

Chapter 192 Down, Down, Down

Fiona

We were just getting out of the car with Lexi when Nina’s shiny silver Benz appeared in the parking lot behind us. She grabbed several bags out of the trunk then trotted over to where we stood waiting, then the four of us walked inside together.

Nina went with me into the nursery while Alex paid a visit to the restroom. She set her bags down by the door and waited till I had the baby on the changing table before coming close to me and whispering, “Hey. I, uh, have news about your...” The word “mom” she only mouthed, did not say aloud. Her eyes darted through the doorway in the direction of the bathroom.

I followed her eyes and gave Nina a tight nod. I mouthed the word “later.” She read my lips and nodded. I changed the subject for now by complimenting Nina’s pretty new hair color. “Love this,” I said, eyeing her now deep burgundy locks. She grinned.

I told Alexander about my plan while we started walking over to the interview room, where Kayden would soon be meeting us with the traitor.

He gave it some thought, then insisted we make a quick detour. We headed to his study and he went straight for his desk, looking through the drawers until he found a roll of clear packing tape that he took with us to our next destination.

Roland looked down at the roll of tape when Kayden brought him into the room a few minutes later. Then he looked up at Alexander.

He did not look over at me. This was something I’d been thinking about ever since my run-in with Iris the previous day.

Iris was overall a strong broadcaster with her emotions, I had realized. She was, for starters, an extremely emotional being. And after touching her hand only once, I felt a very strong connection to her energy. I hadn’t needed to touch her again to be nearly overcome with an acute sense of her inner world when we saw each other yesterday. All it took to trigger the connection that second time was eye contact.

And Alexander’s traitorous soldier had been avoiding my eyes ever since he learned my role and purpose in these interrogations with my husband.

I told Alex that today I wanted to hold Roland’s hand and look into his eyes, while asking him some questions of my own. I didn’t know what I was going to ask him; that was part of the plan. I just wanted to probe the man’s feelings and follow them wherever they’d lead. Egg him on and see where he would take me inside his mind. If I could finally get him to hold eye contact with me, I was sure I could get a much better read on him in general.

“You have two options,” Alex explained to the former soldier. “You comply with our interview. You look Fiona in the eye while she questions you and you answer her. Or, I tape your eyelids open so that you have to look her in the eye. And she finds her answers anyway.”

Alex picked up the tape roll and tore at the open end, ripping the plastic apart with a loud, dissonant hiss.

The traitor, nodding his head, finally brought his eyes up to meet mine.

I took hold of both his hands – they were handcuffed together and locked to a bolt on the table – and stared into his eyes. They were flat brown, tired-looking and unemotive... on the surface...

It’s hard to describe in words what it was that I was attempting to do in those first few moments. It was something intuitive, not logical. I held my eyes on Roland’s eyes, focusing deeply and not blinking, for I do not know how long. I started digging around inside his mind and body, trying to see what was in there, trying to get a feel for what he was feeling. That’s the only way I can think to explain it.

When I felt a tear roll down my cheek, I realized I had not blinked in far too long. My eyes were dry and pained.

I shook my head and blinked a dozen or so times. Then refocused on my interrogee.

“Who is it?” I asked him. “Is someone else involved?”

I was getting used to seeing this expression, the one that flashed across Roland’s face. It was the “spooked” look. I had only suspected, after studying his energy, that he was worried about someone.

As usual, the traitor did not answer. I felt a little swell of anger – that was Alexander, who was standing behind me and growing frustrated already.

I tried to ignore my husband’s encroaching emotions and focus my mind back on Roland. He was working very hard to block me from accessing his inner world. I could tell that now. He had some sort of a protective wall of his own in there.

“Why are you worried about them?” I asked, improvising. “Have you been threatened? Are you being blackmailed?”

I sensed I was on the right track, but Roland doubled down on suppressing his feelings and hiding them from me. I stared into his eyes, feeling more tears rolling down my face now but not daring to blink. I was finally getting somewhere.

“What else did you give her?” I asked. “What else did you give Scarlet?”

Rather than caring at all about the answer to this question, I allowed his anxiety to peak at the mention of the fugitive queen’s name while I squeezed his hands, kept staring into his eyes, and visualized the wall in Roland’s mind. Then I visualized dropping a wrecking ball down into that wall.

Roland’s eyes clamped shut, his hands flew open and he tried to wrench free of my grasp. He started shivering from head to toe, but still he did not say a word.

I did not release my grip on him. I was feeling it all now. All his emotions. I couldn’t believe the wrecking ball thing had worked. I sucked in a deep breath and let my desperately dry eyes blink furiously as I absorbed everything.

I felt it all, but that didn’t mean I could make sense of it.

Guilt. Extreme guilt. Extreme anxiety. And a memory of some horrific event.

There was something wrong inside this man’s mind. Something had been damaged in here. Something dark and violent and dangerous had been buried, something had been locked behind this wall I had gone and broken down, and now it was out...

Then suddenly I was back in that forest clearing from my dream. Only now it was dark out, and I really was all alone.

And the earth below me was sinking like quicksand.

I tried to lift my feet and run but the dirt was pulling on my ankles, sucking me down into it. Dragging me down, tearing with firm hands at every inch of my body and every ounce of my soul with a force impossible to resist. I opened my mouth to scream but no sound came out.

The edges of my vision darkened, went black, and then moved inward slowly, contracting into a smaller and smaller circle...

And down I went, limp and helpless into the earth. The circle closed over my eyes, and all that was left was black, and the feeling of falling... down, down, down...