

Chapter 69 Crossed The Line

Everyone settled around the huge dining table in the banquet hall, specially designed and reserved for small feasts and gatherings, such as this one. Everyone here was either a member of the royal family or important to them. Madeline was dressed in one of her best blue gowns, Edward looked as charming as he always was, and so did the rest of his sons. Albert did not know why he had to sit through this torture, since he had rather hoped Lancelot would fail. But Hermione had insisted it was important to act as though they were on Roxanne's side. Elizabeth and her mother were beautifully dressed. The two elderly women of the house; Lady Eloise and Lady Marion were not left out of the elegance spree. Richard, Bailey and Reuben were present as well. And so was every member of the council.

Each sat down, drank, laughed out loud and was merry.

As they feasted, Ava leaned into Lancelot, who was seated by her side. He had not said a word or spoken to anyone except he was asked a question. Even then, he gave his usual curt replies and said nothing else. All through, Madeline had been sending Ava signals to tell her to get closer to Lancelot. Finally, she had gotten the chance.

She waited carefully for the moment Lancelot seemed a little less...ready to tear someone's face off, and wrapped her arms around his left hand. He

was previously trying to sip a glance of wine, but the feeling of her skin on his caused him to pause abruptly, and not in pleasure.

His eyes danced to her smiling face, and he fought the urge to pull his hand away from hers. The cabinet members, which included her father, were present and watching. Lancelot knew better than to cause a scene.

Ava waited for him to pull his hand away from hers. She already had a plan for when he did. However, she was both shocked and pleased when he just sipped his wine and stayed quiet.

"We missed you terribly Your Grace. Myself in particular." As she spoke, she blushed and smiled shyly, but Lancelot didn't spare her so much as a peep.

Madeline, who had been carefully watching everything saw Ava's small contact with Lancelot as an opportunity she had to prey on. Now, she would wipe whatever remained of the doubts the elders or anyone else at all, had about her son. With Lancelot's success in his tests and his betrothal to Ava, he was now unstoppable. And Madeline was ready to make sure it remained that way.

She cleared her throat so that her voice would be loud, and cast a smile at Lancelot and Roxanne.

"Oh my goddess! Look how cute the both are!" she said aloud, and everyone's eyes turned to the couple immediately.

Lancelot focused his gaze on the wine bottle in front of him and read the inscriptions on the bottle in his mind, he would do anything to black out their voices and their stares.

"They would certainly make a beautiful couple!" Garrett, Ava's father and head of the council of elders called out, and his colleagues cheered in agreement.

Everyone around laughed, apart from a few who would rather be anywhere else but here, celebrating the success of Lancelot, when they only wanted to see him fail. And of course, Lancelot himself.

"That reminds me, Your Highness. I do hope the ceremony of Lancelot's selection of mistresses is being organized accordingly?" one elder, who seemed to be half gone from all the wine he had taken into his system roared aloud, and everyone laughed.

"It is very important that they are beautiful, to please the Alpha's eyes."

The room shook with laughter and hearty cheers again.

From where she sat, Ava's grip on Lancelot's hand tightened. A frown crept up to her face and she felt a strong surge of annoyance. She hated the thought of Lancelot being with other women, but she knew he had to, tradition demanded it. James noticed Ava's stern expression and pitied her. He could only hope, for her sake, that Lancelot found pleasure in her. Traditionally, she was not his mate. Therefore, it was said that she would not be able to fulfill all his insatiable desires. As long as she wasn't his mate, there would always be limit to the pleasure she would give him. That was why Lancelot was required to have mistresses; to fulfill the desires Ava would not be able to. Their father, King Edward didn't need mistresses because he found his mate before becoming Alpha King.

However, Madeline chuckled and spoke up while laughing and holding on to her husband's hand.

"Yes! We are putting it into careful consideration. But! I can assure you that it would be a mere formality. I have no doubts that Ava here..." She paused and sent a wink to her keen audience.

"Would have no problem satisfying my son. I mean, look at those hips!" she thundered, and sent the room into a fit of laughter and applause once more. "Indeed!" Ava's father cheered at the top of his voice.

Meanwhile, Lancelot who was less interested in their conversation, he looked around and searched for his trusted personal assistant. Peter was standing beside the door and his eyes were fixed on Lancelot.

When their orbs met, Lancelot raised a brow in query, intending to inquire the whereabouts of Roxanne. Lancelot needed to make sure she was hidden in her room. He did not need her wandering about again, not in the presence of the watchful eyes of the elders and Hermione and her children, who were always ready to drag him to the mud. Peter did not say anything or return a signal to Lancelot. He only shook his head slowly, his eyes laddered with guilt and concern, before he moved away from the spot he stood in. Lancelot's eyes followed him carefully, wondering what was wrong with Peter.

His personal assistant was keeping something away from him again, Lancelot thought. And he made a mental note to make sure he found out what it was once this feast was over.

Sitting there, like a spirit in the room, even though his body was present, Lancelot counted seconds, which turned to minutes, and minutes which turned to hours. Every laughter, every joke, every story told and every plan made passed over him. His ears picked only a few things of what was said; when Madeline talked about fixing a date for his wedding, and a date for his mistress selection ceremony.

Alas, Lancelot was more than grateful to the goddess when after one hour, thirty minutes and forty-five seconds later, the banquet hall was almost empty. With the exception of servants who cleared the table, Madeline and Edward, who had just bid him goodnight together, and Peter, who stood at the edge of the door, awaiting further instructions.

Lancelot had not even been paying enough attention to know when everyone left. He only knew that he was alone now, and Peter had questions to answer.

He rose up from his chair and nodded curtly when the servants bowed to greet him. As he walked to Peter, he noticed that the man was avoiding his gaze. It confirmed Lancelot's theory that Peter was keeping something away from him. So, he did not bother to ask too many questions when he stood in front of him. Staring down at Peter, with his both hands tucked into his deep pockets, Lancelot's deep voice growled. "Out with it."

Peter took two steps backwards before speaking.

"Out with what, sir?" he asked, in a silly attempt to feign ignorance. Lancelot was not buying it, and was equally not pleased that his time was being wasted.

"Where is Roxanne?"

Lancelot did not scream, but the calm tone of his voice was more dangerous than his yelling. With his countenance, Peter knew it was no use lying to Lancelot, even though it was the safer thing to do.

He picked the dangerous path, and decided to tell Lancelot the truth.

Peter lowered his head to the ground, for fear of what he'll see in Lancelot's eyes.

"She was present with the kitchen maids the last time I saw her."

The words slipped out of Peter's mouth and rested on Lancelot's ears with painful echoing effects. The two things that continued to resound in Lancelot's mind were; kitchen and maid.

Roxanne was in the kitchen, and working with the maids?! Something within him sparked his tier like electric current, both anger and annoyance thrummed his veins. But Lancelot was good at pretending to keep his calm. "Who sent her there?"

Peter said nothing, only stayed silent and kept his eyes on the floor. It drove Lancelot further towards the edge.

"I do not want to repeat myself."

"The queen," Peter blurted out. He knew what he had done, and he knew what would follow.

The queen, his mother, Lancelot thought. Irritation pricked at him, and his bright blue eyes turned a dark and dangerous shade. He took few steps away from Peter and turned sharply on his heels.

Madeline Dankworth has crossed the line, it was time he made her understand that there were certain lines she could not cross when it came to him. Roxanne Harvey was one of those lines.

Her limbs began to ache after hours of standing and bending at regular intervals to get the heaps of dishes washed. At last, after what seemed like three hours of endless and painful scrubbing and rinsing, she was done.

However, she was reminded that she still had to pack her things from the guest chambers.

Marilyn made sure two maids escorted her to her room and watched her in spite as she packed her things together, into her suitcase.

She wondered if Peter knew of this, if Lancelot was aware. But then, even if they were, what difference would it make? Madeline was the queen, and from what Roxanne had seen, she was also the one who called most of the shots and dictated the happenings and events of this palace. Her words were definite, not even her son could revolt against it.

So, Roxanne quietly packed her things and allowed herself to be led to the servant's quarters. It was a small duplex at the back of the grand palace, just before the woods. The corridors were still long, but tighter, so that it was almost impossible for two people to walk side by side.

As she walked slowly, Roxanne took peeps into some rooms. The maid's quarters used bunk beds, and there were three in each room, with just enough space for six people to cohabit.

Maybe, just maybe this place won't be so bad after all, she thought. Roxanne was really trying to make herself see the good in everything that was happening. But, the more she tried, the more nothing seemed to make sense. Finally, the maid in front of her stood before a door and pointed to it.

"This would be your room from now."

Without waiting for Roxanne to speak, she brushed past her and walked away, the maid behind Roxanne followed her and the two ladies left Roxanne standing in front of the door with so many questions.

She took deep breaths in and out, trying to calm her anxiety, before pushing the door open. This was the last room in the corridor and by far the smallest she had seen.

The smell of damp undergarments, sweat and feminine deodorant hit her immediately. As she looked around the room, she could see that it was half the size of other rooms she had peeped into, and there were four bunks present in this one! There was barely enough space for three people to stand on the floor at once. Yet, eight people were to live in here.

Everything she was currently looking at wanted to push her into self-pity. She wanted to wail and regret her actions, but immediately thought against it.

If this was her new reality, she would have to learn to accept it. If the world thought it was tough, she would try to show it that she was tougher.

So, still standing in front of the door, her grip on the handle of her box tightened as she took one step into the room.