could be months before I return north to my new home, I was also excited for the trip. I looked forward to seeing familiar faces and places again.

"Always busy," Renka said.

I nodded slowly... and wondered if I had actually heard the sadness I thought I had in her voice, or if I was mistaking it. It almost felt as if she had an accent... yet at the same time she didn't. It was odd, but it made sense. She herself was odd, what with her slightly pointed ears and all those freckles.

I wonder where she was from? Did all people from her homeland look like her? Did different people have different freckle patterns, or...

"What are you thinking about?" Renka then asked.

Blinking, and smiling a little awkwardly as I felt caught bare handed... I gently nodded at her. "Well... you?"

The countless freckles furrowed at me. "Excuse me?"

Oh? Oh! "I uh... I meant you in general. Did everyone have so many freckles like you? Back where you're from?" I asked with a point at my own face. Thanks to the mirrors in the Society I've used over the years I knew I only had a few freckles myself. Compared to her I was a single snowflake and she the blizzard.

For a long moment the young girl just... stared at me... and then she gave me an ever so soft smile. One that somehow made her look a lot older. As if suddenly she had matured a decade or two. "No. In fact where I'm from us women typically hid freckles. With make-up and such," she said.

"Make up...?" They hid them...? Why? They were so adorable! Without them she'd not be half as unique and...

Renka though seemed to want to change topics for she gestured lightly at me. "Can we walk and talk?" she asked with a point behind me.

I slowly nodded with a frown as I glanced behind me; to the hallway I'd just come from... and found it empty. Of not just random people but my friends, too.

Had they abandoned me so readily? I knew that Fressi's mother had summoned her so had likely hurried obediently but still... Now I'll have to find them. I wasn't sure where the ducks were staying here in the church, and it was bigger than one thought. It might take me a long moment to track them down, even with their very obvious scents...

"Do you live here, Renka?" I asked as I went to join her. She was already walking away, with a bit of a pace too for her size.

"No. I just visit," she said.

So she must live outside of the church. I wonder if she was a noble or something? She was younger, but obviously well-mannered and...

Glancing at her clothes, which looked normal here in Telmik, I knew better than to think them so. They looked pristine. Flawless. Not a single stain or tear, as if freshly made this morning... and not made as in recently from laundry, but from the tailors. Her clothes might be something a more common individual would wear in Telmik, but a commoner would definitely not be wearing something so perfectly new. Even new clothes on commoners typically had small blemishes.

"We're lucky we run into each other so often then," I said as I thought about it.

"Hm... How is Angie doing?" she asked.

Ah! "So you do know each other! She must have been teasing me then, she had said she hadn't recognized your name! She's fine. She's up north, though she had been getting a tad upset that we'd not set up the orphanage just yet she was fine," I said. Actually, at this rate the orphanage might be done and open by the time I got back up there...

"That's good," Renka said simply.

How nice! But really, Angie should have said something... I wonder if that meant she was one of the kids that came here to go to school? I had been told that not all of the students were orphans. Some nobles did send their kids here, I think I had once been told...

"It is... do you want to write a letter to her? I'd be happy to deliver it for you if you want," I suggested. Even if Angie had not wanted to admit they were friends I bet she'd feel very happy if she got a letter from her. Angie really liked children.

Renka though chuckled at me. "I'm fine... thank you though."

Oh...? Maybe their relationship was like the one Rapti and Sharp had? Maybe they had gotten into a fight or something?

I decided to let it be then, as to not pry too deeply. Instead I focused on something a bit more important, maybe, and also the main reason I had been on the lookout for her. "By the way... last time we met you had been about to ask something. Do you remember what it had been?" I asked, hopeful.

"I do. But I do not think you're ready for it," Renka said.

Hm...? "What do you mean?"

Renka then slowed to a stop... and stared up at me with an odd look. One that almost made me wonder if she was teasing me or something. Was she playing a prank on me or something? She had that mischievous look that kids sometimes got... likely the same one I sometimes got when teasing Vim. As one who wore it often, I knew it well.

Then, out of the corner of my eye... I noticed something weird. Or rather, I felt I did.

Hm...?

I glanced around, and realized where we were.

Wasn't this... the center of the church?

Yes. It was. Down that hall led to the huge auditorium. Where they held the bigger sermons. Vim had taken me to a few of those when I had first joined and got here, and then recently I've gone alone or with friends... but... how had we gotten here so quickly? This was nearly on the other side of the Cathedral from where we'd just been... there was no way we'd been walking this long, nor had come this far...

Glancing around some more, I felt a bit uneasy as the hairs on my ears and tail stood up a bit.

"What is it?" Renka asked.

"I... well..." An uneasy feeling filled me as I slowly realized what was wrong. It hit me like a river fish's tail slap to the face, and once it did I nearly panicked.

There were no people here.

In the middle of the day.

In the dead center of the church, where the public was allowed to roam.

No one but us.

"What's...?" I was about to step towards her. To protect her. Since the situation was odd... and Vim had told me to be careful during such moments. Especially now.

She was just a human, so I needed to be careful. Especially since I wasn't entirely sure if she was a member or not. I didn't feel like she was, yet.

But... why was there an odd cold feeling in the air...? As if... as if no one else had been in this area for a long time. People left heat. It was unnoticeable usually, but... the complete lack of it wasn't. It was very obvious that this place was cold. Too cold. As if a tomb.

This story originates from a different website. Ensure the author gets the support they deserve by reading it there.

"I..."

"Should I praise you for noticing, or should I question your bloodline? I'd think a cat would be a tad more perceptive."

My mouth went dry as I stepped back a step... and stared at Renka.

She had crossed her arms behind her back, standing straight up as she did... and had a look on her face that made my eyes narrow at her.

"What are you doing...?" I asked with a whisper as she raised a hand. She pointed a single finger upward, and I followed it up... and found only the ceiling. A decorative, stone décor littered ceiling, but a normal ceiling all the same.

Looking back down, I found her swinging her finger downward... and then she swiped her hand, as if flinging something downward. The way I would to snap a wet towel, or something.

And as she did, something shimmered in the air. I stepped backward again as I watched a wave of blue wash down from above her. As if someone had just dumped a huge bucket of the bluest water I've ever seen over her, a thick and seemingly wet looking layer of blue... stuff ran down from above and onto her. And as it did, it seemed to expand. It started to grow outward, making me step back again in worry as all of my senses told me to panic.

I had no idea what I was seeing. Nothing made sense. The world around me was acting weird... and someone I had just trusted was the cause of it all... and...

Then I wasn't alone.

Flinching as something huge and heavy rushed past me, I let loose a yelp as a burst of wind exploded before me. My hat flew off my head from a wall of air that rushed towards me, and as it hit me and knocked me back and nearly to my butt I winced as I recognized the feel of it.

I'd felt it twice before. It was unmistakable.

Once when Tim had died.

Another when the bear had.

"Vim...!" I shouted through my ringing ears as squinted through the whirlwind that was whooshing all around us... and found Vim's fist and forearm were punched through the blue stuff surrounding Renka. With wide eyes, I held my breath as I watched him pull his arm back and out of the blue stuff. A visible

hole was left behind, and white cracks were spread out all around the hole... and now with the blue stuff solid and unmoving, no longer like water but now looking like glass, I found it kind of looked like an egg. A large egg, all around... Renka? Who Vim had just punched?

For a tiny moment I expected him to pull out her head. Or maybe she herself by her neck... but instead only his fist emerged from it.

"As strong as ever, Vim," Renka's voice said from within the blue egg.

"Renka," Vim said her name with a growl, one that made my spine go stiff.

He knew her...! She knew him!

Then, before anyone could say a thing more... Vim kicked the blue egg. Hard.

Another burst of hard air flew at me, but this time I was ready. I lifted my arms and ducked behind them, shielding me from the main blow of the wind... but my ears began to ring again as the burst of air whistled loudly between and around my limbs. After a few moments the wind dissipated, and I peeked around my arms and found the blue egg in pieces. All over the floor... and Renka was nowhere to be found.

I panicked for a moment, since the egg was everywhere! There were bits and blue pieces not just around Vim, where it'd been and where Renka had been, but practically everywhere else too. There were bits near me, down the hall, on the walls and I knew if I looked up at the ceiling I'd find them there too.

"Vim...!" I groaned. Hopefully she wasn't in pieces everywhere too!

"I'm fine, Renn."

My heart thumped as I quickly found the source of her voice. I yelped as I stepped to the right, away from Renka who was suddenly standing right next to me.

I got a few feet away, barely, before Vim put himself between me and her. For a tiny moment I expected him to attack her again, but this time he remained still.

"Took you long enough, Vim. We had been talking for some time," Renka then said, as if taunting him.

"Are all of you alive? Do I need to start grinding you all into bits and pieces or something?" Vim asked back, as if he hadn't even heard her.

My tail squirmed wildly beneath my pants as my heart understood what my mind didn't want to. From his words alone.

"I assume your accusation is thanks to your recent encounters. Havoc and Stance, right? If you must know, Havoc having survived your wrath the first time was pure happenstance. I on the other hand... have never allowed you to kill me," Renka said with a small frown, and as she did so I realized I might not find her freckles cute anymore.

"I distinctly remember crushing your head," Vim said.

"My sister's, Vim. My sister's head. Not mine."

My heart writhed.

Vim's shoulder's visibly relaxed... and I nearly threw up as even from behind him I saw his utter relief. "That so?" he said, and sounded utterly happy as he did.

Gods, Vim...!

Renka stared at him for a long moment... and I knew she had seen it too. Since it had been so clear, as day and night. The implications both behind her statement, and his relief, was telling.

It seemed all this time Vim had utterly downplayed his hatred. For them.

Then, Vim stepped forward.

As he did Renka raised a hand, again with a finger pointed upward. "Ah! I'll disappear the moment you come closer," she warned.

"That just makes me want to try harder," Vim responded.

"I've no doubt. But, before you try..."

"Another warning I'll not heed, is it?" Vim asked with a spat, interrupting her.

Renka scoffed. "Hardly. Havoc was stupid to try. But what do you expect from someone stupid enough to try and negotiate in good faith with you?"

It was Vim's turn to scoff, and he took it.

Renka didn't seem to mind... as she then swiped her hand through the air. Again there was a shimmer in the air, but this time not above or around her... but instead right in front of her. Above her now outstretched hand.

Then before I knew it, something was in it. Something golden. Small. And...

It jingled.

"Do you know what this is Vim?" Renka asked as she lifted it a bit, displaying it between her fingers.

"One of my mother's bells. Yes. You actually think I'd not recognize it?" Vim asked with his voice thick with disgust.

My stomach twisted alongside my tail as I bit back a groan. What a conversation! And I don't think I'd ever heard such utter vehemence in his voice before! If pure anger and rage alone could kill, she'd already be dead!

Renka though didn't seem to notice, for she just smiled and nodded. "She had been my friend, Vim..."

My eyes shivered and started to blur.

"Such good friends, I'm sure," he said sarcastically.

The bell jingled again. The note it let out was... pure. Loud yet not. It sounded as if it was right next to my ear, yet at the same time distant. It also almost sounded as if it was echoing around me, and it likely should since we were in the center of the church near the auditorium... but I heard no such echo at all.

"She's not like her at all. I had expected you to fall for someone similar, more like her, honestly... She's too passive. Too gentle. Too many gray lines in her belief system," Renka said.

My ears fluttered as I became the topic of the conversation, even though Renka's eyes never left Vim's.

"You're testing my patience," Vim warned.

"Hmph." Renk then tossed the bell upward. My eyes immediately followed it, locking onto it as if it was a bird and I stepped forward and reached out as it flew my way.

Catching the bell was easy, but realizing something else was now happening wasn't.

Renka had swiped her hand through the air again, and Vim had stepped forward. For a tiny moment I had expected the throwing of the bell, and my catch of it, to be the ignition. The start. The beginning of the end... yet instead Vim had gone still. Right as the world began to shimmer again... though this time, instead of around or above her... it did so to her right. A few feet from her.

I tensed up at the sight of it, expecting something terrible or unbelievable... but instead something a tad more understandable appeared.

A person.

One tied up.

Kneeled on the ground.

"Do you know who this is, Vim?" Renka asked with a gentle wave at the person who was blindfolded, but had obviously heard Renka's words.

The ropes around the person, one that seemed to be a woman but it was hard to tell with how they were kneeling and tied up, were glowing a faint blue. Much alike the earlier egg, nearly the same color and shade. And...

"What... is this...?" Vim asked as he clenched his fist, as if to attack. His hands made terrible sounds as they clenched. Had he just torn skin? And muscles? I didn't dare to look.

"The only one, Vim," Renka then said.

What had felt like hot air around me went cold as something changed. I glanced around for its source, but couldn't look long enough. My eyes kept going back to the person tied up on the ground. They looked like they were trying to wiggle free... as if to escape the ropes, or the blindfold, but it also looked as if their very body was keeping them from doing so. The glowing ropes didn't look that tightly bound, or even tied at all for that matter... how were they so stuck?

Renka stepped over to the person, who must be tall because even on their knees they were nearly eye to eye with Renka. She reached over and patted the person on the shoulder, as if to display a trophy or something. "The only one, other than me now with Havoc's death... that knows of Renn's existence. You might not remember her, but," Renka began to speak, but Vim interrupted her.

"Casper."

The tied up woman went still upon hearing her name.

Renka blinked... and then slowly smiled. "Your hate really has no limits, does it? You can barely remember the names of those alive and around you yet remember our names even almost two millennia later."

For some reason I hated hearing one of Vim's words from her mouth. Especially since... well...

I gulped as the scary idea of it not even being his word, but instead hers, made me want to run away.

Vim glanced at me, likely thanks to the noise I just made by gulping, and then he looked back at Renka. "What games are you playing, Renka?" he asked, a tad calmer than before. Had looking at me calmed him down?

"I'm playing to win. Even if the rest aren't. My gift, Vim... a peace offering. And a promise," she said as she gestured at Casper.

Vim's shoulders drooped again, and the hot air came back.

"After you kill her, I'll be the only one who knows of Rennalee's existence... and I'll keep sure of it. I'm the one the rest trust to keep an eye on you, as I've done since the beginning. I'm the watcher, Vim. And I use my illusions to keep it that way," Renka said, and then pointed at me. For the first time since Vim had appeared she had finally taken her eyes off him. "I'm her lifeline. I'm all that keeps her safe from them. And as such... I'm now yours too," she said with a smile.

Cold realization washed through me as she snapped her fingers, and the air around her shimmered again. This time though instead of something appearing around her, or near her... she instead seemed to be the one who shimmered. She herself, not the world around her. As if I was now looking at her through a window of water.

"We'll speak again, once you have a moment to clear the mind," Renka said... and as she did her voice started to distort. It gained an echo, a real one, and then it... like her, simply faded away.

I blinked and found her gone. Completely. Without even a shimmer in the air.

Then another blink brought the rest of the world back.

I startled, since I suddenly found myself surrounded. Dozens of people were all around us, and nearly all of them looked like normal people. Not a single Society member was around... and as such...!

Hurriedly reaching up to cover my ears, I began to panic and was about to scream... no one seemingly had noticed our sudden return but I knew they would any moment. And once they did... But my panic changed into an odd mix of panic and confusion as I felt something. Other than hair and fur. On top of my head. I felt it at the same time I heard and saw the golden bell fall a few feet to my left, near Vim. I had dropped it in my panic.

I had a hat on!

My heart thumped wildly as Vim took in a deep breath and sighed it out as he glanced back at me... and gave me a sad look. "She put your hat back on, Renn. You're fine," he said as he bent down to pick up his mother's bell.

"I'd thank her, but it looks like she left something even more dangerous..." I groaned as I glanced past him... and to the woman still tied up a few dozen feet from us. still tied up by the glowing ropes, too.

"You have no idea."

Chapter 637 Vim – To Question A Ghost

Shutting the door behind me, a bit too strongly but not so hard that anything broke, I breathed in a bit as I stepped through the small hallway and into the room.

Casper was still in the center of the room. Tied up and sealed just as I'd left her. And Renn...

I glanced to my right at my wife who stood up a bit straighter upon my looking at her. She had her tail in her hands, gripping it so tightly that it was clear how stressed out she was. My spear was in her arms, resting against her collar and shoulder. It shifted a little as she turned as to look at me as I entered the room. She gave me a worried, slightly confused, look... but said nothing.

Holding her gaze for a long moment... I found it within me to speak up and reassure her. And did so with a much kinder tone than I had just used on the people outside of this room. "All is well, Renn. The bindings on her are unbreakable. They will start to flicker wildly once they're at risk of failing or becoming undone. So we'll have a good warning before it happens," I told her.

Renn's worried eyes narrowed a bit at me. "That's not what I'm stressing over, Vim," she said.

Right... "That too will be okay. It's okay. I promise."

"You keep saying that..." Renn whispered, a bit sadly, as she glanced over to the center of the room at Casper.

I heard Casper shift ever so little, only able to move a hair while under those bindings, but I didn't glance at her. I instead kept my gaze on my wife... who noticeably gripped her tail tighter, as if wringing it as one would a wet towel. She didn't just look stressed and worried... she looked scared, even. And I knew her fears were not thanks to the woman tied up in the center of the room.

One could not blame her for such emotions. I knew how this all probably looked, and seemed, to an outsider's perspective... and even more so to hers.

She had known Renka. I wasn't entirely sure how long she's been interacting with her, but it has been at least a few months.

Renn. Consorting with a god. And one of the most powerful ones at that.

My neck cracked as I turned to look at Casper... and watched her again shift ever so slightly. She tried to sit up, her eyes going wide at my looking at her... and it was clear she had just panicked but hadn't been able to act upon it. The bindings on her body, and around her mouth, kept her not just still but silent. She couldn't even release a groan or a whine. The only reason she was even able to see was because I'd already removed the binding covering her eyes. I had wanted to make sure it really was her.

It was. And by removing the blindfold I had also confirmed the bindings were exactly as I remembered them.

I myself knew those bindings well. They didn't work as well on me as they did others, but even for me they were an annoyance. It took effort on my part to break those binds, a lot of it.

"Vim..." Renn whispered my name, but I could hear in her voice her real statement.

She was warning me. And I knew without asking, or looking at her, to what she was trying to remind me of and make me heed carefully.

I calmed myself a little and nodded... and took in a deep breath as to ensure it.

Yes. I had a right to be furious... but right now was not a moment of anger. I'd not get any answers with fury.

Though if any answers I'd be getting here and now were of any value was still up to debate...

"Is everyone okay, Vim...?" Renn then asked.

Shifting ever so softly, as if I too was bound by those divine ropes, I nodded. "They're... worried, but fine. Luckily only a few members caught wind of us coming down here, though it won't be long until everyone here knows of it. I have the Chronicler's word that she'll keep everyone at bay and leave us be," I said. She had made me vow to tell her what was going on, truly going on, in exchange afterward... but I had a plan on how I'd avoid doing such a thing later.

Renka had ended her illusion right after leaving after our confrontation... and had done so while Renn and I, and a tied up Casper, had been directly in the center of the main entrance of the hallowed halls. The main place of worship for one of the grandest and largest cities left on this planet.

Odds are there would be a lot of strange rumors to deal with after so many people witnessed me pick up Casper and walk away with her on my shoulder, but at the very least my and Casper's weirdness had made sure that Renn had not been very noticed if at all.

I'll need to let her know later that she had done well... Renn could have screamed or freaked out after Renka's disappearance, and any such outburst would have been justified. The fact she had kept her cool well enough to not draw attention to herself was praiseworthy indeed... even if it was simply because she was too stunned to do aught else.

"What'd you tell everyone?" she asked.

"That this is a personal matter," I said.

Renn sighed, rather boldly, but I didn't find my words lacking. It was the truth.

This was a personal matter. It had nothing to do with the Society.

At least... as far as I was aware.

"All the same please keep an eye on the door. If it opens please let me know right away," I said as I stepped towards Casper.

"Should I leave...?"

I paused and glanced at my wife who now had a different kind of worried expression. One much... sadder than the one before.

"No. Maybe by letting you stay and listen, and watch, you can finally get answers that I'm incapable of giving you," I told her. And meant it as I turned back to face Casper.

She sat on her knees in the center of the room. A room that, like the many just like it all on this sub-floor beneath the Cathedral, was a resting place. A tomb. This room had no coffin, or any dead resting here, and as such was empty. It was just a medium sized room without anything in it, though there was a pattern in the center of the room's floor where a coffin would be laid to rest... but thanks to that it was the perfect place to have this conversation. We were deep underground, in a very well built stone and metal room that was almost airtight. I had left the door open for a short time to ensure it aired out a bit before sending Renn in, and I knew we'd be long done before the air quality got so bad that it would endanger or impact her health. Though most of that confidence came from the fact she was not just a thick-blooded non-human but also one with a heart.

She likely didn't even notice the bad air quality in this room, even though many others would.

As I approached Casper I heard Renn's grip on her tail tighten some more. I worried a little for her poor tail, since she was squeezing it so hard.

"Let's get this over with before my wife's lovely tail goes bald, shall we?" I said as I stepped to Casper.

Casper glared up at me, but not in a defiant way. Instead I saw fear. Terror. Yet the kind that accompanied hatred more than acceptance or despair.

The glowing ropes tightly wound around her body and thighs made the air a bit warm around her. The mana infused into them was thick, and I knew once I grabbed one they'd burn flesh. Just as they had properties to keep the one they bound from freeing themselves, they too had traits that kept them from being manipulated by outside forces. It was one of the reasons I had made sure to warn Renn from touching them, or Casper herself, though it seemed my warning had been unneeded.

Renn was still standing near the small hallway that led to this room's exit. And she was even making a tiny whine of a noise as she watched me kneel down next to the bound woman. Odds are my wife had no plans at all to move, unless absolutely necessary.

Up close, even through loose clumps of hair and very narrowed eyes... I could see Casper's irises. They were thin, almost see-through looking things. They were small yet I felt I could see things within them, as if seeing through very tiny windows. I wasn't sure if that was a trait she's always had or something new. I couldn't really remember her very well. While dealing with the Chronicler and the rest I had been trying to remember all I knew of her, but I was coming up short. It was almost a miracle that I had even remembered her name.

Though there was one thing I remembered about her... rather clearly.

Reaching out, I grabbed the glowing cloth around her mouth and tugged it. Her whole head leaned forward as it resisted my pull for a moment, but after a few moments of burning my skin and resisting it

finally snapped. A small tearing sound filled the stone room, echoing a bit as I removed the binding and freed her mouth.

Holding onto the glowing binding, even though it kept burning my hand to the point it made sizzling noises, I nodded as Casper took in a deep breath... and then popped her jaw as she stretched it.

"Hello, Vim."

I heard Renn shiver at Casper's voice, and I knew it wasn't just because of how it sounded. Casper's raspy, almost hollow sounding voice didn't echo at all in this room even though it sounded like it should do so. "Casper. Quite a predicament you got yourself in," I said, greeting her back.

If you stumble upon this narrative on Amazon, be aware that it has been stolen from Royal Road. Please report it.

"An understatement."

"Hmph." I scoffed at that... and then glanced down at the cloth in my hand. The glowing rope was no more. It was now a black cloth of torn fibers and strings... looking more like a worn down rag than anything else. I tossed it aside. Since it no longer had any mana in it the thing was useless. "Do I need to actually ask...?" I asked Casper as the rag landed a few feet away near the wall.

"No... I know what you want to know," she said.

"Then?"

Casper blinked, just once, and then she turned her head a bit. She tried to lean a little, as to try and look past and around me at the one warily standing behind me... but her body wouldn't cooperate. As if she was numb from the neck down, her body barely budged even as she tried stretched her head and neck. "Any chance I can plead your mercy to stay his hand, lovely wife?" Casper asked after a moment of fruitlessly trying to get Renn's attention.

I heard Renn stand up a bit straighter, but I didn't glance back at her as she stepped a bit closer. She didn't get too close, but she did step around me a bit as to likely be able to look Casper in the eye.

"Careful..." I warned.

Renn went still as Casper glared at me. "What can I say Vim...? Even if I tell you the truth, you're still just going to end me," Casper said, her tone a bit snippy.

"My warning had not been for you," I said simply.

She blinked again as Renn made a noise, which I ignored. "Considering she might be my only chance to survive this, you hardly need to worry that I'd try to harm her, Vim. Not that I could even if I wanted to," Casper said with a small nod to the ropes around her.

"My warning had also not been one heeding physical harm, Casper," I said simply.

The god's eyes narrowed a little. "I see."

"I don't."

It was my turn to blink as I frowned and glanced back behind me, while keeping an eye on Casper... and I found Renn had gotten a bit closer. She was still several steps away, but had now crossed more than half the distance between us originally. She now held the spear, gripping it as she had just been her tail. Worriedly.

"I'll not allow her to harm you, Renn," I said, clarifying what I meant.

"She obviously understood, and knows, that Vim... she meant she doesn't understand why she should be on guard for any other reason around me. Have you not told her anything of us?" Casper asked.

"He's only... said a few things..." Renn answered before I could, and did so in a way that made it sound as if I was some kind of lying husband who kept many secrets. She even glanced at me with a tiny bit of unsureness as she spoke, as if afraid to say such a thing. Which made me feel like an ass.

I had plenty of secrets, but I liked to think I wasn't so bad as to be a liar. But in a way I was, wasn't I? I may not have outright lied about the gods, or the threat of them... but I had omitted and talked around them enough that I may as well have.

Especially since I'd known this would happen eventually. Even if I had ignored it, and did my best to not admit it or confront it... this had been an inevitability. In truth I should have realized it even long before Stance or Havoc showed up too, I should have figured this would happen the moment I got into a

serious relationship with someone. After all it was their best chance to hurt me, really hurt me, and of course they'd take it.

If anything it was a miracle it had taken this long...

"Casper can read minds if you lock eyes with her," I told Renn as I held Casper's gaze.

She blinked and frowned at me. "Not while sealed, Vim. You should know that," she said.

"I've always been the type to err on the side of caution."

"Like some saints," Renn said softly, as if everything made sense to her.

Casper raised an eyebrow and I could read her thoughts rather clearly on her face, almost as if I had the same ability she did.

"Comparing the two would be like comparing me to a typical knight in strength," I said simply.

"Understatement. Again," Casper said.

It was, but it was something Renn would understand.

"So...?" I asked Casper, ready to get back on topic.

Casper continued to glare at me as she moved in a way that told me she had just tried to shrug but hadn't been able to. "Where to even begin...?" she asked, maybe herself more than me.

"Why not start with what you think is most important," I said.

"That just leads me right back to her..." Casper said with a tiny glance over my shoulder at Renn.

Not what I wanted to hear, but it was what I had expected. "Why though?" Renn asked for me.

Casper blinked, and then frowned as she slowly glanced at me... and when I didn't say anything she realized I was okay with her answering the question. So she took in a small breath as to do so. "It's uh... hard to know where to start..."

Renn stepped a bit closer and I took note of how close she got. I made sure to keep an eye on her as she got within a few steps of us, but luckily at least she was keen enough to keep me between her and the tied up god. Though if she did so knowing how dangerous she was, or just out of basic instinct I couldn't tell.

Actually...

"By the way she's a god, or at least what you'd know one as," I said to Renn with a glance, having realized I hadn't actually said so yet.

Casper scoffed as Renn gave me a weird look. "Yes, Vim. I kind of figured that out already."

Oh? That was laced with sarcasm. It sounded cute coming from her, it wasn't often she acted so. "Was just saying..." I mumbled as I looked back at Casper.

The bound god gave me a look too, but one of annoyed amusement instead. "You haven't changed a bit," Casper said.

Also not what I wanted to hear right now. "Just get started already," I said, a bit annoyed now myself.

"And start where? What you obviously want to hear is stuff that will just piss you off and get me killed faster, not really good incentives you know..." Casper said.

"Why did Renka give you to us like this?" Renn then asked, before I could say anything.

I blinked as Casper shifted her head little. "That's where you want to start...?" she mumbled quietly but then sighed and nodded. "I'm the one who first knew of your existence. As he said, I'm capable of hearing thoughts. True thoughts, and in full. So I... have been working alongside Renka all this time keeping tabs on Vim all these years. Since none of us could get close, or actually see him with any of our

abilities. And... well, I was the one to first find out about you. Or well, the prophetic dreams of you at least," Casper explained.

Renn shifted, and I went ahead and expanded a bit on what Casper was saying since I knew Renn needed such information to really understand what she was saying. "Gods are able to view people and places from great distances away. But those abilities do not work on me or around me, so they use them on those I am near or associating with. Akin to how a saint's prophecy doesn't ever focus directly on me but I can be noticed in those focused on others if I interact with them. Casper's ability of reading minds works through those methods too, as long as she can look those people in the eye. She likely read the minds of those that Renka or others watched on from afar and that's how they first learned of you," I explained.

"From... how long ago?" Renn asked.

I blinked at the odd question as Casper frowned. "Uh... if I wasn't tied up I could give you an exact date, but maybe two and a half centuries ago or so?" Casper said.

Renn must not have liked that answer for her grip on the spear tightened, harshly.

"If it was that long ago why doesn't everyone know of her then?" I asked, pointing out a flaw in this supposed situation. One I'd been wondering about for a while.

Casper smirked. "Renka's plan. She's the only one able to hide from you, Vim. So she's the only one brave enough to do anything near or concerning you. Without her no one else would dare come close. She made me agree to keep her a secret," Casper said.

So it was true...

I believed it... because even though I had felt Renka earlier, thus how I had tracked and found them in that illusion a little bit ago, it had been sudden. Renka had appeared out of nowhere... at least, from what I had felt. Which was impossible, even for them. Even when a god transported or teleported using their abilities, it was a gradual arrival. One that took many seconds to accomplish, and it could be felt rather clearly. It was why they could never just sneak up behind me, their abilities didn't allow it.

Yet Renka had seemingly appeared from thin air, at least based off my senses.

Which meant she had been there this whole time, and had simply stopped... doing whatever she did to hide herself from me.

"How..." I was about to ask about such a thing, but Renn interrupted me as she stepped closer.

"Why is my arrival causing such problems...?" Renn asked, rather quickly.

Casper frowned at me in a way that told me she noticed I had been interrupted, but she went ahead and looked up past my shoulder to look at Renn. In the eyes. "Vim, obviously? Or well... your relationship, I guess?"

"But..." Renn didn't seem to find that answer one that made sense, but it did to me. Perfect sense.

The question now wasn't why they had become active; it was what did they want now that they were.

"We've never put any stock into the prophecies you people get. Especially with how many we'd lost once you found a way to exploit them, Vim. And in truth, we had figured the ones about her had been the same thing. Ones that you would negate or avoid on purpose. You should have seen Renka's face when she summoned me a few years ago, back when she had first seen her in person for the first time..." Casper smirked as she spoke, as she remembered a memory that to her had been funny.

"When'd you first meet Renka, Renn?" I asked as I studied Casper's face. She looked... forlorn now, though had a small smile on her face.

"Huh...? Um... I think a few months ago, when I came back here with Lellip and the rest. I don't think I've ever seen her before then," Renn answered.

Casper frowned at that. "That might be the first time Renka's shown herself to her, but we've known of her for a while now. Like I said, she summoned me to help her a few years ago when she first joined your little society thing. Renka had wanted me to read her mind to verify some stuff for her," Casper said.

"You speak as if you hadn't been involved in watching over me all this time," I noted.

"Because I haven't been?" she said with a shrug. "I help when she needs it, but that's only every so often. Like I said Renka is the only one who even dares come near you, Vim."

"How... how many of you are there...?" Renn asked a question that I wanted to know the answer to, as well.

"That I know of? Forty-four. Or well... Forty-three, I'm included in that first number," Casper said.

I nearly fell back at the shock of such a number, but kept my cool. Barely.

So many...!

"Don't look so shocked, Vim..." Casper said with a sour tone.

"Is that... a lot?" Renn asked.

"To him? Obviously. But no. It's a pitiful number," Casper said.

"Havoc had said..." I started to speak, but my mind was still wheeling from the new information and I hesitated.

"Havoc...? That idiot got himself killed for no reason, Vim. Half of us didn't even acknowledge him, he was a liability... though I guess I am one too, now..." Casper said.

Yes. She was.

But... for who?

And did I want to even find out?

Chapter 638 Renn – Casper

Vim had gone quiet again.

He was kneeling in front of the bound Casper in the center of the room. We were in one of the dark stone rooms underneath the Cathedral, not far from Celine's Tomb. This room actually stunk a little, and felt a little damp though I didn't see or hear any water. And we had no lamp or light source, other than the glowing ropes around Casper... so this room felt unnatural. I didn't like their glow, or the way they were bright enough to fully light up the room but not reflect off anything or cast shadows. But right now I had no time to worry or care about my surroundings.

There was a god.

Right in front of me.

Though... if she really was one, as Vim claimed, then she was likely one of the most pitiful gods I'd ever seen.

Not that I've seen many... I guess...

Casper, like Renka, looked... almost too normal. She was a tad shorter than me, at least from what I could tell, and looked like a typical healthy woman. The only real odd thing about her, enough to be considered not normal at least, were her eyes. They almost looked... fake. As if she had two glass marbles in her eye sockets where her eyeballs should be. They had a dim glow to them, but not in a way a monarch's heart did but instead maybe the way a distant window glimmered in the setting sun.

Vim had said she could read minds. If she looked me in the eye, at least... but from what I gathered she also couldn't do such a thing at the moment. Likely thanks to the same reason she was tied up and unable to resist or do anything. Though it was hard to understand how glowing ropes had such power, I knew better than to really question it at the moment.

I had better questions to focus on instead.

"Vim said Havoc knew about me... if you were keeping me a secret with Renka, how did he...?" I asked, trying to understand a bit better.

"Honestly I'm not sure. I think Stance figured out somehow, and when he went insane Havoc noticed," Casper said.

Insane...? A god can go insane? Such a terrifying thought...

"And now you're the only one other than her who does," Vim then spoke up, his voice heavy.

I glanced at him, as did Casper... and I didn't need to see his expression to know what was upon it. Casper flinched at the sight of it and as such told me all I needed to know about it.

"Yes..." Casper admitted softly.

"Why..." I was about to ask why my existence being kept a secret was so important, but Vim interrupted me as he reached out towards Casper. She and I both went still, and wide-eyed, as he grabbed her by the shoulder.

Holding my breath, and half expecting to have to step back in both shock and to avoid the splatter of blood... I couldn't hide my relief when none came and Vim nodded. "Renka gave you to me for a reason. To earn my trust. Why not give me a reason to break that trust...?" Vim then asked her.

Gosh...! I wasn't sure whose heart I was hearing, mine or Casper's, but it was beating loudly and fast. Maybe it was both of ours?

"I have nothing, Vim."

I blinked and my tail went stiff as Casper smiled gently at him... as if suddenly not afraid of him, even though she had obviously been so a moment ago. She even still had what looked like a layer of sweat on her brow, though it was hard to tell thanks to the odd lighting of this room.

She shook her head in a way that normally accompanied a shrug, but she didn't do so. "I have nothing," she said again. "I can't tell you what Renka plans for her, because she never told me. I can't tell you if anyone else knows of her, because I don't know who does or doesn't. I can't even tell you where any of

them are, for the same reason you haven't been able to find any of them all this time. They're hidden in a special way, one that keeps even us from revealing it to you even if we wanted to," Casper said.

"Havoc said he could," Vim said stiffly as he removed his hand from her shoulder.

"Then he lied. Or didn't fully understand how Renka's ability works. Not a surprise, he was erratic. Always had been. He always caused issues, Vim, even over little things," Casper said.

"I'm finding that hard to believe. Why are you keeping secrets? I'm about to kill you," Vim asked.

"Vim...!" I stepped forward, but he ignored me. Casper however didn't, she glanced at me for a moment... and studied me.

Feeling a bit awkward, I wondered if she was reading my mind. Her eyes were... very focused on me. And I wasn't sure if I was feeling their gaze so strongly because I was simply conscious of her ability or because of something more normal, such as the situation or her very existence.

She was a god, wasn't she...? So... I mean...

Gosh! I shifted a little as Casper sighed at me and looked back at Vim.

"Does she not know how this ends, Vim?" Casper asked him softly.

"She should," Vim answered, almost as softly.

"Vim..." I groaned as I stepped forward again and steeled myself.

I knew what they were talking about. I knew what they meant. I knew where this was going.

I knew Vim, and his hatred for gods, well enough to know... but...

"Yet you let her watch. Listen. And not because you simply don't care, as you had those others so long ago... maybe you really have changed..." Casper said as she looked again at me.

I gulped as I realized I really needed to have a real conversation with Vim. Soon. About all this. About his past, the gods... everything.

I now couldn't wait. Not when lives were on the line... and not just my or his life either.

"You're okay with dying," I whispered as I stared into her unnatural eyes.

"I'm older than anyone else on this planet, Rennalee. I've lived multiple long lives. And getting caught by Vim for that whole time has only meant one thing. What happens next is so natural and expected it's almost comical," Casper said.

"But..." I wanted to argue, but wasn't sure where to begin or even how to do so.

Vim was going to kill her. No matter what she said or did.

But... why? Why did it have to go this way? Just because she was a god...? Or was it because instead of their threat to us? To me? To him?

What was that threat, anyway...? She basically just said that all this time, for hundreds of years, she and Renka have been watching Vim... monitoring him... this whole time. If they've been doing that all this time, why did it matter? Did anything change? Had they harmed us in any way during that time? Have they harmed Vim? The Society? Me?

If not, then...

"I'm not ready for this conversation..." I mumbled as the heavy realization of it fell upon me.

I didn't know enough. Didn't understand enough. I was lacking in so much necessary information to truly comprehend this situation that it was almost... comical, as she had just said.

But I knew I didn't have time to correct any of that. Especially now that I was close enough to see Vim's expression.

He was calm, and per usual had a stoic expression... but it was wrapped and wreathed in fury. The emotion lining his expression was not annoyance or frustration but... anger. Pure anger. Maybe even hatred.

Just... just what had these people done to make him so? Where even hundreds, if not thousands, of years later their mere existence made him like this? Especially since his parents were...

I shifted as I realized something very serious.

Casper was a god! And... that meant...

Reaching into my pocket, I almost didn't notice Vim's small twitch as he heard the pure note ring out from my pocket and hand as I pulled out the small bell that Renka had thrown at me earlier.

It rang out with a nice sound as I turned it around and stared down at it... and then noticed the sound it was making echoed a bit. And... not in a natural way. My ears fluttered as I heard the sound of the small bell again and again, but not because it was actually bouncing off the walls nearby.

The thing echoed endlessly... almost as if in my head, not in the room. It was hard to explain, and I wasn't sure if it was because I was in such a stressed out state or because of a more unnatural reason.

Holding the bell carefully, I studied the small golden thing and wondered if it was real gold or not. It felt... cold, even though it had been in my pocket for some time now and should be warmer.

It had a ribbon tied to it, one that felt like silk, and it was a reddish hue that reminded me kind of the color of my berry smoothie drinks.

"What's she doing?" Casper whispered to Vim.

"She's..." Vim was about to say something, likely either teasing me or something similar, but I interrupted him.

"Did you know her...?"

Vim shifted a little as he glanced at me, and as he did I was glad to notice the anger hidden at the corners of his expression faded a little upon doing so.

This content has been misappropriated from Royal Road; report any instances of this story if found elsewhere.

"The owner of that bell...? Vim's mother? No."

Oh...? "But..."

"She knew her, but not well. She's misunderstanding your question, Renn," Vim said gently.

"Hm...? Oh. Then yes. I did know her... I guess," Casper added.

Oh! "Really...?" I grew a bit excited over confirmation, another batch of it at least, that what I expected all this time was true.

Vim's mother, his parents, had been gods!

Casper frowned at me as she glanced at Vim. "Why's she smiling so happily?"

"Unlike all of you she's capable of sentimentalism," Vim stated.

Casper's frown deepened. "Should have expected such an answer..."

"Renka... gave you to us. To Vim. Why?" I asked as I gripped the bell closely, almost as firmly as I did Vim's spear.

The bound up god gave me a look. "Didn't we already go over that...? I'm the only one other than her who knows you exist. She's hoping to use that as a bargaining chip against Vim," she said.

"Yes... but why? Why does she need to bargain...? For what?"

Vim quickly glanced at me and then back at Casper, in a way that told me he too was now very focused on the topic. More than he already had been, somehow.

Casper though sighed in a way that told me she didn't find such a thing as important as we did. "Knowing Renka...? It could be anything. You know how she is, Vim."

Did he...? She had mentioned, before disappearing into that blue stuff, that she had been a good friend of Vim's mother... which meant...

They knew each other...? Well? Vim had recognized Renka rather immediately, though he had outright attacked her on sight which of course made me wonder what kind of history they had.

"She sacrificed you... and you don't even know why?" I asked.

The god gave me a deep frown. "You find that odd...? Does anyone ever really understand why or how they die? I have a general idea; I'm being sacrificed for her goals. What else needs to be known?"

"Uh..." All of it? I'd be furious if I was in her situation...

Maybe it was because of her age. Or maybe she, like all gods, was just... weird? Renka had been a bit odd, hadn't she? Maybe they were all like this? Strangely indifferent?

Maybe to them death wasn't...?

"Do uh... gods really die?" I asked, unable to contain that question.

Casper blinked... and then chuckled ever so softly. "Oh, Vim... you've not told her anything, have you?" Casper said after her little chuckles. Vim didn't say anything. He didn't even twitch. He just... sat there, staring at Casper, who gave me a sad smile. Almost as if she was pitying me. "Yes, Rennalee. We can die. And do. Though, statistically... only in one way," she said with a tiny glance at Vim.

The bell jingled as I shifted.

Gods only died by Vim's hands...?

"Wait..." I paused a moment as I spent a moment to ponder Casper... and how her mouth had moved earlier. Just now. As she spoke.

"Hm?" she glanced at me and smiled.

"Are... are you not speaking? Normally...?" I asked as I recounted a bit of our conversation. Her mouth had moved oddly for most of it, almost as if...

"Ah, I am. But I'm speaking my own language. Not the one you know," Casper said with a nod.

Vim too nodded. "You're understanding her, but she's speaking another language Renn. It's how they are," Vim said.

Right... somehow that made sense, I guess... being a god and all. I guess...

"Odd you noticed. Most of you don't," Casper said.

My ears fluttered as I glanced at Vim... and calmed down a bit as I quickly realized he wasn't like that. It had made me panic for a moment, thinking all this time I had not noticed him speaking to me with a different language too but it didn't take long to search my memories and find the truth of the matter.

"I don't have that ability, Renn. I need to learn languages. Like you do," Vim said simply, likely noticing my gaze and thoughts.

Casper smirked at that, but it relieved me to hear it said all the same.

"So no, Vim. I have no answers for you. I can't give up anyone else, because I don't know how to give them to you. I can't give you any information, at least nothing of value... and of course you know I can't

do anything myself for you either so..." Casper shrugged at Vim, and did so in a way that made me feel awkward.

She was... completely resigned, wasn't she? It was so odd. She of course had emotions, since I'd seen and heard them... but she was also almost acting as if she had none to speak of.

Could I be so indifferent about my own death? If I was in her shoes?

Maybe I could if I lived as long as she has... but could I really say that? It wasn't as if I wasn't hundreds of years old too...

"Give me something. At least try," Vim said.

Casper frowned at him. "Try how, Vim...? You should know Renka would not have given me to you with the ability to speak and think if she thought I could do something like betray her or anything. So... what do you want from me?"

Vim stared at her for a long moment... and then he sighed and stood up.

I flinched, the bell ringing as I stepped back in worry and expectancy of Vim doing something crazy... but he simply stepped away as he shook his head.

"Vim...?" I asked with concern as he stepped over to one of the walls and glared at it.

"Hm... while he debates my fate, mind if I ask something Rennalee? I'd normally just find out myself, but considering the circumstances..." Casper got my attention as she looked up at me.

"Um... sure?" So she would normally just read a person's mind? I wonder what it was like to have a conversation with such a person? I bet it was annoying... or smoother, depending on how it went.

"The tail. Yours, I mean... is it as thick as it looks or is it just puffy?" she asked.

A bit caught off guard by such a mundane question, I decided to just... answer it honestly and promptly. I swung it around and grabbed it with a hand again, to show her. "It's about half fur," I said as I squeezed it with the same hand that held the bell, as to show her what I meant. Hadn't I been squeezing it earlier...? She should have noticed.

"Huh..." Casper frowned at that as she nodded.

Gosh maybe she was insane too... did she not realize the situation she's in?

"Can I ask a question in return...?" I asked as I released my tail.

"Sure?"

"Why... why are you giving up so easily? You're... you're a god. You've lived so long, done so much... yet you act as if it's now all over and it's fine. But you're not even dying for a good cause... why? You've been surviving all this time, right? Fighting Vim and stuff? This whole time...? Why give up so readily?" I asked.

Casper frowned at me. "I've been captured for some time now, Rennalee. A year or so. So I've been expecting this. Plus it's as I said, being at the mercy of Vim like this is... well, it only ends one way," she said.

A year...?

Jeez she was talking as if I was the weird one in this situation... but surely I wasn't wrong to find this so utterly wrong, was I?

Glancing at Vim, I glared at his back for a moment as he continued staring at the wall... pondering whatever he was focused on.

Looking back to Casper... I stepped a bit closer and kneeled down, much alike how Vim had been doing earlier. I made sure to keep Vim's spear firmly in my grasp, as if there was a chance that Casper could steal it from me, and studied the odd eyes that bore into me in return.

"Vim's going to kill you," I said softly.

She nodded. "Odds are he'll eventually kill all of us, so it's just fate I guess."

"Is there really nothing you can do to change that? Surely... something? You're a god, aren't you? Can't you do anything?" I asked.

Casper frowned at me. "What would you have me do, fluffy cat? He's never accepted such concessions before, even by those far more powerful and important than me... so what hope do I have?"

I see... so it wasn't just that she's had time, ample time, to come to terms with this... she's had countless moments of proof too.

Just how many gods has Vim killed...? To get those like her to this point? Where them being captured, or at his mercy, made them so... resigned and submitted to their fate by his hands?

Casper then started to chuckle again, ones that even turned into little girly giggles after a moment. My ears fluttered as she then glanced at Vim with a smirk. "Why, Vim... you must be a little teddy bear with her. She has no idea what you are," she said to him.

A tad bothered by her statement as Vim turned around finally and stepped back over this way, I wondered how I should interpret her words.

Was she... just pointing out the obvious? My lack of understanding the situation? Or was she speaking of something else? Maybe she was just teasing me, or...

"You're capable of miracles. True ones. A creator of life, even!" I argued, before Vim could say anything or do anything. "Surely you can think of something...?" I said, and I wasn't too ashamed over the begging tone in my voice.

I didn't want Vim to kill her. And not just because I wasn't entirely sure if she deserved death or not.

She was helpless. Bound and sealed. Unable to even shrug her shoulders. She was no threat to us. To me. Or him, or the Society...

So...

Casper's small smile softened until it became... sad. Really sad. Then she sighed softly at me and looked down, away from my eyes. "I was abandoned, little panther. By people far more powerful than me. I have nothing to offer, and even if I did he'd not believe anything I say. If anything it's a miracle he hadn't simply killed me on the spot earlier," she said, sounding resigned again.

"But..."

A gentle hand placed itself on my shoulder, causing me to look up at Vim... and found him gently frowning down at me.

"But Vim..." I whispered up at his look. The one that told me it was pointless to even try.

"Tell her of your experiments, Casper. Of the humans," Vim then said while holding my gaze.

"Hm...? Ah, trying to convince her that my death is warranted are you? Sure thing. I used to break the minds of people, to find out why they can't house or store mana. My idea back then had been their inability to do so wasn't a physical issue but a mental one. Well... I'd been wrong," Casper then said.

"Huh...?"

She nodded at me with a frown. "I wasn't the only one. It's what we've all been searching for after all. A battery, basically. A way to store excess mana in the natural world. My attempts never produced any real results, but they had not been gentle nonetheless."

What...?

"She's slaughtered and tortured countless people, Renn. Humans and non-humans alike. Hundreds of thousands of them, at minimum," Vim then said.

I blinked as I watched Casper smile at that and nod... as if gladly and proudly accepting an accolade and wanted me to praise her for it.

Feeling a bit sick in my stomach, I barely noticed Vim grab me by the upper arm and lifted me up and away from the tied up god. I stood... and as I did Vim took his spear from me.

"Vim..." I whispered his name as I realized it was over. The gentle look on his face hinted at me what the spear his hand confirmed.

"Step back Renn. Please."

Wanting to whine and argue... I couldn't find it within myself to do so as I stepped back.

With unsteady feet I stepped away... as Vim again kneeled in front of Casper. He did so a bit closer than he had last time, to the point his face was nearly touching hers.

"Where are they, Casper?" Vim then asked with a whisper.

The weird looking eyes blinked. "You won't be able to find them... but they're in the sky, Vim. Far away from here, to the north-east. Near that meteor crater. The one that Griffon dropped on you."

Vim nodded... and then whispered again. Though this time, impossibly...

I couldn't hear what he said.

Gulping, I nearly stepped forward as to get closer. So I could hear better... but it didn't matter.

Casper glanced at me, and gave me a small smile... as Vim then moved with urgency.

Casper flinched as he plunged his spear straight into her chest, and then through her. It made a weird sound, as did her, as he speared her through... and Vim's Mother's bell rang out as I flinched as she died.

"Vim..." I whined a groan as I watched her eyes stare my way... but she wasn't looking at me. And as Vim shifted his spear ever so gently as he pulled it out and stood away from her... Casper slowly leaned forward and fell down face first.

Flinching as she fell... and the ropes around her began to flicker, like candles in the wind, I couldn't help but whine as everything felt... wrong.

He had killed her. A god. One who had been at his mercy.

And she had died with a smile on her face.

Chapter 639 Vim – To Clear One's Hands and Mind

Wiping my hands, since unlike my spear they had been hit by Casper's blood, I did my best to remain calm and collected as I stepped over to the Chronicler. She was waiting outside the room, with others such as Mapple and Tressi, and even a few faces I didn't outright recognize... and she looked in a half-panic.

Glancing down at my hands, I was glad to see none of Casper's blood remained anymore. Not just because I'd wiped them, either. Like all gods, the blood faded after a bit. I didn't even smell it anymore.

"I can tell by your glare that this was not foreseen," I said as I approached her and shifted my spear as to rest it against my shoulder. I had wanted to give it back to Renn, as to not walk out of the room with it in my hands... but realized she was neither in the right mind-space for that and that it was also a good way to let everyone know how serious this moment had been.

Them seeing me with a weapon in hand was a rarity. Especially when and after I had actually used it.

"No... I have no idea what is going on, except baseless whispers," The Chronicler said as I glanced behind me.

Renn was still in the room... I could just barely make her out from here, since I had left the door open for airflow. No one else had seemingly dared to venture in to it, but I knew it wouldn't be long until she walked out and joined me.

Casper's body was already fading away. Like all gods, after death, they faded and disappeared from this world as their last bit of divine mana left them.

Once the body fully disappeared, which only takes a few minutes, she'd leave the room. And would hopefully not do so with a face full of tears.

Casper had not deserved such sympathy.

At all.

I'll need to let her know that later.

"Well... as I said before, this was a personal matter. She had been an enemy of mine, from long ago. From before the Society, even. I'm sorry for allowing my personal affairs to come into your halls," I said, and although I spoke a little callously... I meant every word I said.

The Chronicler glanced around her at the small group with her, and I tried not to notice the looks of utter disbelief. Because I knew their disbelief was not from my words, but rather my actions.

They likely believed me... but it was that very belief they doubted. Because I'd never before, bar monarchs, ever spoke in such a way or acted as I had now and here. Even my agreement, my contract, with Celine said so... When it came to monarchs I had authority, and could act on them as I wished.

But how did I explain to them that such things were related? Short of telling them that Casper had been a god...

"So uh..." Tressi's large feathers fluttered as she glanced around, and I knew what she wanted to ask. They all likely wanted to ask the same, if not similar, questions.

"I've dealt with my issues. All is well now. I apologize again for letting them into your home and lives... I'll endeavor to make sure it doesn't happen again..." I promised, and as I heard Renn finally leave the room, walking slowly with a snuffle, I nodded at them. "I'm uh... thirsty. I'm going to go get a drink. I promise to sit and expand a little on this later, Chronicler, but for now please just be patient and give me time," I said as I stepped away.

"Wha...?" The Chronicler didn't seem to fully understand, but I didn't wait to expand. I turned around and stepped over to Renn, before anyone could get gather their nerve and approach as well.

"You okay, Renn?" I asked gently.

"No... but you know that."

I did. "I need to go... think for a moment. I've told everyone that all's well, and that it had been a personal problem... Later today I'll sit with the Chronicler at least and give her a short explanation, but for now I need to go and think," I said.

"Without me?" she asked.

Yes. No.

I... "I don't know..." I admitted after a moment of internal conflict.

That had been my initial plan. To do what I always did after such moments... to just walk and think alone. But...

Rennalee. My wife. She had just experienced all that, watched and listened and was a part of it all... just as much if not more than I had just been. And I had been about to just walk away and leave her be? What kind of man was I to do that?

Breathing in a little, and holding it for a second, I slowly nodded as I breathed it out and relaxed. "Right. Together. Sorry... I'm just..." I apologized to Renn, who I realized was likely severely as confused and unsettled as I was if not many more fold.

She deserved better. I should not spend time settling my own mind, but hers. She was more important.

Renn gave me a gentle smile and nodded up at me as her ears fluttered, and the sound of my mother's bell rang in my ears. "Thank you, Vim," she whispered.

With a deep sigh, I nodded and glanced behind us at the group watching us from a small distance away. A few of them, like Tressi and Mapple, had likely been able to hear everything we've said so far... but luckily Renn had the mental wherewithal to not have said anything too worrying here and now.

"Um... let them know, I guess... I'll wait for you down the hall," I said with a gentle gesture to them. They'll likely be expecting Renn to say something to them, and would also calm down a little if she did.

"I am good at being your wife, I suppose," Renn said happily as she stepped around me and headed for the group.

You might be reading a pirated copy. Look for the official release to support the author.

I watched her go for a moment, and the way her tail happily twitched in the air as she did.

Right. That was what a partner would do, wasn't it? My father would have called it public relations.

As Renn went to talk to the Chronicler and the rest, I stepped away. I didn't even glance into the room again as I headed down the hallway, heading in the direction of the nearest stairwell.

My first idea was to just walk around here underneath... but I didn't want to now. I genuinely felt like getting a drink. Maybe even actual alcohol for once. And now that Renn was to join me, maybe even some food. I'd enjoy watching her eat and drink her favorite berry drinks right now, I think.

Maybe the Walking Pig? It was about time for dinner, a little early but I could throw some extra coins around and get in early even if they weren't outright ready for it. Plus that would give Renn and me some privacy too...

I waited, a long moment, for Renn to finish her conversation as I continued pondering where to take her for dinner. I of course decided on the Walking Pig, but for a moment I had considered finding somewhere else. Telmik actually had quite a few nice restaurants here. Like many holy cities, especially ones that saw gluttony as a sin, it had plenty of options to indulge in such a thing.

Such simple irony made me smile... which Renn noticed as she hurried over. "What are you smirking at?" she asked.

"Distractions," I answered simply.

She tilted her head at me in a way that made her ears flutter adorably, and then she glanced back down the hallway... to the group still lingering where she and I had left them.

"They're... very bothered, Vim. But it seems they're not really sure why. None of them had seen what had happened, only seeing you carry Casper through the Cathedral. They're more worried she was some human who found us out or something than anything else," Renn said.

Right... and depending on who had seen me do so, they had likely not even noticed the glowing bindings or her divinity. "So you've calmed them down a bit for me?" I asked.

She slowly nodded, though a tad unsurely. "I think so. I think they now believe that this is just something I got involved with... Chronicler actually teased me about no longer using my tail as a fishing line," she said.

"I'm sorry for making you lie about it," I apologized.

Renn smiled at that and nodded. "You should be! But it's okay. I uh... am not sure how else I'd explain this to them, at the moment, anyway."

Right...?

"Used to be easy for me you know? I either outright told people the truth or just ignored everyone completely. Life was simpler back then," I said as I glanced at the group again. They were still there, noisily talking to one another. It seemed they were about to head our way, since this direction led to the nearest stairwell.

Time for us to go then.

Before I could step away though, Renn reached out to me. She grabbed my shirt's sleeve, a bit daintily.

"Are... you okay, Vim?" Renn then asked with a tug on my sleeve.

I shifted a little, since I was a tad stunned over her question. Not because it was out of place, but...

Smiling gently at her, I nodded as I reached over and patted her shoulder. "Yes. I am. I'm just... troubled, but I'm already calm now and collected," I said.

Really. She knew what I was. Or at least, an idea of what I was. She should know that I was fine, as I always would be... yet here she was, worrying over me so seriously.

"You sure?"

I nodded. "Yes. I am."

"Physically, yes... but what about everywhere else?" she asked.

Oh...? My smile grew as I nodded some more. "Yes. I was... admittedly very upset a little bit ago, but now I am fine. In fact, to a degree I think I'm feeling better than I have in a long time," I said as I reached over to place my hand on her lower back, as to lead her down the hallway since the group was now heading our way.

"Why do I believe you...? Is it because you got to kill a god?" she asked as she allowed me to lead her away.

I chuckled at that. "Actually, yes! To a degree. That is something that makes me happy. But rather in this case, I now feel a bit more comfortable because I now know who exactly my enemies are and I even have an idea of why they're my enemies," I said.

"Hopefully you plan to let me know all that stuff here shortly...?"

I nodded. "Yes. Over dinner. How's the Walking Pig sound?"

Renn's ears fluttered as she perked up. "Oh? Yes. Though can I have a little bit before we eat? I uh... let me get the taste and smell of blood out of my mouth at least."

Taste and...? Oh... right. In that small, badly air circulated room; she had likely gotten such a taste in the air from Casper's blood as I stabbed her through. Even if that blood was now gone, faded away into nonexistence, the lingering aftertaste likely still remained.

"Right... well, we'll walk around a bit then," I said as I glanced down to her waist and found her hat. I grabbed it for her, but didn't put it on her head for her. I knew, thanks to her ears, that she always preferred to do it herself. Though she did like it when on the occasion I did it for her.

She accepted the hat as I watched her tuck her ears into it and put it on. After she did she went ahead and reached around as to also hide her tail away, tucking it into her pants as we rounded a corner.

"It's too bad we can't take Fressi with us, I bet a tasty pig would make her like me," Renn said.

Hm...? "She doesn't like you?" I asked. Fressi's mother, Tressi, had said something similar hadn't she...?

Renn sighed as she shook her head. "She uh... doesn't. I don't think. Which is too bad she's so adorable..."

"Well if anyone can change someone's opinion, it's you," I said.

"Yes, but can I do it before you whisk me away somewhere...?" Renn wondered with a sigh.

"Well..." Had no one told her that they wanted to join us east?

Before I could mention so, she slowed and gave me a sad look.

"I'm sorry Vim... I hadn't realized who she was... Renka, I mean..." Renn whispered as we walked through the dark hallway.

Ah.

"Renn, I'd never fault or blame you for such a thing. Ever. Even if she hadn't been one of the greatest illusionists, nearly as good as my mother, I'd still not blame you. She's... a being of power. One who breaks the natural order. Even I fall prey to their tricks and abilities, I just power through them thanks to my own blessings. Ones no one else has," I said.

"Still..."

Patting her back gently, I nodded. "All's well, Renn. Especially since this is really my fault for not telling you more about our enemies, and how to detect them and stuff..."

"It is!" she agreed, a bit loudly.

"Yes... I plan to correct that..." I said with a small groan.

"Hopefully soon... before it happens again, please," Renn said, as if in warning. "I know I've agreed to give you time and stuff, Vim, but obviously the world isn't going to wait with me," she added.

I flinched as we neared the stairwell, and I nodded.

How true indeed...! I felt as if I was making progress, and even Renn had lately said so too... but there was now no denying that it was long past due. I had much to tell her, and do, and...

"Well...?" Renn asked as we began to climb the stairs.

"Yes, Renn. I agree... and know."

"Good. I'll look forward to it," she said.

"Add it to the long list," I mumbled.

Chapter 640 Renn – A Full Belly, For Now

My belly was full.

Leaning back in my seat, I breathed out a happy sigh of relief as I licked my lips clean of what little honey had been still on them.

"Feel better?" Vim asked as he happily watched me enjoy myself.

I nodded. "Yes, actually."

So odd. After that whole incident, and especially after watching Casper die and her body just... turn to dust and disappear, I had thought I would not be able to eat or drink a thing for some time. Yet here I was, only a few hours later now recovering from a hearty meal with pure joy.

Maybe Vim was onto something. Maybe the best way to relax and calm one's unsettled mind was to eat and drink merrily?

Blinking lazily, I wondered if I could convince Vim to carry me back to the Cathedral and to bed. I now felt like I wanted to take a nap.

"By the way... I don't get to sleep in the mansio this time," I said, since I wasn't sure if he knew or not.

"I figured. Too many visitors at once... honestly it's a good thing," he said.

I nodded. It was. I'd never been here before when so many members were here at one time... it was too bad these recent events had ruined such a thing. I was right now a bit happy and blissful, since I had just enjoyed a wonderful dinner with the man I loved, but the truth of the matter was life right now was hectic.

Sitting up a bit straighter, I licked my front teeth as I glanced around the table. Not for anything else to eat, but just... to examine the damage I'd done.

A large platter of a picked clean hog sat between Vim and I. And that wasn't all we'd eaten. Several other plates were scattered around the platter, of varying breadstuffs and greeneries. Some still remained, but most of it was just scraps.

I did though still have a nearly full pitcher of my berry drink left, one that I felt was worth bursting my stomach over as I went to pour some of it into my glass.

"Is it possible to... tear open your stomach? From eating too much?" I asked.

"Yes. A stomach can rupture from eating too much, but it's harder than you think. Your body will naturally try to fix it before it happens, by forcing you to throw up," Vim said.

Hm... "Don't think I've ever eaten so much that I've had that problem," I said, though right now I did feel a tad bloated.

He chuckled at me. "You say that as if it's a bad thing."

"It is...!" I said with a tiny smile as I took a drink.

Sighing in relief as I licked my lips again, I wondered for a moment if it was possible to grow these berries up north. "Can I grow these, Vim? At home?"

"Actually yes. Though you'd have to be mindful of them, I can help you with that."

"Good," I said with a happy nod. That meant I could have it all the time! "Hopefully in winter too...?" I asked. I knew many things didn't grow well in the cold.

"No... but we can prepare and store them properly for it, within reason."

Whew...

For a happy moment I just enjoyed my drink, and the knowledge that I'd be able to grow and make this deliciousness myself in the future. It was something I'd wanted to talk to him about for some time, but life had just been... hectic...

"Do... they eat? Too?" I asked softly as I thought of Casper and her final moments.

Maybe I should have let her eat something first... I'm sure Vim would have at least allowed that...

"They do. But are more like me than not, they don't need much and only eat because they want to," Vim said, understanding my meaning.

We were sitting alone in the corner of the Walking Pig, with mostly empty tables around us, but we weren't completely alone. Not only were workers walking around, half the restaurant was now occupied. It seemed they only opened during dinner, and had about in the middle of our meal opened their doors to the public but were still not fully open.

I wasn't sure how much Vim had given the worker to let us in early, since I had been busy talking to the waitress girl, but I knew he had definitely given them something extra as to let us in early. And knowing Vim it had not been a small sum. He just didn't care enough about money to be frugal.

During our meal we had not talked much at all about the gods, or anything that had happened. We had talked a bit about it all on the way here, but really only about him promising to go into detail later.

Right now, as he had said earlier, it seemed he just... wanted to calm down. To relax.

Hopefully he was. He seemed fine, all things considered... he was even smirking and flirting with me as he usually would. As if Renka and Casper had never happened, almost.

Should I... not bring them up? My question just now had been about them, but... a bit less serious I think.

I wanted to ask more, but what if he still wanted to relax? What if my doing so ruined this moment?

What did a good wife do in these moments? Should I help him relax and calm down, or should I be the little push he needs to do the right thing?

"Renka was someone my mother considered a friend," Vim then said.

My tail went stiff beneath my pant leg as I gulped, and did so as I held my cup to my mouth. He had likely just thought I had taken a drink, and hadn't been shocked.

"Um... I see," I said softly.

He sighed as he nodded. "Thus her having one of her old bells."

I shifted but didn't reach into my pocket as to pull it out. It was in my left pocket.

"Is she uh... not a friend? I mean, I know none of them are your friends... but..." I went ahead and asked, since he had been the one to bring it up. Had he somehow noticed my thoughts earlier? Hopefully he couldn't read my mind as Casper could, he had been staring into my eyes earlier...

Though maybe he didn't need to. Many people over the years have made it very clear that my thoughts were always very visible on my face. Readable by all.

"She'd been my mother's friend. Not mine."

A case of content theft: this narrative is not rightfully on Amazon; if you spot it, report the violation.

I gulped again upon hearing his tone. It had been very flat.

Vim leaned forward a bit and reached out. He grabbed a piece of bread from his plate, one that almost looked as empty as the others for once, but he didn't eat it. Instead he just picked it up and looked at it. "Renka is not just one of the most powerful of them, she also made quite a few powerful monarchs too. Tor's ancestor, for one," he said.

Nodding slowly, I gently shifted around my cup as to make the berry slush in it swirl in the cup. "Do you... plan to um..."

"I'd like to go search for them... but..." Vim started to say, but paused as one of the waiters walked nearby. They wiped down one of the nearby tables, then left.

"This... crater? Do you know where it is?" I asked. What word had Casper used...? "Meatoer?" I said it aloud, and knew I'd said it wrong the moment I had.

"Meteor crater, yes. It's a place where I'd fought one of their more powerful members. He dropped a meteorite on me," he said.

A what...? "So...?"

He shook his head. "I've been there before. Not too long ago even. If Renka, as I now believe she has, really has figured out how to keep her and others hidden from me then even if I went there I'd not be able to find them. Not without first being noticed and they escaping before I could do so at least. They'd just go somewhere else..." he then went quiet as he frowned and then tossed the piece of bread back onto his plate.

"Hm?"

"Havoc had mentioned that they couldn't move... that once he took me to them they'd not be able to escape me..."

"Oh...?" I sat up a bit as I watched him really contemplate such a thing.

He nodded slowly as he continued to ponder it. "But I mean... the fact they could and should be able to escape is still a fact. Plus, now with Renka involved and Casper's comments, I don't think I can take Havoc's words at face value. He could have just been desperate..."

I see... It was almost too bad I hadn't been there to meet Havoc. I wonder what had been said between them...?

"If it's... of any value, Vim... Renka never did anything to me," I said gently.

He blinked as he glanced at me.

"She... could have hurt me Vim. All this time," I said with a tiny shrug.

"I know. But her lack of doing so is not because she's kind or merciful. It's because they want something. Something from... me? You?" he slowly shook his head. "Honestly I'm not entirely sure, but the end result is the same. I can't imagine what it is, not really, but I can't imagine they'd be acting like this otherwise."

Right... "Are... are they all bad, Vim? Really?" I asked.

He nodded.

"But..." I was about to say what about his parents, but stopped myself.

Was I really sure they were gods...?

I had felt almost as if Casper and Renka, and their comments about them, had confirmed it... but honestly, did it?

No one has outright said they were yet, right? I mean... they had to have been, but...

"Um... Vim..."

About to ask the question, I had to go quiet as someone walked over. I sat up a bit straighter as a larger man smirked at us and gestured at the table. "Mind if we clear the damage?" he asked.

"Sure," I said with a smile.

He nodded and then looked back, and shouted at one of the other workers. A middle aged woman hurried over and the two went to quickly clearing away the empty and mostly empty plates from our table.

Once they stepped away, having left only a few plates and the platter with the remains of the hog, I gestured lightly at the table between us. "Don't they usually wait till we leave?" I asked.

"They're giving us special service thanks to how much I tipped," Vim said simply.

Oh. Right. Made sense.

Vim then sighed as he leaned back in his chair, causing it to creak loudly. He didn't seem to break it though.

"Most of them, Renn, are and were like Casper. People who committed terrible atrocities. There's a reason half the religions in the world are ones that worship what you'd consider evil gods... like the Epoch faith. It's because the gods their based on were evil themselves," Vim said gently, as if speaking about the weather.

I took a tiny sip of my smoothie as to gulp.

"Do you... believe anything she said? They said?" I asked after a moment.

He nodded. "I do, within reason. Renka definitely has a goal... what it could be...?" he shrugged. "But I'm not so blinded by hate that I can't admit she's likely being serious. Her showing herself to you as she has, trying to form a relationship or whatever, is proof of it."

"You think that was what she was doing?" I asked.

"I think so. She was either confirming something, or seeing how close she could get to you without me realizing it."

So I was what...? Some kind of test subject...? "She... never really said anything, though? Didn't ask or say anything too serious..." I said. I'd already told him on the way here, since we had taken a long route and had time, that Renka hadn't really said anything important in my perspective before now. She had seemed odd to me, enough to make me worry about her, but not in the way he had understood. At least, not outright.

He nodded. "She was likely just searching for something more internal. Probably just wanted to make sure our relationship was real," he said.

"Is it?" I asked with a tiny smile.

He scoffed at me. "Any doubt of my love for you Renn was obliterated the moment they got involved."

"I still like to hear you say so," I said with a smile.

Vim gave me a small smile in return as he nodded. "I bet you do."

If my ears had been visible and not under my hat they would have fluttered violently. Instead they just twitched a little.

He could have said it... Why does he tease me even during these moments?

"All that being said... I believe them, but that doesn't mean I trust them," Vim said.

I nodded at that. So he was done having our tiny moment of flirting was he? "Do they hate you as much as you hate them, Vim?" I asked. It had seemed to me that Casper might not have hated Vim, but at the same time had seen him as something of an inevitability. Like... how I would see death, maybe.

"Most do... I'd think, at least... but even if they didn't I can't imagine them, any of them, trusting me. In any form or shape. Just as I don't trust them. So it's... odd, is all," Vim said.

Hm... "Do you think she's nearby?"

He nodded. "Now that we have proof they've been watching for all this time, yes. She might even be watching and listening right now," he said.

Oh...? I glanced around, half expecting her to just... suddenly be here.

She wasn't though.

"If she shows up in front of you without me nearby, or if you suddenly find yourself somewhere else without reason or explanation, just remain calm until I show up. Do what you do best, keep her talking until I can get to you," Vim then said.

I smirked at that. "Is that permission to become friends with...?"

"Not a chance," Vim interrupted me, rather abruptly, before I could finish my sentence.

My lips twitched a little as I nodded, a bit bothered by how seriously and quickly he had put an end to that idea.

Vim sighed as he then leaned forward again and nodded. "Just... be on guard, Renn. They want something from us. And they'll resort to insane levels of violence and cruelty to get it, especially once they realize they can't get it any other way," he warned.

Insane levels...? That was terrifying since I doubted I could imagine Vim's idea of extreme violence or cruelty even if I tried to.

Vim and Casper had spoken of... experimenting. On people...?

Maybe something like what that god had done to those at The Summit? The one that Vim had slain and they had been so thankful for they had made that mural into that cliff and joined the Society because of?

Had they all done such things...? Why? Just because they could...?

Hadn't they made us? All of us? If so then...

I gulped, and was about to ask another question. One that I likely didn't really want to know the answer to... but before I could Vim slowly stood.

"Let's go, Renn. It's starting to get busy," he said.

I slowly nodded as I glanced around, and found that he was telling the truth. More people were being seated at the tables nearby which had been empty this whole time. Likely why they had been cleaning and wiping them down earlier.

This was now no longer a place we could comfortably have a quiet conversation. Or a private one.

"Do we get to continue this or...?" I asked as I stood, and then quickly went to drink as much of my drink as possible.

As I, basically chugged, the last of my drink Vim smiled gently and nodded. "Later. I think I should go talk to the Chronicler first before bad rumors start to spread. Already have enough of them as it is."

Hmph.