

I Have to What?

Rinka Tur

Shorehaven

Autumn, ~328 ADS

“Don’t look at me like that, it won’t matter, I can’t do it.” Minxson Tracker crossed his arms and glared at Grellia.

“Do not presume to look at your Queen like that, Minxson, and you will do it.” The Queen crossed her own arms and glared back at him.

“I am not one of your messengers, Grellia. I do not like this. She will not like this.” Tracker rolled his eyes at the thought of the possible confrontation to come, when he did as Grellia commanded. He knew it was a losing battle, and he’d of course carry out her wishes, but as a matter of form, he felt obligated to put up some resistance, lest Grellia get a swelled head for being right all the time. Fat headed Queens were annoying, after all.

“It matters not what one likes or does not like, one will do one’s duty. We cannot allow Wyn Eryi to stand empty any longer. Would you rather see it taken by the dwarves, or perhaps one of those human warlords to the east? It is doubtful that they would let you come and go as The Lord Healer does... did.”

By correcting herself, Grellia was reminded of the reasons for her decisions, and her eyes grew sad. Seeing the tears shimmering in her eyes, Tracker ceased arguing with her, and his tone gentled. “You don’t think they’re coming back?”

“It has been six turns of the moon, Minxson. We have heard nothing from any of their party. Nor has there been any indication that they achieved their goal. It is time to accept that they may have failed, and are perhaps all dead.” With the corner of one flowing sleeve, Grellia wiped away a tear, quickly composing herself after doing so.

“I do not want to be the one to bring this news.” He shook his head.

“Be comforted in the fact that if anyone knows your position as messenger, and would not strike out at you for bringing this tale, it will be Rinka. It has to be you, Minxson, even if Togow were here; this could not be entrusted to anyone else.” Grellia reached up and unclasped the chain holding the silver pendant that she wore, passing it to him.

Tracker looked at her with uncertainty. “Are you certain? This was a gift from your grandsire; you’ve never taken it off.”

The Queen nodded. “All the more reason to send it. As you recognized the importance of that piece, so too will Rinka, and she will then understand the gravity of the situation, and that this is no small thing We ask of her.”

“I understand, but...” Tracker protested, trying to hand the necklace back.

“She waved him off. “We trust that you will keep it safe, and that Rinka will return it when next we meet. We trust that you know how to find Our former courier?”

Tracker nodded. “I have a general idea, Rinka sent directions to her Inn on E’atara to Taim, and he insisted that we copy them into the estate records... for just such an emergency, I suppose. It is an emergency, isn’t it, Grel?”

Dropping all pretense of formality, Grellia replied, “Yes, dear one, it is. It grieves me to send you away, when you are the only one I have left, but this needs to be handled.” She stood and stepped over to look up into his eyes. This was his friend Grellia speaking to him now, not the Queen of Shorehaven. She seemed very lost, and he couldn’t resist pulling her close to offer some comfort. He held her for a bit before she pushed away.

“What are you going to say?” Grellia asked quietly.

He sighed, and ran a hand through his hair, thinking. “I’ll tell her the truth, that Wispen got the crazy idea in her head to go after Hal’lee, and Tide wasn’t about to let his wife go off alone, and Taim wasn’t letting Tide go without him, which in turn got Kei all riled up and demanding to go along. Rinka will understand that explanation, I’m certain. What she is not going to understand is that you’re making her take over at Wyn Eryi.”

“Letting Rinka stay off adventuring on her own is a luxury Shorehaven can not afford right now, Minxson. This needs family, and Rinka is the last one that fits that description. If Wyn Eryi were turned over to any other courtier, and Tidewild were to return, you can imagine the complications that would cause. I might have civil war in my court. That I cannot allow. I know our Rinka well enough to know she will gladly step aside and let her uncle have the duchy back, should he return. Knowing her, she’ll probably succeed at finding her cousin Aedin, just so she can step down sooner.”

“The clan Tur inheriting a duchy, I never thought of it as a possibility.” Tracker said, shaking his head at the wonder of it.

“And I always did. Taim would have none of it, he preferred his position as it was, and refused to take any land. I was selfish enough to allow that bit of impudence, since I preferred having him here leading my Guard. Damn him for going on this fool quest!” Grellia stomped a slippered foot and exclaimed, “Damn him! And damn Wispen and Tide too.”

“You don’t mean that.” He chided.

“No, no I don’t, but allow me my little temper tantrum, would you?”

“Of course. Come give me a kiss goodbye, then you have to put your manners back on and become plural again.” He held his arms out and she flew to him, kissing his cheek and hugging him tightly. “I’ll go get Rink.” He turned away and left the chamber, before he thought of anything else to say that might distress Grellia further.

Wyn Eryi

~328 ADS

The one person Rinka had never expected to see turn up on E’atara was Minxson Tracker. Therefore, as soon as she had seen him, she suspected there was trouble. When he gave her Grellia’s necklace, she knew there was trouble. When he bowed his head to her and swore fealty, her heart broke, for the meaning of it was not lost on her. Her family was gone, all those closest to her, for if not, one of them would have been Grellia’s choice for this “honor” being thrust upon her. It had taken every ounce of her control to not fall into hysterics, though she knew Tracker would have excused such a display, it would serve no purpose.

Duchess? The idea was preposterous. It had slipped her mind that Wyn Eryi was a duchy, and Tidewild was a Duke. He’d simply been Lord Healer for so long, that his “proper” title had little meaning to Rinka. But Grellia had dropped it on her head, and made her an unwilling Duchess.

The reasoning, once she thought about it, made perfect sense, Grellia knew darned well that Rinka wanted no part of formality, court and titles. She knew her former courier did not lust after power and position, and for that reason, would be biddable and agreeable in managing Wyn Eryi for the crown. Minxson had told her that not accepting the “honor” would most likely cause a power struggle at the Shorehaven court, one that Grellia could not afford and could not avoid if Rinka declined this reward. Shorehaven was only just getting back on its feet after the tsunami, there were enough power struggles going on in the reformed court, this was one Grellia did not need.

Duty. Even though she was no longer the official courier of Shorehaven, Rinka’s loyalty was still to Grellia and her homeland. The Wyn’s Favor Inn would survive without her for a while, Brandy was a capable manager, and Rodin Rae would certainly keep an eye on the profits, there was also hOOt, who could drop in there now and again to check on things and turn a bit of coin for himself. The business wouldn’t go under, at least in the short term. Wyn Eryi needed her more. Since the court had pulled out and returned to the

reconstructed Palace at Shorehaven, there were only a handful of guards stationed there. Word would soon get out that the castle and estates were vulnerable, without anyone at the helm.

Not to mention the Moonrise Clan, who relied on Wyn Eryi for protection during the winter months. Should Wyn Eryi fall to enemy hands, the gypsies would be in danger, as Minxson had pointed out. His first duty was to Moonrise; he would be torn in two, should he have to decide where to make his stand, for Grellia or for his kin.

What had her father been thinking, chasing off after Tide like that? No sooner was the question formed in her mind than Rinka realized the stupidity of it. This was all about duty, for everyone involved. Taim Tur had a blood debt to Tidewild, if the healer was running off into danger, of course Taim would run right along with him. As for her mother, her reasons were transparent, having gotten her lover back after so many years; she obviously wasn't letting him out of her sight. But what had prompted Wispen to take up this quest? Wispen was always the sensible one, why would she decide after well over three centuries, to hunt down and eliminate Hal'lee? Had her Seer's gifts shown her something of import or consequence? Rinka knew Wispen bore the burden of responsibility for Hal'lee's escape from justice, had Wispen's sense of duty forced the issue suddenly?

Where were they all now? Tracker and Grellia believed they were dead, their mission a failure. Rinka didn't believe that at all. She felt in her heart that her parents, at least, were still living. If they had crossed over, she would have felt something. She held onto that belief, anchoring her hopes on it.

Minxson had told her Grellia had sent people seeking Aedin, as Wyn Eryi was his birthright. But Rinka's cousin had eluded Grellia's messengers. Which was just as well, Rinka knew Aedin had his reasons for remaining hidden, better that he remain safe, for the time being. Finding Aedin had just become an item on Rinka's List of Things to be Done. That list was getting far too long.

She still had other outstanding responsibilities on that list. There was a puzzle to unravel. Rinka and her Falo brethren still did not know what had happened on their last journey to Wyn Eryi, the journey that had been somehow wiped from the memories of those who had gone with her, Falana, Galatyne, Kiriannin, Rahne and Beren. Of their party, only Bart knew how his trip had gone, for he had made his way home separately. Then what of her promise to Makei? His final task, which Rinka had promised to take up, was still a mystery. Or was it? She and Rahne had left Wyn Eryi to look elsewhere for clues, Rinka remembered that much, but could not remember what had come of that journey, it was part of the missing memories.

Twiddling Grellia's pendant in her fingers, Rinka sighed and pondered all these things as her horse, Jingle, made his way along the path. She would have to find a way to sort matters out from Wyn Eryi. It was not as if she would have much else to do, Wyn Eryi didn't need much managing, she was merely going to be a placeholder. Like it or not, she was on her way to a sort of captivity. Grellia had clipped her wings and was installing her in a big, ugly, stone cage. The lofty new title that went with the captivity didn't lessen the blow at all.

Just when she had settled in and was beginning to think of Morgandy as home, fate had decided to shake things up again.

"This sucks." Rinka muttered.