

Chapter 14 The Dreaded Dinner

The knock on his room door caused him to frown. Standing in front of his mirror, Lancelot raked his eyes down his body one last time.

"Dress appropriately," his mother had said. He could only hope his attire of white suit trouser and an army green long-sleeved shirt was appropriate enough for his mother... And Lady Marion.

His blonde strands of hair he combed to the back of his head. He knew how much his mother hated to see his hair fly all over his face. Not that he cared, but one of Madeline's shades about etiquettes, dressing, and manners was the last thing Lancelot needed tonight.

The knock came again. This time, he sighed and walked to the door. Whoever it was must have come to call him to the dining room. He couldn't believe it was 7pm already.

When he opened his large wooden door, Butler Lee stood in front of him. A prim smile on the old man's face, one that Lancelot couldn't mistake for anything else; the old man was teasing him.

"By the goddess! You look absolutely stunning your graciousness," Lee said, smiling as he bowed in courtesy to Lancelot.

The young man chuckled and sighed. Lee always had a way with his words and gesture that made anyone laugh; including Lancelot and his mother.

"Oh please Lee. I would appreciate if you would drop the title. Makes me feel older than I ought to."

"Oh! But you are old, young master..."

At his statement, Lancelot raised a brow in query. It was also a signal to Lee that the young man properly understood his pun. Delighted, Lee smiled.

"I know what that sounds like, and I must tell you it was purely my intention. Also, the dowager would have my head dangling from the edge of a sword if I am ever caught addressing you by your name." Lancelot opened his mouth to say something, but Lee was faster.

"Speaking of heads. The Luna has asked me to usher you to the dining room, or else, the only head lost would be yours. Everyone is seated and waiting for you already."

Lancelot fought the urge to roll his eyes.

Of course, everyone was waiting for him; everyone he didn't want to see.

Lancelot sighed. Lee's eyes showed concern for him. Lee had always been so concerned about Lancelot, ever since he was a child. To him, the boy did not deserve the tragedy life thought it best to throw at him. From his days as a child, all the boy had ever done was suffer.

He knew Lancelot was not happy, he only wondered when the boy's unhappiness would end. It was only now that he was talking to him that he saw the boy smile, or chuckle. Every other time and with every other person, he was as cold as ice and as hard as diamond.

"Everyone?"

"Every single member of your family. Come on young master, we don't want to keep your mother waiting."

Quietly, Lancelot followed the butler behind. As he approached the door to the dining, his heart fell and his eyes darkened. He had taken on his deadly and unfriendly aura again.

Lancelot took a step into the large and luxuriously furnished dining room, before he stopped to look around.

Lee had not been bluffing at all. Every single person was here. The long and rectangular dining table had twelve seats arranged around it. Eleven of those seats were filled. His dark eyes rested on the last seat beside Ava. He fought to fight back his scowl. That could only have been his mother's doing.

"Brother!" Arthur, the last son of Edward Dankworth and Lancelot's second younger brother called out on seeing him. The excitement in his voice caused everyone at the table to fall silent. All eyes moved to the door where Lancelot stood, his hands tucked in both his pockets.

Lancelot stood still, allowing all their eyes to drink his appearance. For once, just once, Lancelot wanted to disappear so they could all leave him the hell alone.

Finally, his father spoke up.

"Come son, come join us," Edward called out, a smile spread across his English face.

With a sigh, Lancelot began to walk towards the crowded table.

"Your hands out of your pockets now young man. Do you have not an iota of respect for the elders of the table?" The antagonistic voice belonged to Lady Marion, wife of the Late Edward the Second and Lancelot's grandmother. Lancelot said nothing, he simply took his hands out of his pocket and nodded in courtesy. As he walked to the only empty chair in the room; between Ava and Elizabeth, his cousin.

As he pulled out the chair, Elizabeth's brown eyes rose up to meet his. Her rosy lips curved into a beautiful and teasing smile. For a second, Lancelot thought he saw her blush.

When he lowered himself into the seat, he turned away from her and gave everyone around a curt nod.

"Now, now mother, do take it easy on the boy. You do not always have to be so hard on him," the next voice that spoke belonged to his mother.

Lancelot was surprised his mother had spoken up in his defense. But then, when it was against Lady Marion, his mother could fight for anybody, just to get on the older woman's last nerves. Lady Marion scoffed, her nose in the air as she turned to her son.

Lancelot took note of the feast on the table. The finest of meat, chicken and pork, rice and barley, soups and sauces, mashed potatoes, properly cooked cabbages, and finest of wine bottles were placed at strategic positions on the table. Each person had a plate and all necessary utensils in front of them.

"This is bigger than the normal family dinner I expected," Bailey, Madeline's younger brother was the one to speak next. Of all his uncles, Bailey was Lancelot's favorite. The man always had his own way of putting an end to very awkward situations.

"Yes aunty," It was the beautiful Elizabeth's turn to speak now. "Are we celebrating something?"

Murmurs erupted around the table. Lancelot said nothing, he poured red wine into a glass and quietly sipped from it.

"Yes. The return of the golden son."

Lancelot would have ignored the statement, but the malice evident in the tone was strong enough to turn his head toward the direction of the speaker. He could tell his younger brother, James's voice from miles away. Lancelot just needed to see the look on his brother's face as he spoke.

"Dankworth's favorite son has returned. We ought to have a dinner to celebrate. So that is what we are doing."

The silence at the table turned awkward once again. Lancelot sought a befitting reply to give his brother. He had always known James was jealous of him. Even though Lancelot never understood the reason, he had silently hoped James would overgrow his childishness and malice. It was obvious he still hadn't.

Lady Eloise was the one to clear her throat next. Lancelot turned to his grey-haired grandaunt. The lady had a broad smile on her face. She rose a glass up and with a broad and genuine smile on her face, turned to every member of the table. "Now, now everyone. We have all gathered here as a family, whether it's to celebrate or not. We should be able to enjoy each other's company in peace and harmony. It's been so long since we were all together like this. Since my late brother's burial, it's been hard to bring everyone together like this. We are here now and we should all make the most of it. Am I not right Madeline?"

Lancelot thought he would smile at how skillfully Lady Eloise was able to hand over the baton to his mother. His eyes shifted from his grandaunt to his mother.

"Of course..." Madeline cleared her throat. Lady Eloise's small stunt had almost caused her to choke on her wine.

"We are certainly a family. And I have gathered everyone today because of a special reason." When she regained her composure, Madeline sat up and straightened her head. It was a gesture that signaled to everyone that she was in control, just as she had always been.

London Pride pack was her husband's to rule and hers to manage. And someday, Lancelot would be blessed with the responsibility of leading and rule the pack, it was why they were all gathered here; to plan his coronation as Alpha prince, heir to his father's throne.

"My dearest son..." Her eyes fell on Lancelot's with a dramatic smile of pride.

"Lancelot would be crowned as Alpha prince in the next 27 days. I gathered us all tonight because I need you... We need you as a family to stand by us and help us prepare for this great occasion. We would need your wisdom, experience and connections to make his coronation, crowning, and wedding a success."

At the mention of the word, "wedding" everyone's eyes fell on Lancelot. His fists tightened. His right hand against the wine glass and the left one on top of his thighs.

One thing was clear; Madeline Dankworth was going to get him married to Ava if he didn't do something. He had to make a move, and he had to move fast.

"Wedding?" Elizabeth cried out first. Lancelot's gaze shifted to her. Just like him, she had her fists rolled into tight balls, ones that had her veins protruding from her flesh.

When it dawned on her that her outburst had been uncalled for, she lowered her head and laughed nervously.

"I mean, that's extremely wonderful news," she muttered, still trying to regain her composure.

Lady Eloise's eyes fell on the beautiful girl. So did her mother's, Hermione. Eloise smiled against the glass pressed on her lips, she could see through the girl like transparent glass, just the way she could see through every person seated around her. "Yes," Madeline spoke up, in response to Elizabeth's outburst.

"He would be married to our darling Ava exactly three weeks after his coronation."

"You mean Bran's mate?" Albert spoke up for the first time that night. He was Lancelot's cousin and Elizabeth's older brother. He, just like most of the people seated at the table with him, despised Lancelot. But his reason

was special, he wanted what Lancelot had; the position of heir to the throne of London Pride pack.

No one said anything. This time, all eyes moved to Madeline's, furious ones, anticipating her response.

Madeline narrowed her gaze at the young man. He was nothing but four months older than her own son. Just who had given him the right to cut into her words like that? Madeline forced a smile at him.

"Well, I'm sure we all know better than to mention his name at the table."

"Why? He leaves us and suddenly Lancelot is in control of everything..."

"James! You would be quiet, this instant!" Madeline yelled, her fists coming into contact with the table with so much force, that everyone felt the glasses on the table shake.

As if on cue, the fury in her blue eyes disappeared while she watched her second son melt into his seat.

Her smile was back again.

"So, let us pretend all of this never happened and have dinner quietly. We would have a family meeting to discuss about this tomorrow evening. We should all be ready to come to terms with all that has happened in the past, all that's happening now and all that would happen in future..."

"Are you okay Lance?" Ava whispered into Lancelot's left ear. After realizing how tense and furious he looked.

Lancelot's gaze fell on her before he tore his eyes away.

No, he wasn't. He wanted to get out of here, and fast.

When Madeline finished her speech, everyone cheered her end statement and gulped down the content of red and white wine in their various glasses.

Only Lancelot sat quietly, visibly indifferent and slightly irritated. Everything was about him and he hated it.

He wished he could go away, go away and never return.

He heaved a sigh, he was thinking too much again, slowly losing his mind once again.

He had to see Doctor Flinn as soon as possible.