The Second High Kinlady
by lavellans

Summary

From the moment they meet, Prince Naemon is aware there is something different about Runaril. She is nothing like their fellow Altmer, and it only serves to intrigue him further. But their love is star-crossed, and their brief happiness comes at a hefty price...

Notes

This is a fic that absolutely nobody asked for, for a game that not many people write fics for to begin with, and for a couple that I've only found one other fic for. So I've got that going for me.
With that in mind, I hope you all enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes.
When they first met, it was as if she barely existed. He gave her only the most cursory of looks, turning over to her again only when she walked closer.

Prince Naemon quirked an eyebrow. Few commoners would dare approach royalty so openly, and the few that had were nothing like this one. She was neither desperately seeking an audience or insolently demanding something from him. No, she was definitely different. She did not fear him, and yet she was not arrogant either; the woman was simply treating him as an equal, and the thought intrigued him more than it should have.

Estre squirmed by his side, his discomfort growing as the nameless woman approached. “Who are you? What makes you dare to approach His Highness the Prince Naemon?”

The younger woman blinked in surprise. “Runaril Mihris Alethion, Your Majesties,” she said after a short pause. “Please call me Runaril, though,” she added, turning back to Naemon and ignoring Estre again. “It’s less of a mouthful.” The woman laughed, smirking to herself. His wife wrinkled her nose and looked like she was on the verge of losing her composure. For some reason, he fought back a laugh. He should be defending the High Kinlady, he knew that deep down, yet he found himself warming to the other elf over his wife’s clear protestations.

“I suppose congratulations are in order,” he smiled. “You saved my sister’s life. The life of our noble Queen. The Dominion will reward your service.”

“I hope so. Fighting the Veiled Heritance really builds up a sweat, but at least being one of the Eyes makes it worthwhile. Don’t I look great in this new uniform?” Runaril turned around in a circle, gesturing proudly. She looked so pleased for herself that Naemon really did laugh at that point.

Estre drew herself to her full height, sniffed imperiously and walked away stiffly as if someone had shoved a rod up her ass.

Oh dear. I’m going to pay for this later.

“Did I say something wrong?” Runaril’s face turned from simple pride to worry in a heartbeat. Naemon felt himself scrambling to come up with something to say that might comfort her and wondered why he was suddenly so bothered about a stranger, anyway.

“Her Highness... does not take kindly to flippant comments, especially from one of our own kind,” he said slowly, hoping she might understand and not take it the wrong way. “She believes that we must always uphold ourselves to a higher standard of behaviour than... other races might. Since the Dominion was founded by Ayrenn, she feels that we have weakened ourselves by allying with the Bosmer and Khajiit, and she is determined to mark us as different from those she deems lesser by any way she can.”

“Ah.” Runaril sighed. “She’s one of those, then. I’ll have to guard my tongue, then. I’ve been so used to mixing with Raz now that his humour must have rubbed off on me a little.” It took him a second to realise she was referring to that cat, Razum-dar. Troubled followed him like the ocean’s stench stuck to a fishwife, and his easygoing attitude had definitely rankled some who felt that it was unbecoming for an Eye of the Queen. Naemon had never really interacted with the man beyond his induction ceremony, but some of the rumours he’d heard were... eyebrow-raising at best.

“It just feels like a lot of the Dominion is stuck in the past,” she said quietly, and he hadn’t realised at first that she’d spoken. “I thought maybe if I embraced a different attitude, if I tried to get along with all those of other races, creeds and livelihoods in my work then it would make it easier to serve my
Queen, but all I ever get is the disapproval of my own kind. Am I doing something wrong, Naemon?"

She looked at him square in the eye then, and he was caught off guard by the strength of her gaze. Her golden eyes looked so sad, so uncertain that he felt something deep stirring in him in response. *She is so fragile,* he thought.

Would it be appropriate to encourage her behaviour? Was there really anything *wrong* with her easygoing attitude, her jokes and smiles? He certainly saw no harm in it; for sure, some of the traditions of his ancestors even irritated *him* at times, but such things were not spoken of among the Altmeri. They were the *strongest,* the *proudest,* the most *righteous* race in all of Tamriel, and any flaws or misgivings were to be brushed under the carpet.

He struggled with himself. Naemon saw people like Runaril as a breath of fresh air, frankly, but he knew what he had to do. The Dominion outweighed everything else, after all.

“You are an Eye of the Queen, and must behave as such,” he said, his voice coming out harsher than he had intended. “If you lower yourself to the standards of this... *cat,* you are doing no better than betraying your own kind and wallowing in the filth of the lesser races. He may be a servant of the Dominion as you are, but he is no Altmer.” He exhaled, wondering why he was still talking. “It is different for us. We will always be better than them, but we cannot allow ourselves to sink to their depths.”

Runaril looked as if she was going to cry. He had heard the sounds come out of his mouth just as she had, but they weren’t *his* words. That wasn’t *him* speaking. Had he needed to be so harsh with her?

This Dominion will be nothing but trouble.

“I apologise, Your Highness.” Her voice was quieter than a breath, and her eyes would not leave the ground. “It is true that my behaviour was inappropriate. I am sorry for causing offence as a servant of the Dominion. If Your Highness wishes to arrange a fitting punishment for me, I would gladly accept it. Please may I have your permission to leave and attend to my duties?”

Naemon felt terrible. This had not gone at all the way he thought it would. Had she *really* been letting down their race? The more he thought about it, the more he felt as if *he* had misbehaved.

Any scholar in Tamriel could tell you that the Altmer were haughty, noble and thought themselves to be higher than any other race. They were descendants of gods, after all: Naemon knew this just as well as any simple barmaid might have been able to explain it.

*We are pure and untainted in spirit. We carry the blood of the Aedra in our bodies. We carry their gift of magic in our minds. We live for centuries as their blessing to our souls. We are stronger and better – that is how it has always been, and always will be, as a simple fact of our existence.*

But did that mean they had to be so dour and humourless? Could they not... live a little? Perhaps the likes of Razum-dar had the right of it, and simple jollity could accomplish more than a grim and clinical nature ever could. Had his ancestors been *wrong*?

“You must leave me now,” Naemon replied, feeling graver than he had thought possible. “Go and serve our Queen; bother me no further.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” She gave him a properly executed curtsey, and it hurt him more than words could say.

*Why* was he feeling like this? More to the point, *what* was this ridiculous feeling in the first place?
She ran from him as fast as she could, ignoring the shocked looks of the nobles and guards flocking to Ayrenn. He had the feeling he would likely not see Runaril for a while again.

*Estre will be pleased with how I handled this.* The thought should have pleased him – his wife was a gracious woman, an upstanding citizen, loyal to the Dominion and all the bindings of their heritage. It didn’t.

Naemon could taste ashes in his mouth and shook his head, slowly walking towards the place his wife had scuttled off to. He felt bitter and angry, snapping at all who got in his way and slamming doors theatrically behind him, leaving a stunned audience in his wake. Estre reacted with joy as he explained what had happened after she left, kissing him on the cheek and praising his loyalty to the Dominion in correcting some “illborn ragtag wench” that, by the social laws surrounding royalty, he should not have been forced to speak to. She cooed on about it constantly until he left the room, too furious to listen to her any longer. Estre was unfazed by Naemon’s reaction, getting out her sewing as he quietly shut the door and went for a long walk in the palace grounds to clear his mind.

Guilt was never a pleasant emotion to bear.
Runaril had been dwelling on the prince’s words since she had fled from him, mulling them over while she nursed a cup of ale. She would have to change her ways pretty quickly, she realised, or maybe Naemon would have her executed for insolence. She wasn’t really sure if such things were possible, but Runaril wanted to give it the benefit of the doubt. She hadn’t been born into a rich family and had had no dealings with royalty prior to escaping Coldharbour and suddenly being plucked into Ayrenn’s affairs. She had no idea how to behave properly around them, and clearly it showed.


“You seem troubled, friend. Raz thinks he knows something to cure that.” Her friend sidled on next to her, pulling up a chair. “Perhaps an extra two bottles, with some for your sweet friend here, no?” She forced herself to meet his eyes.

She forced herself to meet his eyes.

“Thanks Raz, but I...” Runaril faltered. The prince hadn’t forbade her friendship with the Khajiit, had he? He just said she shouldn’t imitate his behaviour. “Wallowing in their filth,” he called it. *Was it such a crime, really?*

“What’s wrong, Runa?” The Khajiit spoke to her tenderly, looking concerned now. She supposed she must look a mess, with tears still streaked down her face and her hair tousled from running so fast.

The nickname only made her feel worse. Raz had given it to her fairly early on, soon after learning her name. It was the same name her parents had called her before they had passed away, leaving her with nobody in the world. Much like how she felt now.

She crumpled, crying against his arm. Raz patted her back awkwardly, gently murmurin to her until she felt strong enough to stop burying her face against him. She took a few shaky breaths, raised her face and called out a spell to hide her tears. It was a simple enough spell, an adapted and less lethal form of pyromancy that basically evaporated liquids as opposed to... well, burning someone alive or something.

Raz chuckled. “Ah, you magic types are all the same.”

“What?” She sniffed, confused.

“So theatrical. Raz thinks a handkerchief would have sufficed perfectly well.” Runaril giggled at that, and her friend looked more relaxed.

“Still, the sweet lady will not tell me what is wrong. I think I might have to drink and cry in a corner myself, now. You have wounded me terribly, not to trust me so.”
She let out a genuine laugh for the first time in over an hour. “Razum-dar, you are the most terrible man on Auridon.”

“Why not all of Tamriel?”

“Because you wouldn’t be allowed to set foot anywhere! They’d arrest you for... I don’t know...”

“All the crimes known to man, Raz has done, and done them well,” he smirked at her, sticking out his chest as he downed a whole bottle of mead. Runaril could only gape at him in wonder. He really was something else.

Feeling better, she took in a deep breath and looked at him with a serious expression. “Raz, the Altmer all have sticks up their asses.”

Raz let out a raucous laugh at that, leading some patrons to glare at him. “And bears shit in woods, no? Let me guess: they said I am a corrupting influence on your sweet innocent mind, that you aren’t acting the part of the magical demigod or whatever your people are, bla bla bla.” He shrugged, nonchalantly adding, “It’s true, though. I am a scourge on mankind. A defiler of men, women and people of good taste. I even cheat at cards sometimes.”

Runaril could only laugh at that, smirking at him. “I’d have to agree, there. I lost that match to you only because you were lying about your hand. A Falmer could have seen that I was about to sweep your money off the table.”

“Better for me that you didn’t, then. There is nothing worse in this world than an honourable person.”

“You only say that because you’re not.”

“Raz is wounded by that accusation! This one even rode naked on a guar through an Argonian temple for the sake of the Dominion. I am the most honourable servant to ever raise his sword for the Queen!”

“And a terrible liar, too.”

“But I did ride naked through –”

“Yes, and I bet you just did that for fun, anyway,” she grinned at him, and he mimed a stake going through his chest.

“Wicked minx,” he groaned theatrically, “you will be the death of me.”

Runaril would have given him what she hoped was a witty retort when another elf hurriedly ran into the tavern, scanning the room until he found their table. He made his way over to them as if the floor burnt his feet, looking rather uncomfortable at being surrounded by such open displays of drunkenness.

“The Queen has sent for her newest Eye to accompany her to Tanzelwil to fulfil her ritual obligations there,” he said, looking as if he wanted the ground to swallow him up.

A man on a neighbouring table made a crude gesture, bellowing, “If I go there will she do that for free?” The messenger looked aghast.

“Her Majesty is not –”
“Bothered by the drunken mutterings of her people, no,” Raz finished for him. “The lady will be on her way shortly.” The messenger looked relieved, escaping the tavern as quickly as he could with a very red face.

“Poor man. I think he may have been traumatised now.”

Raz rolled his eyes, snorting. “Honestly, is sex really such a big deal for your people? It’s not a crime when people want to have a pleasant moment together, you know.”

“It is when you imply your reigning monarch is a common prostitute, but no harm was done. Still, that poor man.” The two friends laughed at that. Runaril made her way over to the bartender, paid for the drinks and left the tavern with Raz following on by her side, vehemently defending the merits of casual encounters as a means to “bring the Dominion together.”

“I’m sure that woman thought differently when she saw you bedding her husband, though.” Runaril finished saddling her horse and led him away from the tavern’s stable.

“On the contrary! She ripped her clothes off, stood before us, naked as a baby, and joined in the fun!”

“Of course she did. Now, I have an important job to do, apparently.”

Raz gave her an elaborate salute as she mounted her horse. “Goodbye, fair lady! This one will mourn the moment of your passing until his dying day!”

Runaril rolled her eyes at him in mock exasperation. “Goodbye, Razum-dar.” She gave the horse a gentle nudge and rode quickly on the path to Tanzelwil, hoping further chaos wasn’t waiting for her there.

She sobered up immediately on seeing him standing there, the grin leaving her face like paint dripping down a wall. Runaril dismounted quickly, leaving her horse in the care of a servant as she made her way over to Naemon, offering him a curtsey as she came closer.

He looked just as awkward as she felt, shifting on his feet and avoiding eye contact. “I’m glad you’re here,” he said quietly. “My sister brought us here to perform a ceremonial ritual. It’s a bit of political theatre, really. Gain the blessings of the dead and all that rubbish.”

Runaril snorted at that. Maybe they weren’t so different, after all. “I didn’t realise the Queen was an actress, now.” She winced, remembering his words. “Ah, forgive me, Your Majesty –”

Naemon waved her apologies away before they had properly formed, looking at her properly now. “I... may have been hasty in my judgement, earlier,” he admitted slowly. “I realise now that there are... different ways to serve the Dominion. You are doing a very important job for the good of us all, and if it means that you choose to sidestep protocols every now and again...” He smirked at her. “Well, it’s different, I suppose, and that’s not necessarily bad. Though my wife would tan my hide if she heard me disavowing everything we supposedly hold sacred.”

Runaril laughed, and the sound made him instantly feel better. “I’ll mind myself in front of her, Your Majesty,” she said, grinning. “Does this mean I get to call you just Naemon, then? Err, out of her earshot.”

“I suppose so.” He shifted his stance, looking at her thoughtfully. “You are... special, I suppose.”
Runaril blushed at that. Naemon’s words were more or less in passing; they didn’t carry much significance, seeing as she was an Eye of the Queen and therefore more significant than the average elf. Maybe that did mean she was allowed to speak to him frankly. Still, the fact that he had said it made her feel.... something. Whatever it was, she couldn’t put her finger on, but it wasn’t unpleasant. It felt warm and fuzzy, as if she was being bathed in a gentle glow.

He coughed awkwardly, trying to fight a blush himself at her reaction. Perhaps his phrasing had given the words significance he wasn’t sure if he’d even intended. She was a beautiful woman, after all.

Beautiful?

“I’d best go and attend Her Highness’s wishes, then,” Runaril said nervously.

Naemon nodded in response. “True. Ayrenn was always the impulsive type. If danger doesn’t find her, she’ll seek it out and invite it home to dinner, so you’d better make sure she hasn’t got into trouble somewhere. Do be a loyal subject and see she survives, won’t you?”

“Of course, Your – er, Naemon.... ah, Your Highness?” She coughed, turning red. “I’ll get the hang of it eventually.” She gave him a hurried curtsey and went to search for the Queen. Runaril’s red face would be a strong enough beacon for his sister to find her, at any rate.

Naemon chuckled to himself. She had got flustered because of him, and for some reason the thought only amused him.

He found himself smiling and thinking about her long after she’d gone off, only he couldn’t understand why. He also didn’t understand why he was so thrilled to see her in one piece, unscathed and escorting his sister to safety.

Naemon felt like he was being cocooned in gentle warmth, and it made him feel happy and content. He had no name for this feeling, but it wasn’t an unpleasant one, so it didn’t bother him.

A mystery for another day, then.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry if it feels kind of fast-paced but this is definitely not a slow burn fic - I felt that the quick nature of their romance matched how such a thing might have been handled in game; depending on your playstyle, all the quests with Naemon before the incident can be completed easily in one sitting, so I obviously spread the story out for as long as I could. I felt that having everything move fast (and people noticing) would match how it could have played out, with the pair being constantly scrutinised and.... Yada yada yada. You get the picture. Just keep reading.
“You mean to tell me that my *wife* was the Veiled Queen? *You* killed my *wife*?” Naemon had never really raised his voice before, but he was shouting so loudly at Runaril that the whole island had probably heard it by now.

The thing that hurt most wasn’t that it had happened, he realised. He was confused and hurt, of course; his wife, his dear Estre was gone. The children they were going to have together would never be realised. He was left without a mate or a legacy to continue.

No, the thing that hurt the most was *she* had done it, but the news hadn’t come from her lips. Damn the Dominion to Oblivion, he had heard it from that *cat* of all people when he had scampered ahead of Runaril, his face as grave as stone, to break the news.

He had seen her in the distance. She looked so small and fragile, like a breeze might send her flying. Naemon had never seen Runaril like this. Admittedly, they had only known each other for a few months now, but he had come to view her as unbreakable, an indomitable force of sheer determination that would send their enemies cowering into submission.

To see her as weak as anyone else as weak as an Eye of the Queen, no an *Altmer*, even, should *never* be.... it was painful.

He didn’t know what to feel when she slumped in front of him, falling to her knees like a limp ragdoll, begging for his forgiveness. She had explained about the Veiled Heritance through gulping and crying, and her body was wracked with sobs. Runaril would not dare to even look at his feet, so she gazed at the ground beyond them, her vision blurred through her copious tears, as she tried her best to explain herself.

*I will be killed*, she realised, trembling. *He won't believe me. I will be executed for treason, and I will never see him again. My soul will be condemned to Oblivion, while he will ascend to Aetherius. I will be tortured by Daedra for my treason. I deserve it. I have robbed a man of his wife. I have killed a member of the royal family.*

She imagined her parents in the room with her, looking on at her with scorn. “Look at that fool child,” her mother would have said, looking at her like one might gaze at an insect before crushing it. “She thought she had all the answers, but in truth she had none at all. Now she will die, and she still refuses to see her own stupidity. Her stubbornness is her own undoing.”

The thought of her beloved parents learning about what she had done made it even worse. They would have been so unhappy. Would they have hated her, as surely Naemon did? Would they have forgiven her, as Naemon never would? Did she *deserve* it?

“All the apologies in Tamriel cannot excuse my crimes, Your Highness,” she wailed, ashamed of how desperate she sounded (and, worse, *felt*), “but I truly believed I was serving the Dominion in exposing this plot. I have saved your sister’s life, yes, but at the cost of your wife’s. It is still treason to kill royalty, and my excuses cannot save me now. I do not deserve your forgiveness, but I only beg a moment to pray for my soul before I am executed.”

It took a moment for Naemon to register what Runaril had said. *Executed, treason, killed....* The words raced around his head, and he could not comprehend the meanings behind them.

*Then* he understood. She believed she was condemned to death. The thought caused a surge of pain
to rise inside him, but he could not understand why. This woman had killed his wife, his beloved mate, and deserved no forgiveness. Like she said, she had killed royalty, and what greater treason was there against the Dominion than killing the wife of the monarch’s brother?

“You have committed treason against the Dominion,” he said, his voice sounding steadier than he felt. It gave off the appearance that he was calm and collected, in control of the situation. “You must be sentenced eventually.”

“I understand, Your Majesty,” Runaril gulped through her shuddering. Her face was so pale. He had an insane urge to scoop her in his arms and hold her close, patting her back and comforting her until she stopped her weeping, but her tears were seemingly endless. Every so often, she would offer a murmured prayer to the gods in a tone so low that he could not catch the words, but it was frequently broken by sobs.

Why do I want to do that? I don’t, not really. But the truth was that there was something oddly compelling about her. Over the months he had known her, he had been talking to her frequently (and only when Estre was absent), and come to learn a great deal about her. She was a free spirit with a permanently optimistic outlook on life, determined to embrace the here and now without getting bogged down in the trappings of the past. She could respect the important of their ancestors’ traditions, but that did not compel her to agree with them or even follow them all.

In short, she was fascinating, unlike any of his fellow kinsmen that he had ever met. She was a unique woman. Lately, his thoughts had drifted to her more often than not, and Estre had scolded him for daydreaming. She could not have known that he was imagining the sound of Runaril singing to him, smiling that sweet and genuine smile, and chattering excitedly as she detailed the latest assignment that Ayrenn had sent her on, and how – yes! Bam, just like that, right in the chest! – she had felled a seemingly insurmountable opponent. Her tendency to overdramatise and exaggerate was endearing rather than annoying, and her earnest enthusiasm was something he found touching. She had an adorable way of screwing up her nose when she thought she wasn’t being taken seriously, her brow wrinkling just so, and she would fold her arms and tap her foot while scowling until he had to bite his tongue to keep himself from laughing.

She was so different to Estre, who had never laughed loudly in public or private; who had followed social protocols and decorum so religiously that at sometimes he felt almost numb when they had to perform regal duties together; who would never have belched and then laughed it off, doubling over with a hearty chuckling and turning it into a comedic situation rather than turning crimson with shame; who would never have deemed it fitting to speak to those lower than her as equals, talking to them as welcomingly as one might to a long-lost friend, or who would have dared walk up to a prince and strike up a conversation with him while paying no heed to the thousand unwritten laws she was breaking.

That was how he had met her. Even then, he had admired her feistiness, her fierce independence, and had seen it as an amusing quirk and eccentricity that others of their kind would have shuddered at in revulsion, just as Estre had. Now, he could recognise it as one of her strengths, much like her compassion. She was quite unlike any Altmer that he had met, and he was coming to admire for that.

It was an admiration that came dangerously close to..... something else. It would have scandalised society and be greedily seized upon by the gossips of Tamriel, who would have pounced upon his shredded dignity like a lion to its prey. His name would be openly mocked, his reputation left destroyed in tatters and ruins. Likely, he would be expelled from the royal family and sent into exile. Ayrenn would no longer be able to acknowledge him as her younger brother and potential successor, if she even acknowledged his existence at all, for fear of a diplomatic incident. No doubt he would live the rest of his life far from the Summerset Isles, drowning his misery in taverns and inns all over
Tamriel until his liver finally granted him the death he had longed for.

As for Runaril? She would have been granted a similar fate, but less respect. Whore, they would call her if they felt polite. He shuddered to think of it. She deserved so much better.

That was why he stood paralysed, unable to think of what to do or say. Aside from Runaril’s sobbing, there was utter silence in the room. He had not spoken for too long, allowed the silence to drag itself out until it made him feel even worse, and now he could not even bring himself to utter her name.

*She is a traitor. She killed my wife.*

He couldn’t bring himself to order her death. It would have been liking tying a noose around his own neck, the rope only tightening on and on as he tried to imagine a world where she was no longer alive. *She is so young and innocent. She doesn’t deserve any of this.*

“Little brother,” came an unexpected voice. He looked over and saw Ayrenn walking over to him slowly. Her face showed all the grief that he felt. “Little brother, I am so sorry.” *How long had she been there? Had she heard everything? The way I yelled? He shuddered.*

She pulled him into an embrace. He was so tempted to just cry in Ayrenn’s arms and let the weight of his feelings loose onto somebody else, but he couldn’t. There were too many other people there, servants and gawkers and *her,* still weeping at his feet, utterly inconsolable.

The sound of her despair broke his heart in two.

Ayrenn knelt, wrapping an arm around Runaril. She gently raised the other woman’s face so that their eyes met. Runaril stopped crying, gulped and urgently rubbed her eyes with her sleeves. Her nose had been running, but his sister didn’t care; she tenderly wiped Runaril’s face clean until it was no longer snotty and tear-streaked, and the younger woman looked at her with such awe that Naemon felt guilty. *I should have done that. I should have comforted her.*

Only he hadn’t. He had just left her crying while he contemplated her death sentence.

It was becoming a lot harder to think straight.

Ayrenn helped Runaril up to her feet. The other woman looked shaken and scared and still would not look him in the eyes.

“You did a great service to the Dominion today, my friend,” Ayrenn whispered soothingly. “You are not traitor, and neither will you be punished. You performed your duty, and you did so admirably. While it is deeply regrettable that our High Kinlady had to die, you were instrumental in stopping a plot that would have risked all our lives. You are a hero.”

Her words seemed to comfort Runaril, because slowly, *achingly* slowly, she raised her eyes to met her Queen’s. “Thank you, Your Majesty,” she replied slowly. “I was... so scared. I thought I was going to die.”

Naemon felt as if daggers of burning ice had been shoved through his gut. *Of course* she was no traitor; she had been performing her duties to his sister as a loyal servant of the Dominion. *Of course* she wasn’t going to die; the Queen’s pardon would serve as testament to that. *Of course* everything was going to be okay.

“You would never die when I am here to testify for you,” his sister reminded her sternly. “Besides, my brother understands our duty to the Dominion. I have no words that can make Estre’s passing
easier, but it was what had to happen. She was consorting with Daedra, for crying out loud! I will not have my people under that kind of threat from anyone, not even my own family.” Ayrenn sighed. “Little brother, you understand, don’t you? You would not have killed our friend, would you?” It was almost like pleading.

Naemon felt sick to his very core. “Of course not, sister,” he said quickly, hoping she would not notice. “I will mourn my wife’s loss, but my first loyalty is to the Dominion. If what passed had to pass, and the Queen says it is so, then it is so.” He shook his head slowly.

“Sweet sister, would you leave us?” Ayrenn looked surprised but quickly masked her expression behind her regal, commandeering one again.

“Of course, Naemon,” she nodded. “I will give you your privacy.”

She gave him one last look before sweeping out of the room. The servants scattered like mice, hurrying to escape the thick atmosphere that his actions had created, and suddenly there were only two people left in the room.

Naemon... and Runaril.
She was no longer crying and had even managed a shaky smile at his sister’s comforting words. Still, the woman would not look him in the eye.

Ayrenn had made this look easy. How did he speak to her now? What on earth was he supposed to say?

Runaril stood there awkwardly, eyes downcast, making no attempt to move or speak. His own footsteps thundered about the room and his heartbeat felt ten times too loud.

_I have to do this. I have to apologise to her. I was wrong, just as I was the first time. Damn me, I am always wrong with her._

“Runaril,” he said softly, her name echoing in the silence. “Runaril, please look at me.”

She didn’t, only trembled slightly and shifted from one foot to the other. Still, she didn’t flee. _That’s something, at least_, he thought ruefully.

“Runaril,” he repeated, slightly louder this time. “I forgive you. I understand.” Her head snapped up at that, and she looked alarmed before settling into disbelief.

“I killed your wife,” she began slowly. “How is that something to just.... forgive? How can you stand there and be kind to me when I deserve none of this?”

_I need to get through to her somehow before I make her cry again._ He marshalled his thoughts as he tried to find a way to explain his feelings.

“I love you,” she said quickly, taking all the breath out of his lungs. “I know it’s wrong, I know, I know, but I do. I can’t stop. I can’t help it. Ever since I first met you, I couldn’t stop thinking about you. I didn’t understand my feelings at first, but now I do, and I don’t want to deny them any longer.” She gulped in a breath, blinking at him and swaying on her feet slightly. “I killed Estre to save the Dominion, but immediately afterwards, all I could think of was you. I killed your wife, but all I could think of was how much I loved you, how much I so desperately wanted you. Tell me to leave the Isles and I will, I promise, but please just tell me how you feel. I beg you, Naemon.” Her voice began to tremble. “Kill me, kill me, I don’t care, but just tell me whether you could ever feel the same.” Her eyes looked dangerously close to watering.

He heard a croaking sound and realised it was coming from him. Completely unbidden, a smile sprung to his lips. “I do,” he whispered, so quietly he barely heard it himself. “I love you, Runaril.”

He pulled her to him, not caring in that moment whether he was being rough or not, and kissed her. He kissed her with the frenzied desperation of a man finding an oasis in a parched desert, hoping against all hopes that it would save him.

Runaril gasped in surprise against his mouth and he felt tears fall down her cheeks anew, but she gripped him just as tightly as he held her. Naemon’s left hand scrambled into her hair – her beautiful, golden hair; oh, how he had _ached_ to touch it – and tangled his fingers tightly between strands while his right hand pressed into the hollow of her back. Her hands clasped themselves around his neck, and she kissed him with all the fervour of a woman ascending to sainthood.

Her mouth tasted so sweet and _wonderful_, like honey, cloves and fragrant herbs. Her tongue was warm and wet against his as she eagerly pressed herself against him, and for a moment he was
content to simply explore her mouth.

He had never felt such pleasure before. Kissing Estre had never been like this. Estre had never moaned in delight and bit his lower lip; she had never swiped her tongue over his or whispered sweet nothings in his ear, groaning as he ground his hips into her. She had certainly never wantonly rolled her hips against his groin, gripping his skin so tightly that it would certainly leave red marks.

The clung to each other like drowning men for a few moments longer – and it felt like gazing into the paradise of Aetherius itself – before eventually parting.

Naemon and Runaril looked at each other in surprise.

“Do you feel any guilt about this?” she asked him after a short silence, her face completely serious. “We don’t have to take this any further if –”

“No,” he said resolutely. Estre was nothing like her – she had been cold, a beauty only on the surface but icy underneath. Runaril was like the burning sun, and he could feel the warmth of her love for him even without words.

His marriage had been an arranged one, and though they had been married for a while, he had never felt the spark between them that the novels and bards spoke of. He had loved her more as a brother than a husband, he realised, and she had certainly never treated him like a lover. Their passions had been more out of duty than emotion, and he had always felt like an empty shell afterwards. She would turn away, muttering a quick ‘Goodnight’ to her husband, and fell asleep as if nothing had passed between them. He would lie awake for hours, feeling used and tainted, and sleep would only come to him out of sheer, desperate exhaustion.

He realised with a start that he had not made love to Estre for five whole years; she had not seemed bothered by that at all. Naemon wondered if she had ever cared for him at all beyond the superficiality that pervaded their marriage. In her final moments, had she thought of him at all?

He explained all of this to Runaril as best he could, adding, “We did not have a connection. There was barely an emotional one, and certainly not a physical one. We were never in love at all, not like I am with you.” Naemon blushed. He had never felt like such a clumsy youth until now. He was sure he was getting all the words wrong, somehow. Did she understand?

Runaril nodded slowly, letting all of what Naemon had told her sink in. She absorbed the information and thought it over.

“I understand,” she said eventually, “but we will have to be careful. We cannot let anybody learn about this until a respectful time after her death has occurred.” She paused. “At least two or three months after her funeral, then. Do you think that would suffice?”

“The busybodies of Auridon would have a field day,” he snorted, “but I can weather it. It might raise eyebrows, but there wouldn’t be any protesting. With our numbers so few compared to other races, any chance for a successful mating would be seized, regardless of propriety.” Both elves blushed, and Naemon felt like a tongue-tied fool. “Still, ah, our relationship would be sanctioned.”

“That’s all that matters then, isn’t it?” Runaril managed to recover herself more quickly than he did. Naemon was still thinking of her hips rolling against him moments ago, and was now struggling to maintain his composure. “I suppose I’ll... see you around, then.”

“I suppose you will.” The urge to kiss her nearly overtook him, but the time they were spending together was verging on seeming suspicious now. He didn’t want anybody to start thinking certain
things just yet, even if those certain things weren’t technically wrong.

The two elves exchanged shy smiles before Runaril walked away slowly. She couldn’t resist the urge to look over her shoulder at him one last time before opening the door, and the broad smile that met her was mirrored on her own face.

“Goodbye, my love,” he murmured, and it took all her resilience not to leap into his arms there and then. She blushed and strode away as quickly as possible, hoping nobody would ask why she was grinning like an idiot.

For the first time in years, Naemon was able to sleep soundly without fearing his own inadequacies, and he fell asleep with a smile, dreaming of Runaril’s laughter.
She saw him again in Elden Root after Ayrenn had sent her there to investigate the tensions and smooth out the diplomatic situation arising before she arrived there personally to conduct rituals in honour of King Camoran and the Mane. Her reasoning, to Runaril at least, was that she wanted to unite all the three races of the Dominion, and in doing so she had to respect the leadership that the two other races held in esteem.

“The Dominion can only be a Dominion,” Ayrenn told her, “when we all learn to think as one. We will exchange information and honour our traditions while respecting and learning about those of our fellow races, and through mutual trust we can learn to live in harmony. If in uniting our Dominion I have to sit through ceremonies for my whole life, then I would glad do so. I need to show my people that I am willing to listen to them and that what they see as important, I can too. I am no tyrant to quash other cultures; instead, I want us to grow together.”

Runaril had quirked an eyebrow at that. Though she understood and shared the Queen’s goals, she had thought that her monarch had come across as more than a little optimistic. Maybe even naive. Then again, she had only been Queen for three years. A learning curve was to be expected.

At the sight of him standing nearby, all thoughts of politics flew out of her head. She had not seen him in three months – the two had agreed that it would be best diplomatically to keep their distance since after Estre’s funeral and the public acknowledgement of their relationship in order to allow Altmeri society to relax into it.

Sure enough, there had been scandalised nobles running about in shock, each scrambling to outdo the other in protesting to Ayrenn about how this relationship would apparently destroy all their ancestors had held dear; she had listened politely enough before summoning a public council featuring Naemon and Runaril, and the two had explained their feelings until they were blue in the face, justifying them at each turn when someone raised their ugly head in complaint. All present were given a chance to speak, meaning that the meeting took about four hours in total. Thank you, democracy, for killing my legs. Still, eventually even the most hardened Altmer had had to acknowledge that their love was sincere and the fact that it held the Queen’s blessing was enough to quash any further protests, and Estre was no longer mentioned.

Within three weeks of the council, a man had scandalised society by wearing an Amulet of Mara at his husband’s funeral, and talking about Runaril and Naemon was no longer a fashionable shock anymore. They were accepted, and that was all that mattered.

“Are you happy, little brother?” Ayrenn had asked him one evening once all the fuss had died down.

“Yes,” Naemon had told her, and he had meant it, too. Runaril had filled a hole in his life that he had not even realised existed up until then. “I understand that Mother and Father wanted me married after you disappeared; they wanted a legitimate heir to carry on the family name, so they found Estre.” This was the first time he had ever talked about his feelings in the marriage to someone other than
Runaril, and he sighed before continuing.

“I didn’t ever dislike her, but she was more of a sister to me than a wife, and I never loved her romantically. Then you turned up out of the blue after all those years and I was.... stuck. I was still married to her. I couldn’t just leave her, but I didn’t want to stay with her either. Then Runaril appeared, and everything changed.”

“For the better?” Ayrenn asked with a soft smile, already knowing the answer.

“Definitely for the better, sweet sister. Finally, I feel like I’m no longer living in a cage. I can be with the one I love, the one I truly love, and she makes me happy. I haven’t felt like this for years, you know.” He grinned wolfishly at her. “You know, I was considering asking her to marry me.”

Ayrenn gasped and then hugged her brother tightly while he squirmed in embarrassment. “Sister, I can’t breathe –”

“I’m so happy for you both!” she grinned, and her eyes glistened with tears. “I know lately it’s been hard for you, and I know how much Runaril has helped you. You’ve become a better man, little brother, and I’m proud of you.”

Naemon struggled in her grasp as his sister’s tears flowed freely. I seem to be in a habit of making women cry. “Ayrenn, I –”

“I understand if you’d prefer something a little.... quieter, away from all the ceremony and stares. There’s a small shrine to Mara in Elden Root, and couples go there with their rings and pray for Mara’s blessings.”

“All you have to do is exchange your vows and rings, and then you’re married! As simple as that! I think it would suit the two of you perfectly,” she grinned.

“I CAN’T BREATHE, AYRENN.” She let go of him quickly and Naemon gasped for breath, massaging some feeling back into his body. He waited until the wheezing stopped before looking at his sister with gratitude.

“I can’t tell you how much this means to me, sister,” he said, clasping her hand in his own. The two siblings shed tears of joy together, smiling and laughing. “I can’t thank you enough.” He gulped. “I really do love her. I love her, Ayrenn.”

“I know, brother, I know,” she smiled at him fondly, patting him on the back comfortingly. “Now, go and ask her before she forgets your name.” At Naemon’s horrified expression, Ayrenn only laughed and laughed until even he had to smile a little.

The memory warmed him as he travelled to Elden Root two months later, where he knew she was going to come soon. He had to oversee the Khajiit embassy being built anyway, and he hadn’t been there in over a year at any rate, not since the plans were being drawn up. He had no idea what it would look like now, or how much progress had been made.

In truth he hadn’t even so much as thought of Grahtwood at all until he realised he would see her there too.

Runaril. The thought of her made him happy again, but he had missed her so badly. Would she still feel the same after three months apart?
He counted on his fingers. They had been together... *six months*. Was that too short a time to know someone before proposing? Naemon felt terrified now as Elden Root grew closer in his carriage. It had felt like such a great idea while chatting to Ayrenn in the palace, but faced with the real possibility of rejection, his insides were rapidly turning into blocks of ice.

*Auri-El, give me strength. Don’t let me lose my nerve before I see her. Don’t let me lose my words when I ask her. Please don’t make her say no.*

That was the prayer he uttered desperately each night, murmuring the words so frequently before he fell asleep that he was nearly certain he probably spoke them while he dreamt too.

Naemon was just so terrified of losing her. It had been difficult enough in being able to form a romantic relationship with her; now that he had it, and was no longer being judged, he was afraid that something else would go wrong to mar their joy.

*What if something happens during the wedding? Or afterwards, when we’re married? What if one of us dies shortly afterwards? What if she leaves me?*

The thought hurt him more than he could express in words, and it haunted his nightmares. He became more fervent in his evening prayers, even saying them in the morning after waking now. He addressed them to all the gods now, not just *Auri-El*: he said them each in turn to *Trinimac*, *Magnus*, *Syrabane*, *Y’ffre*, *Mara* and *Xarxes*, no matter how long it took – one of them at least would hear his pleas, surely, and grant him the happiness he so desperately desired.

Then the day came when she was due to arrive in Elden Root and seek an audience with King Camoran. He stood in the throne room, more nervous than he had ever been in his whole life, and shook like a leaf.

*Runaril, please don’t say no.*

He closed his eyes at one point, too scared to see what might await him. He was so afraid.

“*NAEMON!*” came a loud cry from the other end of the room. He opened his eyes with a start and saw her just as everyone else in the room turned around to see the cause of the commotion. She had clearly run all the way to the throne room. She scanned it anxiously, searching for him, and then her eyes found his.

*Runaril.*

A huge smile lit up her face. “*Naemon!*” she cried again, running towards him as fast as she could. Runaril threw herself into his arms with such force that he nearly fell over until he steadied himself, clutching her tightly to him as he adjusted her legs around his hips. She kissed him with such force that he thought his mouth might fall apart, and he didn’t care that the whole throne room was staring at them.

*She loves me*, he thought with dizzying relief. *She loves me.*

For a long time, the only sounds were that of the two enthusiastically kissing each other. Then came a cough, sounding both awkward and amused, and both Naemon and Runaril suddenly became aware of their audience.

He let her down from his arms slowly but took her hand in his. *Let them laugh. I dare them. I do not care, because I love her.*

There was a brief moment of silence before King Camoran laughed down at the pair. They
Naemon still kept Runaril’s hand in his.

“It’s nice to see such an enthusiastic reception,” the Bosmer chuckled. His grin was as wide as an ocean, and he had a hearty laugh. “I wonder why the ladies never do that to me.” He laughed again, thoroughly enjoying the spectacle.

Runaril shifted nervously, and Naemon squeezed her hand for courage. She briefly explained the situation about the embassy, and the King told her it was under Ambassador Tarinwe’s direction.

“Your lover here might be a prince and technically overseeing it, but all the decisions made about it are hers,” he said. “She has the final say. Naemon is more... a courtesy for your people. Two Altmer in charge...” He laughed derisively.

To his credit, Naemon didn’t react to the jibe. Instead, he only thanked Camoran for his gracious reception.

“Oh, no, I think that was more down to the pair of you than me,” the king laughed. He seemed delighted by anything that came out of his mouth.

*Is this the right moment?* Naemon was wracked by indecision. Perhaps there was no right moment. Perhaps he just had to ask, and hope for the best.

So he did. “King Camoran Aeradan, would you be able to direct me to the Shrine of Mara?” Runaril’s reaction was a vision to behold.
Naemon was dragging her by the hand now, walking as if his life depended on it. Perhaps it did - he looked as if he'd combust if he didn't get her to that damn shrine in time.

Runaril laughed. "You know, when people get married, normally they ask the other person first if they want to get married before they start the ceremony." That made him stop, and she nearly fell over from the abrupt ceasing of his long, insistent strides. The stricken expression on his face only made her stomach churn.

"I'm sorry, my love," he said quietly, a shadow passing over him. "I suppose I was a little... hasty." Naemon coughed, embarrassed. She could see the pink flush on his golden cheeks and tried to stifle a smile. "I just couldn't bear to be parted from you any longer. It was torture without you, and I... I want...."

This was the moment. This was the moment his words failed him, and she would laugh in his face and leave him. He couldn't bear to look at her in the eyes any longer.

"Naemon," she murmured, stroking his cheek reassuringly. He tried to stop the burning heat in his face, but it was far too late for that now, so he just hoped that he didn't look like the blushing idiot he was imagining. "I love you. I love you and nobody else." She chuckled. "Our romance might be... fast-paced by other people's standards, but really, when has that ever stopped anyone in love from doing what they want? Let them say what they want. At least I would be your lawful wife, and nobody on Tamriel would be able to doubt it by then."

He stood frozen, letting her words wash over him. They were calming him down, but right now he couldn't react. He'd near enough had a heart attack just a few seconds ago, and his mind was still reeling from all the horrific possibilities he'd thought up in that time.

"Naemon." Her voice was as kind and sweet as ever, but its tone had become a little more insistent. He blinked, trying to focus once more. "It's okay. Everything's going to be okay." She let her hands fall from his face but took his right in her left again. "I believe, my love, there was going to be a wedding if we get to that shrine in time."

Everything's going to be okay. She was no Estre. Society would always call her the other High Kinlady, the second one, and perhaps they'd say the one who didn't deserve it at all. But Ayrenn had given her blessing, hadn't she? Their queen, no less. What were the spiteful words of gossiping and cold people against that? Did they matter more than his wife-to-be?

He squeezed her hand and led her further on, following Camoran's directions and trying desperately to rid himself of all the doubts in his heart.
The Shrine of Mara was certainly a beautiful place. Small and understated, simple, surrounded by flowers and glowing with a soft light that left him feeling more relaxed than he had in a long time. It was either Mara’s divine gaze or some ancient magic, but Naemon certainly wasn’t complaining.

At least, not at the shrine. It was the person standing next to it who made him raise an eyebrow.

"Razum-dar!" Runaril cried out happily, running to hug her friend. He was her mentor in the Eyes, wasn’t he? The cat looked very familiar to him. Naemon felt as if he’d seen him before but hadn’t really noticed him all that much.

"Yes, my sweet?" the cat - Razum-dar, apparently - replied with a honeyed accent, smiling fondly at her. "I hear this is a day for good tidings. Your Raz is going to be at a wedding, no?"

How on earth had he known? Naemon felt like screaming. That damned man knew far too much about far too much, and his winking familiarity was starting to rankle him.

Runaril blushed while the cat laughed. "I just wish I’d known about it earlier," she joked. "Naemon didn’t give me time to buy a nice dress or anything." Oh. Perhaps his spur-of-the-moment decision hadn’t been the best, after all. Would she regret it?

"Well, you can be glad that someone came prepared, then." The cat gestured to a small wagon that had been discreetly parked not far from where he stood. "I have a lovely dress for a lovely lady, along with jewelry fit for Ayrenn herself. And for the good man, a good outfit, no?" Naemon hesitantly walked over to inspect the goods he was gesturing at.

His jaw dropped. The man hadn’t been lying. Runaril will feel like a queen today. His own outfit wasn’t too shabby either - finely embroidered in the Dominion’s colours with a small eagle sewed on his chest to the right, and a long cloak that felt like velvet.

Words were going to fail him again. He had no idea how to thank this stranger for such kindness. It was clear the man cared a great deal for Runaril, and he was eternally grateful for how the cat had gone to such efforts to make a special day just that much better for the pair. Still, he felt suspicious. How had he known about Naemon’s plans before he had even publicly announced them? Worse, where had the clothes come from?

Perhaps he’d been listening in to the conversation with Ayrenn. It wouldn’t surprise him in the least. The cat was a loyal employee of his sister’s, and subtlety and intense familiarity with every facet of her life was just a routine part of the job. Cats were sneaky creatures by their very nature.

He cleared his mind of such thoughts. The man had done all of this while expecting nothing, and all he could do was thinking endlessly about the racist beliefs that a lesser man would have agreed with.

"I.... thank you, Razum-dar," he said finally, shaking the cat - no, Razum-dar's - hand.

The other man didn't seem fazed at all by his hesitation, only laughing again. "This one lives to serve the Dominion, no? Even the Queen's little brother, at that. One could say it is just one of my duties to prepare him for his wedding, then." He smiled at him, and Naemon couldn’t help smiling back. His previous irritation and suspicion was fading - there was something about the man's cheerful nature that was oddly infectious.

"I can change sweet Runa into her clothes. You will have plenty of time to play around later, no?" Raz chuckled as Runaril blushed but smiled at him gratefully all the same. She followed him over behind the wagon, leaving Naemon alone with his new wedding clothes and an embarrassing lack of places to change behind.
"My sweet, you are going to be married today," Raz purred as he untied her hair, loosening it from the long braid she had tied it in for convenience that morning. His claws sometimes got tangled in it as he brushed it smooth, and his mumbled cursing and apologies only made her giggle.

"I am," she smiled, marvelling at it. She wondered if her parents would have approved of Naemon and decided that there was no question about it.

Raz went about unlacing her bodice, helping her out of the dress slowly and bundling it up in a far corner of the wagon. She was left in her petticoat and breast band, and by instinct moved her hands up to cover her chest. Her friend smiled and gently removed them.

"Do not fear, Runa, this one has seen such things many times before," he laughed. "Besides, I would never ogle at a sweet friend on her wedding day." He pointed back inside the wagon. "I have even found better underclothes for you."

"Better.... underclothes?" Runaril was utterly lost now. How would they be any better or worse than what she was already wearing?

Her confusion must have shown plain on her face, because Raz only chuckled again. "Ah, sweet Runa, an innocent bride." He scooped up a pile of something white and nestled them close to him, carefully making sure not to crush them. He set them down beside his feet and held up something.

"Do you know what this is?"

"A.... corset?" The women of higher Altmeri society wore them often, she knew that, because they were always wearing those long dresses that went down to their ankles and never had to actually move much. Runaril had been fending for herself from a young age, and armour had seemed like a better-fitting and safer alternative for someone who spent months moving around in the wilderness with just a staff and two daggers to defend her, hunting game and eating wild berries to feed herself.

Still, Runaril had never actually seen one before, let alone worn one. She had no idea how it worked, and it looked complicated. Lacy, but lethal with that amount of ribbon ties.

"Yes," Raz said slowly, "but this is no ordinary corset. This is a wedding corset." Runaril was still clearly confused, so he sighed. "It is designed to enhance the figure. These panels will pad out and push your breasts higher -" he pointed for emphasis "- while the sides are designed to emphasise your own figure. Your curves will be amplified. Your husband will not be able to resist you."

Runaril was blushing furiously now. "You have.... no shame, Razum-dar," she managed to get out finally, although her voice squeaked. He only gave her a mocking look in response before holding up pants. At least they looked normal enough, she thought in relief.

"These little ribbon things descend from the underwear to your thighs. You just hook them onto the front here and here, then put them on. They don't actually really serve a purpose, other than holding up stockings," he admitted with a dismissive hand wave, "but they are designed for their amorous effect. I can assure you that Naemon will go utterly wild when he sees them."

"I.... see." It was becoming increasingly hard to look at the pile head on now. "But why is there a knife?"

Raz gave her a wicked look. "Your groom will be far too excited to untie all those nice ribbons on the corset himself," he explained with a mischievous look, "and it adds to the overall lust if he can
simply tear them apart and rip it off you.” He held up the corset once more and mimed tearing the
ribbons to shreds, winking at her. That might have made sense to somebody more worldly in such
sexual matters, but Runaril could only nod and take his word for it, trying not to gulp too obviously
in surprise at how little she knew about any of this.

"Does that mean I...have to... take this off??" She indicated her underwear, too embarrassed by now
to even trust herself to speak clearly. Raz arched his brow and looked at her in disbelief, so she
stammered an apology. He pulled down her petticoat and gestured to her to remove her own
underwear. For once, he turned away, allowing her a modicum of privacy until she coughed to signal
that she was ready.

Her desperate attempt to cover herself with her hands did not go respected by Razum-dar. "Sweet
Runa," he said with amused exasperation, "I am your friend and you are getting married. Do you
really think I would be lusting over you at this moment?"

"I suppose not." Nervously, she removed her hands as he gathered up the corset and left her to slide
the pants up herself. She felt more relieved, but she still couldn't help noticing the way he gave her a
sweeping and admiring look out of the corner of her eye as she bent over. Still, by the time she had
straightened up, he was looking at her normally and holding out the corset for her.

"Breathe normally," he advised. "If you try to suck in your stomach or anything like that, you'll just
make yourself nervous and uncomfortable." He held it in place while he deftly did up the stays at the
back. He didn't knot or tangle any of the ribbons, tying them neatly and efficiently, and Runaril had
to wonder with how experienced he seemed how many times he had done this before. Or undid them, for that matter.

"Now, put on your stockings and hold them there until I put the suspenders on." She tried not to let
her hands shake as she clumsily slid them up her legs, impressed at how soft they felt.

She realised in a heart beat that she was wearing actual silk. The corset was made of satin, and all the
ribbons were silk as well. This was only her underwear so far, but she was still marvelling at how
expensive it all felt. Runaril would never be able to thank Raz enough for bankrupting himself like
this just for one day.

She told him so as he stood back, making sure the stockings were held in place with a quick glance.
He shook his head, smiling and telling her it was nothing before handing her an elegant pair of white
leather shoes to slide on. They had pearl drops on the toes with a white ribbon bow, and they were
fancier than anything she had ever worn before. Still, she didn't want to get her feet dirty before she'd
even put the dress on, so she quickly but carefully slid them on, wondering how he'd managed to get
a perfect fit. Did he measure my feet while I was sleeping at Vulkhel Guard or something? The
thought left her surprisingly unfazed - it just seemed like something he'd do.

"Now, for the dress." He helped her step into it and pulled it up her. The dress felt silky as well,
loose enough to hint at her figure and not give any clues about the strange underwear Raz had roped
her into wearing. It had a gold brocade embroidered shawl with a sweet floral pattern, matching the
veil Raz brought out for her and carefully placed in her hair under a crown of white roses. They
even smelt good. Was that a spell, or was he just terrifyingly well-prepared?

Slowly but not haltingly, he made up her face with a golden powder that made her skin glow,
smoothing in bronze powder to her eyelids and a subtle rose-coloured tint to her lips. He evened out
the look with a few strokes of his hand before standing back to admire his handiwork, shooting her a
broad smile.

"High Kinlady Runaril," he whispered in awe, "you look like Mara herself. A true vision."
She had no idea how she looked, but Runaril knew how she felt. It was as if Razum-dar had elevated her to some higher level of being entirely; a goddess wasn't too far off from how she was feeling right now.

"Thank you," she told him, her throat choking slightly in gratitude and moving to hug him. He gently pushed her away - "Your makeup, sweet Runa, would not survive that" - but squeezed her shoulder affectionately.

"Time to see our dashing groom, no?" With those seven words, Razum-dar led Runaril out from behind the wagon and into Naemon's awestruck gaze.

Her husband looked stunning. That was the first thought she had. He wore a scarlet doublet with a golden eagle embroidered into his chest and a long, flowing golden cloak. His trousers were a pale blue, and his shoes were red and gold. Naemon wasn't wearing a crown like her or a circlet, but he had clearly tried to hurriedly brush his hair with his fingers all the same. The sight of him made her smile and want to burst with joy.

Naemon could only look at his wife-to-be with awe. She looked so beautiful, like a true goddess, as she smiled shyly at him. He wanted to cry at how beautiful she looked and how unworthy he felt of her in that moment. He wondered if she could hear how loudly his heart was beating, or if she could hear his thoughts urging him to sweep her in his arms and kiss the air from her lungs.

Raz chuckled at their expressions. "A very handsome couple on a very pretty day," he smiled, leaning against a tree as he watched them nervously approach each other. Naemon took Runaril's hands in his own and felt his eyes water.

"I can't thank you enough, Razum-dar," Naemon choked out, barely able to blink the tears from his eyes. "You have made me the happiest of men."

"Ah, I did this for Runaril. You should hear the way she talks about you." His wife-to-be laughed, and Naemon felt his heart soar at the sound. "Still, you don't look too shabby either." The man cleared his throat and gestured back to his wagon. "This one should probably be going through - leave the marriage to those getting married, no?" He chuckled and began to turn away when Runaril pulled him back, her face insistent.

"Raz, you went to all this effort for us. Don't pretend to be all shy about it. I know you want to see this more than anybody." She giggled. "You've earnt it."

Naemon could have sworn the man looked teary-eyed at that, but the cat's happy, easy-going smile was back in the blink of an eye as he made his way closer. "It would be my honour," he murmured. "But I will still lean against this tree, no? There is a reputation to uphold." Runaril could only laugh again at that, and Naemon found an even bigger smile easing its way onto his face.

"Runaril," he said, making sure she was looking at him before she continued. "Do you agree to be bound to me from this day forward, in joy and in hardship, in prosperity and in poverty, in sickness and in health, to love and to honour, now and forever?"

"I do," she smiled at him, shyly repeating his vow. "Naemon, do you agree to be bound to me from this day forward, in joy and in hardship, in prosperity and in poverty, in sickness and in health, to love and to honour, now and forever?"
"I do." The pair shared a beaming smile, and even Raz sniffed quietly from where he stood, trying and failing to subtly wipe his eye. Naemon took out the rings he had secretly brought with him that morning and slid a golden band onto Runaril's finger. Both rings had a sapphire in the centre, and Naemon couldn't help crying a little bit as he saw her wearing her wedding ring.

"Under the gaze of Trinimac, Magnus, Syrabane, Y’ffre, Xarxes, Mara, Stendarr, Phynaster, and Xen, I pledge my vows," he said, his voice shaking slightly as he looked into her eyes. "May Auri-El bless our bond."

Runaril slipped the ring onto his finger and looked at him with all the love he had feared he would never deserve. "Under the gaze of Trinimac, Magnus, Syrabane, Y’ffre, Xarxes, Mara, Stendarr, Phynaster, and Xen, I pledge my vows. May Auri-El bless our bond."

That was all Naemon needed to hear. He gazed at his wife - my wife! - for a second, admiring her in the afternoon glow, before grabbing her to him. Their faces were inches from each other, and she smiled as he pulled her face up to his and kissed her. I love you, I love you, I love you. He hoped she could feel that.

They withdrew with a gasp, and Runaril looked tearful herself now. "I have a husband," she whispered to nobody in particular, before crying. She had such a big smile on her face that Naemon felt woozy just looking at it.

Raz coughed awkwardly when Runaril stopped crying. "You can thank your friend now for the best gift of all," he told them, shyly gazing at the floor while holding out a key. "This one has booked you a room at the Outside Inn until tomorrow. I thought you might want to enjoy your wedding night away from the Altmer Embassy apartments. Just, uh, the two of you, no?"

He couldn't stop Runaril hugging him this time. "Thank you thank you thank you," she squealed at him, giving him an enthusiastic hug. Razum-dar looked surprised but flattered as he returned the hug until Runaril stepped away.

"I must be going now. Queen's business. I suppose I will see the newlyweds tomorrow, unless they are too busy." He gave them a wink and a smile before running off to.... who knows where.

Naemon looked at his new wife with a nervous but happy smile. "We should make our way there, shouldn't we?"

Runaril met his smile with one of her own. "I suppose we should.... husband." The two of them laughed, overcome by relief and sheer joy. Naemon scooped Runaril into his arms and carried her in the direction of the tavern, his heart beating like a drum all the way there.

Chapter End Notes

(I'm really sorry that I haven't been updating for a while, but I've been really busy with work and IRL stuff! I hope this makes up for it...)
Chapter Notes

Things are going to get a bit... ahem, *steamy* here... *(°_ʖ°)*

They found the tavern without much difficulty - it had a very distinctive looking appearance, and they were met with knowing glances after Naemon had asked for directions. He was barely able to focus on putting one foot in front of the other. Runaril was soft and light in his arms, and the thought of what they would be doing shortly made it almost unbearable. Truth be told, he wouldn't have cared about lying on the grass and taking her there and then, but this was their wedding day. He wanted to give her the best night he possibly could, and that didn't include jeering from onlookers.

Gulping and doing his best to not imagine her naked body too much like all the times he had before, he made his way to the tavern and walked up to the upper level, where he was met by a cheery looking innkeeper. The place seemed surprisingly deserted. Naemon looked around him and realised with a start that they were the only three people in the whole building.

The man noticed his surprise and laughed. "I'm guessing by your clothes you must be... ah, Naemon and his blushing bride." He smiled at them, ticking something on a scroll. "You are most welcome here, and you have my hearty congratulations."

"Were you... expecting us?" Runaril sounded just as confused as her husband felt. He gently let her down, putting a protective arm around her, and they both looked at the man for an explanation.

"Oh, yes!" The man mockingly slapped his head. "But where are my manners? I am Fradion, and welcome to the Outside Inn. We're outside the Elder Tree but we're inside Elden Root, so I thought the name was clever." He laughed again. "I was told by a cat fellow to close the inn to the public for today. He paid me handsomely for it, too. Said I should only admit the two of you and to give you the best room in the place, along with your own key." He chuckled as he pointed to the door. "You've got yourself a very considerate friend there, I may add. He told me to serve you complimentary food and drinks, so I left a tray of refreshments in your room by the bed. Truth be told, I had no idea when you'd be coming, so it might be a little cold." Fradion gave them an apologetic smile. "Should I warm it for you? It'll be no trouble, I assure you."

"No," Naemon said quickly. His wife looked at him, startled. "It's no trouble to us. I... uh, we won't trouble you any further tonight."

Fradion shot Naemon a look. They seemed to be in on something together. *What is going on?* "I see. Well, I wish you two a good night's rest." He laughed and winked at the pair. "I'll be on the lower floor if you need me, by the fire. I won't be troubling you there, either."

Naemon looked grateful. "You have my thanks." He beamed down at Runaril and scooped her up in his arms quickly again, making her gasp in surprise. "We will be... retiring now. Goodnight." He quickly made his way to their room, opening and closing the door with a slam. Fradion simply laughed and shook his head as he made his way downstairs.
The pair stood against the wall like that for a while. Naemon was panting against her throat and Runaril guiltily worried if she'd made him exert himself too much by carrying her all this way. His eyes were a lot darker than normal, and he looked like he was strained by something.

"Naemon, my love, you can put me down," she said quietly. "I don't want to hurt you." He blinked in surprise. "You're panting," she explained. "I thought you might be tired."

He did put her down at that but blushed. She wondered what she'd said wrong, so she changed the topic. "Why don't we have some mead?" Runaril gestured to the tray Fradion had helpfully left out for them and walked over. The corset wasn't too tight but it made her feel strange while walking, so she was forced to sway instead. She sat down on the bed and took a glass in her hand, sipping it and sighing in relief.

"It tastes really good, Naemon," she told him with a huge smile, but his expression wasn't focusing on her words at all. He had a hungry look in his eyes, and she wondered if he'd noticed that her hips were swaying. She wondered what was wrong, when -

*Oh.*

*OH.*

That's what it was.

*Ah.*

Runaril blushed. She hoped he wouldn't see how clueless she was in this respect. She'd never kissed anyone before him, and she'd certainly never gone any further than that. Would he be able to tell?

Still, he deserved something more than this. He clearly wanted what was coming very badly, but she had no idea how to initiate it, or even explain that she didn't know how to do any of it, and would he please show her, and was it strange to be a virgin when your husband wasn't?

She finished the mug in a long swig, wiped her mouth and looked at him. The last time they had kissed more passionately, she had been moving based off instinct. Something in her had told her what she was supposed to do back then, and something in her now was telling her that she'd feel less nervous with the mead in her system.

Runaril stood up and made her way over to her husband. His eyes swept over her from head to toe, and she gulped slightly before smiling. *He wants me.* Raz's choice of outfit was clearly working, and he hadn't even seen those weird things underneath yet. *He loves me, and he wants me.* She could take courage in that.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him on the lips gently. His eyes opened wide before he returned her kiss, gentle at first, yet it wasn't long before the tone became something else altogether. He gripped her tightly around the waist and began pushing her in the direction of the wall, slamming her against it. She gasped a little in surprise, but it didn't hurt. Instead, it made something in her react. It felt *good.*

He kissed her deeper, moving around her mouth with his tongue and making her moan as he ran his hands down her sides. He moved his knee in between her legs and wrapped his hand in her hair, stroking down her back with the other.

He brought his lips from hers with a slight smacking sound and looked at her before moving to her
throat. He began sucking on the skin, blowing on it and licking in small circles with his tongue before biting down.

Runaril moaned again. This was some kind of magic, clearly. She'd never felt like this in her whole life.

He bit and sucked at the same area before moving lower to her collarbone, where he sucked and bit again until she nearly buckled at the knees. He was whispering her name against her skin in a breathy voice, and his hand had gone from her back to her buttocks, squeezing them insistently. She wondered how Naemon would react when the dress fell off, and decided she wanted to see.

"Husband," she smiled at him, trying to sound as seductive as she could. "Do you think you could help me out of this?" She turned around and rested her hands against the wall, smirking. Naemon pulled the dress over her head and shoulders so quickly that she was scared for a second he'd torn it, then decided she couldn't care less.

He moaned when she turned around, his jaw nearly hitting the floor. Raz was right. She walked over to the bed, laid down and beckoned him over with her finger.

Naemon all but pounced on her in the second it took to get him there, pinning her down against the mattress and kissing her as if he would die without her lips on his. They kicked their shoes off, hearing them knock against the wall with a quiet thud. He grasped at the corset, feeling her breasts practically popping out of them - that was how it was designed to look, right? - and moved his hands to explore. Runaril stroked up and down his chest and pulled at his jacket impatiently.

He grinned at her, unbuttoning it agonisingly slowly before throwing it to the floor carelessly, just like he'd done with her dress. He was kneeling above her now, and she could see all the muscles on his chest.

"My husband is a very attractive man," she teased, slowly sliding a finger down from his neck to snake across his abdomen, tracing the muscles and imagining herself licking them one by one. He groaned as he pushed back down against her, placing his hands either side of her head.

"My wife is a very wicked woman," he hissed. "Too many clothes."

"Raz had a solution for that," she winked at him. She reached down into her left stocking and pulled out the small dagger he had given her before turning on her stomach and handing it to him. "You can rip me free now, if you want."

Runaril could practically feel how desperate he was getting now from the way he frantically tore into the ribbons, cursing all the while until they all fell apart. He pulled the corset from her and turned her on her back again, staring at her.

She wondered why she'd felt so self-conscious about her breasts earlier. Naemon was staring at her as if she couldn't possibly get any better looking, and it was a definite ego boost. Runaril cupped her breasts in her hands and squeezed them together, looking up at him while she did so, and grinning at his gasping reaction.

She pulled his hands over to cup them instead, marvelling at how big they were and how easily they covered them. He squeezed them almost timidly, looking at her to see if it felt good, and she reassured him with a wink. Then his head darted back down to her collarbone and moved achingly slowly over to her right breast while the other one traced lazy circles around it, moving closer to her nipple. He took the right one in his mouth and licked slowly before gently sucking and nibbling, earning him a loud groan in reward.
He smirked against her breast as he carried on exploring with his mouth and tongue, letting his left hand mimic his actions on the other side. They were stiffening underneath him, and his sweet wife’s attempts at quiet composure were more or less gone. Her fingers were tangling themselves in his hair, and each time he bit her they pulled upwards. It was among the best kinds of pain, and he was only too happy to be making her feel that way.

After staying glued to her breasts for a little longer, he began moving down her stomach, kissing it lightly with his tongue as he moved closer to her pants, even giving her navel a cursory swirl. When he got to the hem of her pants, he looked up at her with a wicked grin, taking in the sight of Runaril flushed and panting against the pillow.

"Have you ever felt this before?" he asked her, pressing his lips against the hem as he tugged it a little lower with his hand.

"No," she moaned at him. "I’ve never - ah -"

He pulled her free of her pants, sliding them down her thighs and giving her a quick kiss where the hemline had been. "Suspenders, hmm?" He arched his brow, winking at her. "I guess Raz wanted to spoil me." He stroked her inner thigh, getting teasingly close, and she gasped and bit her lip. He unfastened them, pulling her pants completely down her legs with the stockings falling. Naemon took them off with both hands and smirked up at her. "Naughty girl. Somebody wanted this very badly, then."

He moved his head back between her thighs, breathing against her as he found her nub and flicked his tongue against it. She almost screamed his name then, squeezing the sheets with white-knuckled fists in her effort to not get too loud, so he carried on lapping at her until she actually said his name. Loudly.

He took it in his mouth and sucked on it as gently as he could, moving his tongue in tiny circles as he kissed her over and over again. He moaned her name against her skin, savouring the way she tasted, the musky scent of her sweat as she trembled beneath him, the way her legs curled up and the voice she was using to practically beg him to move lower.

So he did, parting her folds with his tongue. She tasted divine. Gods knew there was nothing better than the feel of her trembling around him, her eyes squeezed shut as she moaned.

"Shit, Naemon," she rasped as he gently touched her entrance with the tip of his tongue, licking around the sides. "Please, I want - ah -"

"What do you want?" he murmured into her thigh as he pushed his tongue against her, mimicking a thrusting motion as he playfully teased her.

"Inside," she groaned. Her legs were shaking as they squeezed his head tightly between them, and he could only smirk at the thought of how turned on his wife had become from just the anticipation alone.

"Your wish is my command, love." Lapping at her a few more times to make sure she was wet enough, he slowly slid a finger inside her. Her breath hitched and her eyes shot wide open. "Should I go fast or slow?"

"Slow at first." Her voice shook as she looked down at him, and he had to pause for a second. My wife. I am with my wife. I am making my wife feel this way. She loves me.

He slowly thrust his finger in a few inches deeper before pulling out, stopping to gauge her
reaction. Naemon looked up at her, uncertain. "Does that feel alright?"

Runaril gave him a half-hearted glare. "It was fine until you stopped." They both laughed at that before he went back to sliding his finger inside her, curling it upwards and giving her a few strokes, gradually increasing the speed. He moved his finger from side to side, then circling, then alternating.

Naemon looked back up at her with a roguish look. "Another?" he asked, arching his eyebrow mockingly.

"Gods, yes." He whistled before sliding in a second finger slowly, letting her get used to the feeling before he resumed the pace. She made a strangled noise and arched her hips as he went deeper, easing his way down to his knuckles. He was sliding in and out of her easily with a satisfactory slick noise, and her keening moans were making it all the more enjoyable.

Naemon lightly sucked against her inner thigh as his fingers carried on their work, adding a third as she continued to shake and splay her legs further apart. He kissed her and brushed his teeth against her skin before feeling her tighten around him.

"Naemon, I'm - I'm going -"

"I know, love, I know." He slowly slid his fingers out of her and then pushed them swiftly back inside in one thrust. Runaril howled, screaming his name loud enough for the Aedra to hear them, and he carried on gently thrusting in and out for a few more seconds before he finally took them out again. He put them in his mouth, sucking the juices from them and moaning at the taste. He would savour it from then on, each and every time, he promised himself.

"Are you ready, Runaril?" Naemon asked quietly as he slid his trousers down his legs, kicking them and his pants off absentmindedly as he stood beside her. Her breaths were coming in huffs and gasps, and her golden skin had a rosy glow and a sheen of sweat. She gripped his hand in her own as she looked him over from head to foot the same way he had done earlier, her eyes widening as she moved her gaze between his legs. He could feel how achingly hard he was by this point, but he hadn't wanted to rush anything and risk hurting her.

"Yes," she whispered, her face easing into a smile as she looked up lovingly at him. "I want you, Naemon."

"My Runaril." He crawled up the length of her body, sliding an arm under her hips to raise them slightly as he positioned himself before sliding in slowly.

She melted beneath him, pulling his lips against hers in a bruising, desperate kiss. Their teeth knocked together, but he didn't care. Her hands were pulling his head against hers, tangling his hair, pressing against his neck as he thrust into her, gradually setting a rhythm. Naemon moaned into her mouth, their tongues swirling together as she hitched her legs around his waist and pulled down, hard.

"Deep," she hissed. "I want you deep inside me, Naemon." She clutched at him tightly, urging him to bury himself inside her. The way she was biting and sucking on his earlobe, whispering his name in a breathy groan, was all the encouragement he needed.

His hips slammed down hard against hers and she wailed, digging her fingers into his shoulders hard enough to leave scratches. Good. There was nothing in the world that felt so good to him in that moment; no pain that was as dear to him as his wife's nails clenched into his skin as she bucked beneath him, meeting his thrusts as she moved against them.
Naemon had forgotten how good it felt. Perhaps he had never really known, he mused to himself. There was a difference between dutiful relations, urged on by the expectation of conceiving a child with one's arranged bride, and... this. Making love. *Fucking.*

There was a whole world of difference between the two, and he felt it. He could *hear* his groans as he moved deeper and deeper, the slap of flesh on flesh; he could *feel* the aching of his hips from where Runaril was squeezing them between her legs as she clung to him for dear life, the sweat and heat between their bodies as they moved together, urging the other on; he could *taste* the joy on his wife's lips as she kissed him fervently, and the mead on her tongue as it flickered around his. Her soft whimpering was only getting louder and more desperate, mixed in with her moans and barely decipherable begging.

*I will give it to you.*

He slowed down the pace of his strokes, but they were much harder, jolting into her with such force that he actually *moved* her up the bed, but his wife keened under him, her eyes widening.

She sounded so close. He kissed her forehead, her cheeks, her neck, her shoulders, spurring her closer as he wrapped his arms underneath her and held her tightly against him.

He wouldn't last much longer, but he wanted it to be together. This was special. This was *important.* Naemon looked down at her, meeting her gaze, and smiled. "Are you ready, my love?"

"*Yes.*" He could feel the way she tightened around him, how her body shook and shuddered as she screamed his name for all the Aedra to hear, letting go of everything else to bask in her own pleasure for the second time that night.

It was what broke him. He collapsed against her, unable to move, feeling his heartbeat racing just as quickly as hers was. His hips ached, but it was a pain he would not trade for anything else in the world.

After a moment, he gently moved off her body and lay on his side next to her, mindful of not squashing her. Runaril was breathing deeply with her eyes shut, and her hair had fanned out on her pillow. He watched her chest move up and down slowly, and almost didn't notice her hand reaching for his until it closed around his fingers.

"I love you, Naemon," she whispered in a hoarse tone, and he chuckled to himself.

"I love you too." She opened her eyes and looked over to him, a confused expression on her face.

"I was worried there would be blood." Runaril gulped. "That was... what I was told. And I haven't been with anybody before you, but there was no blood. I don't understand." She looked almost afraid now.

"They are... half-right," he said slowly, wondering how to explain it to her. "There *is* blood, but usually only when adequate preparations have... have not occurred. Your body is able to accommodate giving birth, so this..." he gestured to his cock with a wry smile "-would be no trouble at all. That's why I took all of that time beforehand."

"Oh." She laughed, embarrassed now. "I just thought you were trying to make me feel good."

"I was, so that it would not hurt you. I didn't, did I?" Now *he* was the anxious one.

"Nope." She giggled. "Well, it did feel a little strange at first, but not *painful.*" She rolled onto her side to face him. "I guess I'm just... new to all this. I don't really know anything about... um.."
It amused him to see his wife so shy to talk about what they had just done. "Sex is nothing to be ashamed of," he told her softly, "and we will have plenty of time together to learn. I don't know everything, either. All I know is that I want to make you happy, and that's all that matters." Naemon smiled and kissed her forehead.

"You already make me very happy, Naemon." Her smile made his heart melt. I am the luckiest man in all of Tamriel.

"As do you, Runaril." His voice choked slightly, but his wife didn't seem to mind.

"I think I'm feeling a little worn out now," she said with a mischievous look on her face, "so maybe we could sleep for a little bit? I'm sure Fradion wouldn't mind the peace and quiet."

"I'm sure he wouldn't, wife." He leaned over and kissed her on the lips gently before stroking her hair.

"I love you," the two said at the same time before laughing again. Runaril shuffled closer to him and Naemon enveloped her in his arms, pulling the blanket over them as she nestled into his chest.

They both fell asleep with grins on their faces.

End Notes

You can tell I really don't like Estre, right? In game I just saw her as a total b*tch, so I welcomed the chance to convey that in writing. She just annoyed me so much, and getting to send her to hell kill her was a very fulfilling experience. Honestly, she had it coming.

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