

The King's Tainted Mate Chapter 21 - Tips

I was this close to making a proclamation. The moment I had my mate safely in the palace and in one piece, I wished to shout out to the whole of Xatis that I had finally found her. The one meant to complete me. But even I was not that reckless. Not even when I knew that that was what my mate wished for. What she needed. Those beautiful eyes were begging for it as I held her in my arms, giving me a glimmer of hope of a future together. Perhaps she would ask to be marked someday soon.

The thought made the temptation even more appealing, but as tempting as it was, I couldn't let any such words leave my mouth. For her sake.

Her life and that of my child had been threatened twice already and until I knew by whom, I would keep my promise to her. I would protect her. Even from her own blood.

I had not missed how her body had tensed at the sound of my wife's greeting or the rumbling deep in her chest that had left me swooning. And as much as it delighted me to hear her get all possessive, I knew the pain that came with it too. The pain I had caused her.

Seeing her sister would definitely unearth that pain that was barely buried and that was not something I wished to put her through. I would keep her from facing it for as long as I could. Besides, I needed Liira to tend to her. I needed to make sure everything was alright after the scare. My fears had dimmed a little on our way to the palace when her breathing had eased with no further incidents, but I still wished to have her examined by someone who knew what to look for.

"Oh husband!" Myrna, my chosen mate, was fast approaching where I stood, descending the flight of stairs with an unusual air of excitement about her. She'd greeted me with just as much enthusiasm too which was also odd in itself. It was not like we had ever been that kind of normal couple. The kind who'd display their affections in the open. Affections would not describe the intimate moments we shared just so I could have her carry my child and or punish my mate. And yet as she approached, she appeared to be as any normal cherished wife. Eyes beaming, hands clutching her gown as she hastily rushed to welcome her husband whom she had missed dearly. Her display as always was nothing but her doing what she was best at. Pretense.

Knowing whom I held, I tensed as I hoped she would not utter anymore of those useless endearments she had chosen to call me by.

I was in no mood for her antics today. I needed to search for Liira who should have been waiting for me the moment I walked through the palace doors. I meant to walk away too if only that would not be seen as me ignoring my wife by the crowd of witnesses that chose that moment to flood the room.

What was this? I tensed as the familiar faces that I did not wish to see at this particular moment flooded the public hall. Those I did not wish to know about my mate yet. Riding into the hall, I had not expected to be greeted by anyone else except for Liira, the guards or servants at the very least. The latter were there but wore stunned expressions as their gazes had settled on my bloody look, keeping them from welcoming me back home. I cared not for their behaviour as I had more pressing matters.

Where was Liira? I stared out at the guests whose hands held some kind of drink. A celebratory drink? I frowned because I did not remember of anything that needed celebrating and I sure as hell had not called for any gathering of the sort. Lord Evarius...of course he would be among the nobles present...raised his glass in my direction, a lingering smile on his lips. I did not acknowledge it or him. His action only served to annoy me as I was still displeased with him.

“Let me have her.” Thankfully, Liira appeared with Rakon by her side. Knowing the little time I had before my wife came up to me, I hastily handed my mate to Rakon. She did not protest. I even suspected she was glad to be rid of me as she did not even bother to spare me a glance. I had no time to register my displeasure over the matter however, as Liira step away almost immediately, dragging Rakon with her. I watched them disappear before pasting a fake smile on my face and readied myself to greet the queen of Xatis..

“W-What is this?” Myrna’s smile and excitement seemed to falter once she was close enough. “Are you hurt, my love?” I cringed at how much she overdid her concern for me. I could have sworn she did it to get everyone’s attention which was not necessary as everyone had their eyes on me already. With the dried blood and the unusual bundle I had held, it must have made for quite the gossip among the nobles. Whether that was the reason my queen was working too hard at her pretentious self I did not care. “Oh, God, what happened?” She reached out as if wishing to make certain I was not hurt, but

decided against it. Her gloved hand moved to clutch her chest instead in the most dramatic way that almost made me roll my eyes. It was so typical of her.

“An outlaw in Xatis? In the palace?” Someone exclaimed and it took me a moment to realise of whom they spoke. Gol stood behind me, a murderous look on that I was sure had been brought on by all those judging eyes and haughty looks. Or perhaps that was his usual look. I had not yet studied the man to know otherwise. I realized that I needed to offer some sort of explanation as to why he was here before conspiracies that would come back to bite me ignited and spread like a wildfire amongst the power hungry lot.

“This man and his daughter are owed a great debt for saving your king.” Instinctively my eyes trailed the path Liira had used while she got away with my mate. Only after I had spoken had I realized what a perfect cover it was. It was not far from the truth either. With it their stay around the palace, however long, would be thought of as me repaying my debt.

“Oh kind sir, how would I ever repay you?” Tears glistened in my queen’s eyes and I had to admit that she was good. Her theatrics worked to even distract those that would have more to say over the matter.

“Leave that to me, dear wife.” I was not about to let her near Gol or her sister. Not yet.

“But my love...at least let me say my thanks to his daughter then.” She protested and I pulled her in before she insisted.

“Why don’t you tell me about what my dear wife has been up to in my absence instead.” I wished to distract her, but I was also genuinely curious about what she had been up to. The absence of my mother and father only left her to be the only possible host of the gathering. It was not that she was forbidden from hosting events, it was just that I had expected a garden tea party with a couple of noble ladies. Not an actual event where she’d invited some of the powerful noble houses.

My eyes swept across the room, noting everyone present before they settled on her. She blushed and seemed to consider her words before looking up at me.

“Perhaps I should let his majesty take a bath first.”

Curious, I declined. “Why not tell me, then I will see to that bath then join the party. Hmmm?”

She smiled then and I couldn’t help notice how different she was from my mate. “I know it is probably too early, but you will have to forgive me my love. I couldn’t just bring myself to wait any longer.” Her words made me so nervous I reached for a drink of my own. “You might wish to get two or three of those.” She smiled shyly, worsening my anxiety.

“And why would I?” Somehow I couldn’t bring myself to match the enthusiasm in her voice. One would even say my tone was cold, but if she noticed it or was offended by it, nothing of it registered on her face.

“Because...” She reached for my hand and held on while I fought the urge to escape her grip. Hers were simply not the hands I desired to caress my skin, no matter how innocent the touch. “I know that we would have the midwives confirm it, but...”

Midwives? My grip on the cup of wine I held tightened.

“But as they say, every maiden knows her own body.” Her smile grew impossibly wide while I froze at what she could be insinuating. Surely the moon goddess had not chosen this moment to be gracious, had she? “I am finally with child, Elian!”

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I was going to hurt her all over again. Despite my good willed intentions and promises I made, I was still going to make her tread that path of pain again.

I grabbed what would make my fourth, fifth or hundredth cup of wine. I did not care to count as I only sought to wash out the bitter taste that had flooded my mouth at my wife’s announcement. Neither did I care for the eyes watching nor what they thought of my reaction to her news.

Everything else did not matter except her. My mate. My sweet Shyla of whom I should have been working at winning her heart instead of breaking it into even more tiny pieces.

That is what this news meant. If it was indeed true, if my chosen mate was indeed with child, it would be one more reason for my mate to hate my entire

existence. One more reason to widen the gap that separated our hearts and it would be my doing once again.

“I have not had an opportunity to sit with fate and inquire of it as to why all the things that have befallen me have done so in the manner that they have. I have merely accepted each and every one of them.”

My mate’s words pierced my heart. I did not wish for this to be one more thing that she had to accept, but looking at the maiden I had made queen instead of my mate, there was no doubt in her eyes either. We would need the midwives to confirm it, but looking at Myrna, she was truly convinced that even their findings would not be so different from her own. Was it too late to ask of the moon goddess to change her mind and take back this child? I tugged at my garments that suddenly felt too tight to let me breathe.

“Are you alright, my love?” She sought to touch, but I evaded her out stretched hands and reached for one more cup of wine instead and gulped it all down. It was still not enough to wash out the poison that was my wife’s words or the dread that came with my mate getting wind of it.

Not that I wished to hide any of it, but I turned in Gol’s direction. I did not know what I sought there. Perhaps his word. His promise to keep from poisoning my mate’s mind with what he’d heard and seen. The outlaw had an indecipherable expression on his face, but his mere presence seemed to scream my mate’s reason of needing him by her side. I could not be trusted.

I wished to blurt out that this was not how it seemed, but was drawn to the sound of the many voices that had filled the air around me.

“Congratulations, your majesty!”

The entire room had erupted in cheers at my wife’s words and those overly excited nobles had begun to line up to offer their congratulations. I wouldn’t be accepting any of those. Not just because there was nothing to celebrate as far as I was concerned, but because even if it was true that my chosen mate was with child, this was no way to announce the conception of someone as important as an heir of Xatis.

“Now let’s not get ahead of ourselves.” Because I needed to maintain some semblance of normalcy, I mustered the most gentle tone I could and faked a smile.

"Forgive me, your highness. It wasn't my intention at all." If it was possible for Myrna to blush or smile anymore shyly than she currently was, I knew she would have, just to have more of those pitiful looks that she had inspired from her guests. Looks that I had no doubt were meant to sway my words and actions.

"Even then, this is no way to do it." Her eyes sparkled with unshed tears that I refused to acknowledge.

"You don't want this, do you, your majesty?" Of course I didn't, but I was not that reckless to utter such words either. It would just be what those looking to tarnish my reign wished for. Myrna, however, seemed bent on being reckless. One would even say she sought to display how much influence she had on her king. Her broken tone snapped something in me. This was not the time nor the place and I was not that kind of king either.

"I will take that bath after all. And I wish not to be disturbed after." What I really wished for was to seek my saviour out, melt into her arms and forget about all my troubles. I needed my mate.

"Oh but your highness, surely you wouldn't abandon your queen on such a joyous occasion now would you?"

Your queen... That soured my mood more than the careless statement from the arrogant noble who seemed not to have learnt anything from our last encounter.

"You seem to care so much about my queen, Lord Evarius." I growled, yet not possessively but out of annoyance.

"O-On the contrary, your majesty." The infuriating man bowed, but it felt more of a mockery. "It's just that having fathered heirs of my own and having had some kind of experience with my own wife, I do understand why her majesty would do this. It being her v!rgin conception and all."

"Well if you know so much about what she wished to achieve, then perhaps you should have advised her clearly on the ways such delicate matters are meant to be handled." Lord Evarius looked as though he'd been slapped, but that was nowhere near what I wished to do to him. Luckily for him, I had entertained this long enough and no longer wished to indulge anyone. Not even my wife who looked at a loss for words.

Against her very many protests, I stepped out of the hall and headed to the only place I wished to be. The rest would have to wait.

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Seeing Myrna, seeing them together had brought it all back. The pain, the betrayal, every dark thing that had befallen me ever since I had fallen victim to her sinister plotting that was unexpected of a sister. Even when I did not wish to, I had been plunged into that sea of pain and forced to relieve every one of those single moments I had come so close to death.

I shouldn't have looked back, but being handed over to his guard, no matter how gently he'd done it, had pierced my heart. He had chosen her all over again, erasing the little piece of us we'd had for the fleeting time we'd spent together. It was expected but the reality had still barrelled into me with such a force that had me wishing to lock my aching heart away in a deep dark abyss, never to be unearthed again. Perhaps then I would be spared of any more pain.

They had looked perfect together. Even with him covered in the remnants of the attack and she dressed in the finest clothes I had ever seen on my sister, they still looked perfect.

The sight had lasted but for a moment before I was carried out of the hall and yet it had been imprinted on my very soul. It had threatened to drown me, every piece of the memory, but thanks to Liira I had been saved. She had been the angel that had kept me from drowning.

I did not know how she knew, but the moment I had been carried out of the hall she'd held my hand and talked me through the ordeal, prepared me the perfect bath and had whispered the most comforting words to my wounded soul. It had been done in the pretext of saving my child, but none of her words had actually been about the precious life growing in my belly.

"My lady, his majesty insists." He hadn't forgotten about me, but sending his guard to shove his kingly will down my throat so early in the morning was not how I'd envisioned knowing about that truth. He'd stayed away and yet he was insisting on taking care of me still. I felt like the other maiden instead of being the maiden, his maiden.

Realizing I would forever be just that, the mother to his child, hidden away from his world made my heartache.

I chose to chase those gloomy thoughts away and stared at the long line of maidens in front of me one more time and shook my head. "I do not need anyone to clean after me, so I must decline his highness's offer." The maidens were meant to be my own personal servants given to me by the king to serve me in my quarters, but I wouldn't have it. I may have ended up in the palace, but I was not about to have anyone take care of me in that manner. Having Liira take care of me was only bearable because of her knowledge of medicine and I was already aware of the many guards that had been posted in all those quiet halls for my sake. "It's honestly a bit too much."

Instead of being at a loss for words for not being able to convince me otherwise, the guard looked rather amused. "I will let him know of your decision, my lady."

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"Unless you wish for his majesty to behead your servant, do not ask me of such things."

"You are no servant of mine." I snapped at the guard as I began to realize that there were nightmares awaiting me in my palace life that I had not even thought about.

"Oh, but I am, my lady. And unlike them." The guard said pointing to the line of maidens I refused to wait on me. "You will not be rid of me so easily." Surprisingly, apart from Liira, this particular guard I did not mind having around. Something about him made me feel at ease, safe.

His smirk made me give up my quest. I would not argue with him anymore because it was pointless, I realized, and we'd done enough of it already. If he could take back everyone of those maidens and leave me be, it would be all I'd need for a peaceful moment.

"If I may, my lady, my lord." A short plump girl stepped forward nervously.

"What is it Astryn?" It surprised me that the guard knew her by name and actually smiled at her genuinely. The said maiden only fumbled with her apron in return as if she regretted having spoken at all.

“Well,” She began, her eyes cast down as if whatever she was about to say would land her in some kind of trouble. “My lady, will let me stay?”

“Astryn!” Someone from the line scolded after her bold request. “Forgive her my lady. She’s still in training and has a terrible habit of speaking before carefully considering her words.” A glare landed on the poor maiden and the way she coiled after the scolding ignited something in me, making me speak rather rashly in response.

“I guess I could do with some company.” I didn’t, but in a way she reminded me of me and perhaps if she did indeed have that terrible habit of speaking, she would be just what I would need to serve as a distraction from my own unwelcome thoughts.

“Thank you Astryn. You might have just saved me from angering the king.” Delighted was what the guard was, one would even say this was his plan entirely.

“Oh lord Rakon, you are too kind.” The maiden blushed profusely amidst angry stares from the rest that made me think I had made the right decision in denying their services.

“I will leave you to it then.” The guard who I now knew to be Rakon bowed and moved to usher the rest of the maidens out.

“Oh this is lovely, my lady.” Astryn exclaimed as she ran to the large window overlooking the forest that surrounded the castle. She turned out to be a welcome immediate distraction as she did not even bother with introductions. “I have always wished to serve in this part of the palace. So many treasures to unearth.” Her dreamy sigh sought to pull me into her fantasies. Whatever those were.

“I thought this was about me.” I stared at her faking being hurt.

“Oh but it is my lady. Ever since I got wind of your b.ravery, I knew I had to meet you. I had to serve you, if only for a day.”

“M-My what?” I stared at the maiden whose face bore total admiration for me that unsettled me.

Ignoring my question, Astryn pulled me down to the bed instead before uttering one of the most ludicrous things I did not expect even from her loud

mouth. "Tell me how an outlaw and her father saved the king from one of the worst mercineries to plague Xatis? And don't you dare be so modest in your answer as his majesty has made it clear he owes you the biggest debt anyone can owe...his life."

It hurt to hear that he'd branded me just his savior, but hearing that he'd bragged about it melted something inside. "It was nothing really." Despite her warning, I couldn't help sounding modest as the truth was not something I wished to sing about. I expected her to protest, but it seemed something else bothered her. "Is anything the matter, Astryn?"

"It was a brave thing you did, but it does not explain anything." Her face suddenly set in a deep frown, making me curious.

"Explain what, exactly?"

"His highness's behaviour." I wished to hear nothing of my mate, but making that known would invite more questions from Astryn. Questions I wished not to answer. And besides, I had a feeling that she would tell me anyway.

"He'd picked each of us maids by hand and that is just unusual. Lord Rakon has been working round the clock presenting guards to his majesty for his approval, which is equally unusual as he has always trusted his judgement to handle the security around the palace, except this place, apparently. He's also had cooks on their feet demanding to have rabbit meat prepared hence forth which is even more unusual." Had he really? I blushed as Astryn remained oblivious to my reaction and kept mumbling. "Of all my lessons in training, I have paid particular attention to anything to do with his highness and not once has he ever asked for rabbit meat and now suddenly he wishes for it to be prepared daily?" The maiden was getting exasperated by the second while I blushed even harder the more she spoke. "I swear if he was no king, I'd think he was with child. Oh my God that is it!" Astryn shot up from the bed, realization coating her every word and I was sure I was about to be accused of an obvious crime, but then she broke the little pieces that had remained of my world. "It's the queen, she might be with child, finally."

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"Tell me why I'm here?" I sighed in the mind link as I entered the council chambers.

“Because, even if you are the feared ruler of Xatis, the men before you have the power to make your existence quite troublesome if they so choose or are unhappy.” Rakon gladly pointed out what I knew and loathed. “And right now your queen being with child is what makes them happy and in their twisted way of thinking, they think they have every right to do the heir of Xatis right. Well, since they haven’t see their king jumping around like a maiden at the news.”

“Do not over do it.” I glared at my best friend who seemed to be enjoying my discomfort.

“Oh but your highness, you know that is the only way to stomach their haughty attitudes.” As annoying as Rakon was being at the moment, I had to agree with his sentiments. The heads of the five most powerful noble houses in Xatis after the royal family could be a nuisance if they so wished and if there was anything I had learned from my father, it was that appeasing this lot in anyway I could would go a long way in making my reign bearable. It was not what I wished to be doing at the moment as I had a certain beautiful maiden I wished to appease, if only she’d let me. I tucked away my wishes for later and chose to focus on the men who’d requested for my presence.

Lord Hadwyn from the first noble house whose lumber business had earned them a great share of the shipbuilding industry and consequently controlled the transportation industry sat with an indiscipherable expression. I could bet his temper was still simmering under all that calm that he exuded after my honourable refusal to court and wed his maiden daughter.

Lord Nevan, from the second most powerful noble house was calm as always. I always thought that was a perfect quality for a man whose family was well vested in the wellness of the people of Xatis. Their knowledge of medicine dated back to generations and they happened to be one family with the most research on how our wolf healing actually worked. It was only fitting that they ran the medicine industry and they did so with outstanding results. For years now, no plagues had troubled the kingdom because of their efforts and daily discoveries in medicine.

Then there was Lord Quent, an enigma of a man from the fourth noble house. Even with no indiscipherable expression on, one would never be confident about reading what was hidden behind each and every expression he wore. Rakon always joked that the man was ever turning new patterns and designs in his head that were meant to be the current trend for his family’s textile

industry. Having provided linen and dressed Xatis for generations, the fourth house stood proudly for that achievement.

Lord Rhanes, the man who'd give me an earful whenever all that farm produce lay rotting in the barns seemed easy going on the outside, but he could be a beast when he wished to and that was one beast I gladly appeased each time. Just because I knew that if Xatis went hungry, not even my palace doors would keep those hungry stomachs out. And thus the fifth noble house was one house important house in my books.

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Lord Evarius, the thorn in my side that was also heir apparent for the third most powerful noble house wore one of those cryptic smiles I hated. His was not the presence that should have represented his house, but a tragedy in that family had landed him the position of heir apparent that he had made sure to flaunt at every given moment. Despite his regrettable attitude, however, the third noble house was just as important. Their manufacturing business had opened Xatis to a lot of foreign trade with neighbouring kingdoms and it was one family that could boast of having shares in all the five industries as the business depended on raw materials produced in Xatis.

"My lords, how may I be of service to you?" I all but snapped out my request. I knew what they wished for and I also knew they were in for a major disappointment.

"It is more what we can do for you, your majesty." Excitement coated each one of lord Rhanes's words. "In the wake of the queen's very wonderful news, your humble noble houses have a proposition or perhaps you could consider it an early gift if you wish."

"Go on." I mumbled even though what I really wished to do was scoff at the idea of being gifted a banquet for my own child.

"We have decided to throw the banquet in honour of your heir to keep with our traditions."

"You have decided?" I arched a brow at Evarius. "Is your king that incapable his lords feel the need to hold his hand when throwing a banquet for his own unborn child?"

"What Lord Evarius means is that, we would gladly offer our resources to make the event successful. And I'm sure you would agree that that would cover up for the embarrassing way this news got to our ears in the first place." Lord Quent elaborated and I nodded, even though I would not be accepting their gift.

"Perhaps we should wait for the midwife's findings before you my lords decide to empty your coffers for my sake."

"You seem rather calm for a man who should be eager to receive such news. Is there something we should know, your majesty?" I marvelled at their ignorance. It was as if they had forgotten about their own abilities to tell when their mate was with child. Or were they just too quick to believe everything out of my queen's mouth. And if they were, what would be the reason?

"Your Majesty, we have news from the midwives." Everyone's gaze shifted to the entrance of the council chamber where an elderly she-wolf stood.

"You may approach and shower us with the good news." I beckoned for the messenger to approach.

"It is not exactly good news, your majesty."

"How so?" I waited to hear of what I knew already.

"Well. her majesty the queen is perfectly alright."

"However?"

"She is not with child, your majesty. Every one of our inspections have confirmed it."

"Thank you. You may leave." I waved the messenger away before turning to the noble lords. "So you see my lords, I was actually right in asking you to keep your coffers locked up. But that is not to say, the gesture is not appreciated."

“But celebrations are still in order are they not, your majesty?” Lord Hadwyn suddenly decided to make his presence known and I knew it was nothing good.

“Whatever do you mean, lord Hadwyn?”

“The reason you were not so eager about the midwife’s findings. You are not bothered because either way you still get an heir.” I froze, not at the accusation, but at the realization that I hadn’t been that discreet and may have made it known that Shyla was not only my mate, but that she was carrying my heir too.

It was not my intention, if anything, the opposite is what I wished for. I had been as a thief in my own palace and around my mate. Knowing she was still cross with me, the night had been my companion, choosing to slip into her chambers and caressing her while she slept. But perhaps it was indeed time to celebrate.

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“We can always try again.” I stiffened as unwelcome hands accompanied by a seductive tone slid up my bare torso, leaving me cursing Rakon. Best friend or not, I was going to kill him for letting her in here.

“Not now Myrna.” I stepped away from my eager wife and started to button up my garment. Her entire invitation was as unwelcome as her hands were on my skin and her presence in my study. After the news from the midwives, she’d cried her eyes out, but once those tears dried, she had been intent on having me bed her and giving her a child. Something I was unwilling to do even if my life depended on it, but she’d kept seeking me out anyway.

Dressed in one of those flimsy gowns, she’d discarded the cloak that had hidden it and was now freely flaunting all there was to see through it. But instead of being seduced, the sight left me ashamed of my questionable taste that had led me to ravish her the times that I had. “I have matters to attend to.”

“I do not mean right now, but perhaps later when—”

How could one person be this clueless? “I said don’t!” I caught her hands mid air as she sought to lay them on me again.

“When then, your majesty?!” She spat, arms folded across her chest.

Never, I wished to say, but I merely stared at her. It wasn't time yet to reveal my intentions towards her, but that did not mean I would spend my every waking moments before then with her wrapped up in my arms and me doing things to her that I only wished to do to my mate. My blood pulsed at the thought.

"Clearly you have no problem on the matter," Her gaze flickered to the area below my waist before looking back up. "So then why are you intent on avoiding me? Why won't you come to my bed anymore?"

Because it is not you I wish to have and this is clearly not your doing. A vision of my mate plunged me right back into the sea of want and need I had been struggling to escape since that kiss. As fleeting as it was, the sweetness of my mate's soft warm flesh and the desire it had awakened in me was forever imprinted on my soul. There was simply no way I would desire another after getting a taste of something so damn beautiful. If I was going to be pleased by anyone, it would be her, no one else. "Will you now force your king to bend to your will?"

She sighed. "Forgive me, your majesty. But it's already been too long since I have been ravished by you, Elian and while I cannot force my king to do anything, a wife can surely invite her own husband to her bed, can she not?" She slid her gown down, baring her chest in invitation, but I merely watched her little display with disinterest. If she noticed that, she ignored it altogether and chose to keep singing her seduction song instead. "Will you touch me, my love?"

"Don't!" A growl tore from my throat and it left my chosen mate frozen with fear and her quest to bring my hands to explore her nakedness unfulfilled.

Her face pale, while her eyes sparkled with unshed tears, she muttered. "Eli- Elian? Are you rejecting me?" I hadn't yet, but my wolf clearly had and if she kept at it there was no telling what he would do and I wasn't so certain I would be willing to stop him either.

"I told you that I had matters to attend to."

"Very well." She mumbled after staring at me a second too long. "I will leave you to it then." She gathered herself and came closer before reaching up and placing a kiss right where my mate's mark was meant to rest and smiled. "I do hope you enjoy your day, my love." Her happy tone brought a bitter taste in

my mouth and the moment her form disappeared through the door, I summoned my best friend into the study.

"I thought I was clear when I said I did not wish to be disturbed." I growled at Rakon.

"She's your queen and you are more capable of appeasing her than I ever will."

"Appease?" I scoffed at that. "Wishing she could disappear through some magical portal and never return is more like—"

"Did you learn nothing from me boy?!" The door to my study flew open in a violent manner, revealing a very furious face.

"Good morning to you too father, mother." I all but spat. It wasn't my intention, but after the regrettable visit from my wife and the night I'd had, I was not feeling very hospitable at the moment.

"Good morning sweetheart." My mother floated in with her usual warmth and grace that swallowed up some of my tension and annoyance. "He didn't exactly have a pleasant night." My mother warned in the mind link which only meant, do not anger him anymore than he is."

"You will do well to remind him that I'm his king now." My mother's lips twitched and it was all I needed to rein in my temper.

"Rakon dear, why don't you come over here."

"Why, but of course, your majesty." As my mother and my best friend headed for the neat array of shelves filled with books that made for a mini library in my study, I turned to my father.

"Why don't you have a seat father and refresh my memory on this particular lesson I may have missed or forgotten." Skepticism clouded his eyes before opting to take the seat in front of my table.

"The lords—"

"Hmm, it seems I gave them too much credit than what is really due to them." I mused cutting my father off.

“And what is that supposed to mean?” He frowned and I was only too happy to indulge him.

“I knew they would run to you after that little council meeting, I did not just think they’d have chosen to whine so soon.”

“Elian!” My father glared. “You do not wish to get on their—”

“I am their king!” I roared, surprising the older version of me. “And next time they insult me or wish me to lick their bottoms, I will not be this merciful.” My father blinked as if I had just uttered the strangest thing. But as strange as it might have appeared to him, I was king now and it was time he and those wretched nobles acknowledged me as such. I simply refused to be belittled in any manner or bow to anyone.

“Well, that was...unexpected.”

“I appreciate what every noble house signifies in Xatis, father, what I do not appreciate is every one of those heads thinking their little thrones back in their family home is as good as the king’s throne.”

My father sighed. “It certainly does feel like that sometimes, but son, that is a small price to pay to gain allies—”

“As small as it is, I am unwilling to pay for it, so they can shove every gift down their throats if they are meant to buy my loyalty.”

“Throwing a banquet for the heir of Xatis was not meant to buy your loyalty. It was a gift.”

“I know you are not that blind father.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter now, does it? It’s not like your queen will be birthing anything anytime soon.” His bitter tone, shifted my gaze to his face. Worry was evident on it as it would any king when his family line was threatened into extinction by his son not birthing any heirs.

“My queen might not, but perhaps someone else will.” The words left my mouth before I could put a rein on them.

“And who is this someone?” Worry got replaced with confusion and something else that resembled disappointment. Whether he was disappointed in me, I did not care for it.

“My mate.” I announced proudly even when I knew there was a possibility that the news might not be received as I wished.

“Y-You found your mate?” Deep emotion coated my mother’s words.

“Yes I did, mother.”

“When?”

“The day of my engagement.” Both my parent’s brows drew together in confusion.

“Then why in the world would you engage and wed a chosen mate?! Why would you trade a chance to birth strong heirs for nothing at all?” Not the words of blessings or expectation he’d sang when I wed Myrna but I understood father’s reaction and to make him understand my decision too, I embarked on telling the regrettable tale.

“So let me get this straight.” My father’s eyes bore into mine, appraising me with his usual annoyance once I was done. “You did find your mate, only she was no longer pure, so you rejected her and chose a chosen mate in a single dumb breath?” Dumb was not how I would have described the events that fateful day, but hearing them from my father’s mouth, they did sound rather dumb.

“Yes.” I sat up straighter, clearly showing my every intention to own up to my mistakes.

“Apart from rejecting her, you also banished her?”

“Yes.”

“But then she somehow showed up on the palace’s doors, bearing your ring and your child?”

“Yes”

“By the gods!” My father’s tone lost its annoyance, leaving me to relax an inch, but that changed in a heartbeat. “Do you not know that there are ways to be

followed in such a case?!" I was aware, but at the time, they didn't concern me. But of course I wouldn't let that be my answer.

"I did not need some midwife telling me she was tainted. I saw it in her eyes. I knew she'd betrayed our bond." I mumbled.

"And you were the one to cause her to betray your bond. This is a disaster!" My father shot up to his feet, no doubt pondering on the political implications of my very regrettable mistake. "Are you sure she was, you know, pure when you—"

"Are you saying she's a liar?" I tensed at the accusation. I did not expect him to take the news that well, but to call my mate a liar was going too far.

"You are blinded by your bond son and you did say you were drunk that night. So how in the world are you sure she is not after something else?"

"You know damn well that I can handle my wine just fine, and if you wish for me to narrate the intimate details of how I deflowered that innocent maiden, I will."

"You have to forgive me son, but I had too ask."

"You could atleast trust your son."

"I do, but as I said, you are blinded by your bond."

"I am not—" My father raised his hand to silence me.

"What I mean is, you are so focused on your mate and the bliss that comes with the mate bond that you haven't stopped to think about what all this means. To your queen, Xatis, your enemies and perhaps even your mate." I had stopped to think, but perhaps not in the manner my father meant. Just because I had accepted her did not mean everyone would do so just as easily.

"May we see her?" There was longing in my mother's tone that she had never had for Myrna.

"That is the thing, mother. She wants to have nothing to do with me or you or Xatis." I couldn't help sounding like an unhappy child. "She believes I only want her for the sake of the child."

“Well you did reject her.” My father scoffed.

“Are you?” My mother had an indecipherable expression on her lovely face. My answer was I wanted my mate. Not just her, the child too but I wouldn’t be making such declarations yet. Not to them and definitely not when I knew that my father was about to politicize everything.

“I do not know.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” My mother frowned.

“I have hurt her once before, so before I lay on her what I want, I wish to make this about her.” My father gave me a cryptic smile that unsettled me.

“Perhaps not all is lost then son.”

“How so?” I had a feeling that whatever spewed from his mouth would be something to sour my mood.

“This may not be as simple as I would like because Xatis has prided itself in keeping its word to its people.”

“And what has that got to do with anything?” I hated it when father took on that ruthless politician’s expression.

“Everything.” My father’s eyes sparkled as they did each time he was giving me some lesson about politics and as much as I wished not to listen to one right now, I let him speak.

“You see if a king cannot keep his word to his own queen, how are the people meant to trust such a one? A mistress, however, is something that can be understood and easily acceptable even among the noble houses, Xatis and even your queen.”

“Make her my prostitute, you mean?” My temper flared.

“From your narration, it’s not something that she would fail to do. She has served you once before, hasn’t she?” I sought to punch him for even thinking it, but someone broke into my mind link screaming. Only a few could do that.

“Where were you last night?!”

“Liira?” She sounded every bit like a nagging wife and I knew why. Because of the council meeting, I hadn’t spent my night in my grandmother’s wing, making it the first time my mate had slept totally alone ever since I began slipping into her room after she slept. “Is Shyla alright?” I panicked as I flew out of my study without so much as excusing myself.

“She’s fine, but she needs you.” My heart fluttered. My mate needed me, for what I was not certain, but a stupid grin graced my lips anyway.

“Do not waste time here mumbling your greetings. Get in there and tend to your mate.” Liira practically threw me into my mate’s chambers the moment I got there.

The room was flooded with the rays of the bright morning sun, but I frowned at the many things that were out of place. Her beddings were scattered on the floor while her bed was littered with gowns as if she’d been changing in and out of them or searching for something. A vase lay on its side in one corner with its contents spilled over among other things. It was one huge mess and I wondered what had happened in here. I was about to mind link Liira to find out when I caught sight of Shyla. She stood quietly in front of her favourite window, staring out at the woods down below.

My wolf purred at the sight of her while I took her in with an appreciative look. She was perfect. Even with her long silky hair out of sorts, dressed only in her night gown and barefoot, she was still a dream. Did anyone wish to devour their dreams? Because I sure as hell wished to do just that with mine. Only the sight of her teary eyes snapped me out of that fantasy as she turned to face me.

“Are you alright?” Without a second thought, I rushed towards her, hands stretched out in invitation. Even as I did that, I knew I was in for a disappointment, but perhaps that was not to be had as my mate rushed straight into my arms and held on.

“Hold me, please!” Her grip tightened while my breath hitched. Had I heard that right? She wished to be held by me?

It turned out I had as she said it over and over again, much to my delight. It was the sweetest surprise that had me turning to Liira.

“Not that I’m complaining, but what is this?”

“Pregnancy hormones.”