

## Chapter 14

### KYSON

“It’s okay, My King. I know you have to,” she says, focusing on me. I feel terrible. Clarice has been with me since I was a kid, and I know she never would, but I’m not going to trust blindly when it comes to my mate. My guards are under oath to protect my mate and future queen and can’t go against the promise; there was no way they could even if they wanted to.

“I’m sorry, but I have to be sure,” I tell her. Clarice is under oath, but none of the staff know that. I need eyes on the staff, and I know no one will tell her anything or confide in her if they knew. I trust her, but for appearance’s sake, I have no choice. She nods in understanding. Clarice is the oldest of my staff, besides Tanner, the gardener. My command drops all the kitchen staff in the room to their knees because they cannot fight it. A king’s command is excruciating when used at full strength.

I swallow and nod to Damian, who grips her arms, so she doesn’t hit the ground as the rest did. He looks away, and I know he feels terrible. He loves Clarice like a mother. I am sure everyone in the castle does, since she raised most of us when she was still my nanny when I was a small boy. She has been by my side since I was a toddler. She raised

half of those here in this room alongside me, everyone here taking their parents' places within the castle walls when they retired.

“Did you poison my mate?” I ask her, commanding the answer out of her. She shrieks and drops, but Damian grips her tighter. Tears spring in my eyes, and she shakes her head, gasping.

“No, My King,” she rasps out.

“Do you know who did it?” I ask, and she screams, the sound so agonizing some of the staff break down, and others cover their ears. I cup her face in my hands and brush her tears away with my thumbs.

“No, My King,” she answers.

“Do you suspect who might have tried?” I ask her, tears slipping down my cheeks, and she cries out before peering around at her kitchen staff.

“No, My King.”

I sigh, dropping the command. She pants, her face flushed, trying to catch her breath, and Damian rubs her arms.

“It’s okay, son. I know you had to,” she whispers, clutching my hands in her shaking ones. Her words don’t make me feel any better about using it on her.

“When I find out who did it, I will not just punish them for what they did to Azalea; they will get double for making me hurt the woman who raised me,” I assure her. She nods, and Trey rushes over, grabbing her arms. Damian lets her go before getting her a glass of water and helping her hold the cup to her lips so she can drink.

“Help her back to her room,” I tell Trey, and he nods quickly.

“One minute,” I say, stopping him.

“All the food. Where have the orders been going out to?” I ask her.

“The fruit is from here, obviously; the rest are ordered in from town and the usual shipments we receive,” she answers. She points a shaking finger toward the back wall.

“All order forms are pinned over there, Kyson,” she says. A few of the kitchen staff gasp at the casual way she addresses me. In front of the staff, Clarice always called me by my title except when Azalea was around or my guards. Clarice recognizes what she did and quickly corrects herself, but I shake my head.

“You know you can call me anything you want, Clarice,” I tell her.

“I know,” she says, and the kitchen staff look relieved that she isn’t being punished for it. Not that I ever would punish her for the casual

use of my name or anyone for that matter, not that I would tell them that. Everyone slips up from time to time but considering she is the woman who used to change my diapers when I was a baby, Clarice has earned her the right to call me whatever she wants and has never been afraid to scold me, either.

Damian fetches the paperwork down and the kitchen inventory lists from the noticeboard.

“Everyone is dismissed for now,” I tell them, allowing them back to bed. Damian hands the documents to me, and I shake my head. “You handle it; I want to go check my mate,” I say, and he nods before following me out and back to the infirmary.

When I enter, I see Dustin sitting beside her in a chair while holding her hand, rubbing circles on its back with his thumb. He quickly stands, but I shake my head. He looks terrible, and I know guilt is eating at him.

“Has she woken yet?” I ask him.

“Briefly, she asked for you,” he answers, and I nod, brushing her hair from her face.

“Did you find who did it?” he asks, and I shake my head.

“No, but until I do...”

“Until we do, I will be cooking all the king’s and queen’s meals,” Damian says, cutting me off. I was about to say I would do it.

“I will be. You are to stay with our queen at all times.”

“Fine, you’re a better cook than me, anyway,” I tell him, and he snorts before sitting at the desk in the corner, going over the paperwork he retrieved from the kitchen. I stare down at Azalea, and my body starts relaxing. I suddenly shift back abruptly. Dustin clears his throat, averting his gaze before standing.

“I will get you some clothes,” he says, exiting quickly. Damian laughs.

“The only time I see that man blush is when one of us stands naked in front of him,” Damian says, unfazed by nudity.

Not like we hadn’t seen each other plenty of times before. I am confident every person within the castle grounds had caught sight of me naked at some point. I take his seat before grabbing her hand and kissing it.