

The King's Tainted Mate Chapter 66 - Tips

The palace had descended into utter chaos. Thanks to me. It still felt surreal that I had been the one to cause such a stir in the usually calm hallways and palace grounds. In a matter of hours, the usually serene castle was no different from the hustle and bustle of the capital of Xatis.

Following the king's pronouncement everyone had been as soldiers that had been given an order to charge at the enemy. Everyone had gone to arms, except their weapons were not swords and daggers or canines and claws. Theirs were kitchen and butcher knives, spoons and pans, large pots that I was sure could fit a couple of grown men all at once. Maids scurried left and right, carrying linen. Both clean and that which had just been changed. Others dusted, while still others scrubbed the floors so furiously one would think it had not been scrubbed for a century. Others polished as though they wished to see their very faces in the stone floor.

Out in the palace grounds, barrels and barrels of wine were being rolled out of the wine cellars by muscled guards. Too many to count it made me wonder if the strong drink was meant to be drunk by the guests or to be drowned in. Fresh farm produce was being delivered by a long line of carts that I was sure spilled out of the palace gates. Maids, farmers and cooks alike stood and inspected the produce, picking out only the best to be served at the banquet. Protested animals were dragged to the slaughter and I could have sworn I saw a maidservant carrying a crate of wild rabbits too.

Long drapes of colourful cloth had been hung everywhere I looked. Both inside and outside, bringing out the atmosphere one expected when they attended a banquet.

It was already sunset. Night was fast approaching and yet everyone and everything surrounding me was as at the break of dawn. Men worked as though they had just left their beds only a moment ago. Breaking a sweat as though they had not been doing so since dawn. I was tempted to offer my apologies. As my mate led me back to my chambers, I was tempted to whisper my apologies to those we encountered for my part in what had plunged them into breaking their backs when they should have been preparing to retire to their beds. But despite how bad I felt, none stared at me with that expected annoyance or blame for what had befallen them. No. Only smiles. Delightful and beautiful smiles had graced each face I had come across with many maidens whispering happily amongst themselves once we'd

passed by. Many times I had shamelessly eavesdropped on that chatter, just because I had thought to catch them speaking of how they truly felt. I had been disappointed each time as everyone simply gushed about the upcoming event. Not even one had alluded to the odd situation of having the queen and the king's mate expecting heirs. In the end I had merely concluded that everyone I'd encountered was perhaps allied to the king and would never dare speak against him.

"From our trip to the capital, I do know that you do not despise crowds, so then what is this frown about?" My mate spoke at my side drawing my attention. Without realizing, I had stopped in front of one of the palace windows and had been staring at the multitudes below as they went about the business of the banquet. And had he been observing me while we went up and about in the capital? The expression on his face as he held my gaze said so. The realization stirred my insides and before I drowned in the familiar gold that as always began pulling me in, I broke the eye contact.

"I did not realize that so many would be forced into doing so much." I mumbled unhappily. "Just look at all these people, wouldn't they have been happier sitting around their own families hearth, telling stories instead of breaking their backs for me?" The longer I thought of that the more I disliked the very idea. Was there no other way to celebrate my child than getting the whole of Xatis on their toes?

"Forced is a strong word, Shyla." Warm hands cupped my cheeks and shifted my focus back to my mate. Not that I disliked it, but something had shifted in the manner he interacted with me. The kiss he'd lavished on me in front of the throne room aside, he'd barely been a few feet away from me since then and made contact every opportunity he got, leaving me so very aware of his manly presence than usual. It was only thanks to the abundant distractions I had thought nothing more of his touch.

His intense gaze captured mine effortlessly. "Love is the more appropriate word." He pushed back a few stray locks of my hair with more delicacy than required and my heart lurched at the action. "Love for their kingdom, their king, this child..." His hands rested on my belly and I could have sworn I felt a tiny movement there. If only that hand had not shifted to more parts of me that had nothing to do with the child in my belly, awakening them. "Love for you..."

"They barely know me." With the way the gold in his eyes shimmered, I wondered if we were still speaking of the kingdom folk he claimed loved me.

“Even then—”

“Forgive me, your majesty, but my lady here should have been in her chambers getting ready already.” Astryn cleared her throat from somewhere behind us, breaking whatever it was that had been brewing between us. “Lady Liira insists.” She added when my mate turned to her.

“Of course.” He nodded without protest, surprisingly. “Inform grandmother that we are on our way.” He held out his hand in which I slipped mine. We were not so far from my chambers, but I realized that my feet were unwilling to head in that direction all of a sudden.

“Wouldn’t your chambers do instead?” I blurted out the words catching him off guard. The truth, I realized was that I was not ready to part from him, to be surrounded by countless maids and be subjected to some princessly pampering.

Eyes stared at me curiously before nodding. “If that is what you wish for, I will let grandmother know to have everything done in my chambers.” Cancelling everything until the banquet would have been more acceptable to me, but I knew it was simply impossible. I settled for what I could get and let my mate lead us back to his chambers.

Stepping back into his grand bedroom, I didn’t miss the way my belly and heart fluttered at the memories shared there. And neither did he apparently as I caught him staring.

Clearing his throat, he pointed to a door that led out of the room. “You could rest here while everything is prepared.” Before I could answer someone knocked on the chamber’s doors, making me groan. “I promise you’ll hear nothing of what is going on in here until you have to.”

I nodded and followed, ignoring my wolf’s excitement at the privacy promised. “Oh, this is absolutely beautiful.” I marvelled at the view that met me once I stepped outside. Unlike my chambers, out here I could see so much more of the palace and the calm of the forest for miles on end. The view of the sunset was to die for.

“I will gladly share it with you.” He patted a space next to him on a lone chair. The comfort of the seat and the relief of getting off my feet was a welcome change, but perhaps it did not beat the caring way my mate drew me in and held me in his warm embrace as we both stared quietly at the golden sunset.

It was a simple luxury that I chose to indulge in while I awaited tomorrow's storm. Being wrapped up in the scent of my mate made it even more peaceful.

"My lady?" I had not realized how peaceful it was until I was being shaken out of my slumber. "It is time." I was about to protest when the sight of an old woman smiling down at me drew my attention. The priestess meant to aid me on tomorrow's journey I assumed.

"Good evening, my lady. You have been asleep for a while now." It was by no means meant to embarrass, but my cheeks heated up anyway.

"His majesty?"

"He will be here." A hand extended to me and I took it, feeling more fatigued now that I was awake. "Do not worry, you'll be as good as new in no time." That I believed without a doubt. Most of what Liira had said to expect was centered on ensuring exactly that.

Inside, the most amazing blend of floral scents and bath oils greeted me and as much as I had despised being attended to earlier, the inviting scents had me smiling at the maids that greeted me. Clothes were discarded and replaced by a light silky gown as I was led to the bath.

The woman from earlier sat legs crossed on a mat besides the tub and the moment I slipped into the water, her voice broke out in song, bringing down the most amazing sound that seeped right into my soul, leaving me strangely relaxed. But just then a chorus of menacing howls seemed to engulf everything around the palace making me jump. "Are we under attack?" Panic ate up all the calm I had just experienced and yet the old lady did not even flinch. She kept humming with a smile, making me gape at her.

"There is no need to be afraid child. It is just his majesty leading the warriors back from a hunt."

"A hunt?" A lone familiar howl ripped through the darkness outside and drew a growl from my lips. "I'm sorry." My hands flew to my mouth. "It seems my wolf gets a mind of its own too many times."

"Answering your mate's call is nothing to be ashamed of."

“His call?” I flinched when something prickly pierced the skin on my forearm. How in god’s name did that happen? I stared at a print of two dark wolves now resting on my skin and facing each other.

“It is a symbol of that ancient old bond shared by mates...true mates.” I did not know if that spoke of the magical tattoo or the bond shared with my mate.

“Normally, your chamber maids are charged with this part, but his highness would not hear of it. He would not have another lay their eyes on you.” Seemingly done with her charge, I watched as the woman retreated, leaving me wondering what exactly that charge was. “Welcome back, your majesty.” The woman bowed before disappearing from the doorway, making way for a familiar figure.

“You are here.” I breathed out, but for the first time today he was distracted. By the very wolves I still had no idea how they ended up on my skin.

The King’s Tainted Mate Chapter 67 - Tips

The birth mark of the twin wolves was something I would never be able to forget. Well, I had tried to over the years. To keep from being scolded each time I inquired about it when I was younger and to keep the guilt at bay when I was older. I was successful most times, but it always had a way of bringing itself to remembrance when I least expected it. At the most awkward times usually while other times it haunted me in the confines of my dreams.

Seeing it in the flesh, on my mate’s body, was more than bringing itself to remembrance. I had pictured a different end to my night with her. Being faced with that mark on her body was miles from it.

“Perhaps I should have been the one to go. I could have been more convincing.” I kept pacing in the inner chambers of the royal gallery feeling as though the walls of the secret room were closing in the longer I waited. “What if they refuse to come? I know I could not hold it against them if they still refuse to set foot inside the palace. It is the place to have changed their lives after all, but—”

“Will you calm down.” I was surprised to note that my father’s tone did not hold his usual annoyance. “No matter the pain, Florithe and Lydo would never refuse a request from their king. More so since we have honoured their wish all these years.” I hoped that was true, but it did nothing for the anxiety that plagued me still. “Besides if this is at all what we assume it to be, it is only

fitting that we maintain the utmost secrecy around the matter. The king of Xatis appearing on the doors of a noble's house at such an awkward hour when he should be getting ready for one of the most important occasions of his life will be highly suspicious and will definitely send the wrong tongues wagging. Especially if the said noble house is the last place you are expected to show up."

If what I had discovered was indeed true, it would change everything or make everything worse. I had not decided which was which yet. "Perhaps you are right, father." I sighed, deciding to take my seat. "It is just so damn hard to have to sit and do nothing when I know our enemies keep plotting and are getting a step ahead each moment we are forced to wait."

"For what it's worth, you are doing a fine job. If you could get that hot head of yours under control, perhaps you might even outshine your own father."

I scoffed at that even when I appreciated my father's words. "I think I already did that when I beat you time and time again each time we battled."

"It was merely beginner's luck." My father scoffed. "Nothing to do with finesse."

"Yeah, right, beginner's luck... Again and again. For what it's worth, I learnt from the best. It was not always enjoyable, but worth it." I welcomed the distraction my father offered from the matter at hand. If I didn't, I would go out of my mind.

"Yeah, you did make the worst student at times. Drink?" The former king of Xatis rose from his seat and headed over to the cabinet holding the wine before I could protest being served by him. "It will take care of those nerves while you wait."

"Yes, thank you. A generous amount please."

"Oh, now that I cannot do. Your mother and my mother will have my head for getting you drunk ahead of the banquet."

I arched a brow. "I would never peg you for one to be scared of women."

A cup of wine was handed to me. "Those are not just women and you will be a smart king if you learned that lesson sooner rather than later. Your future queen does not strike me as one to be any different either. Especially not when Liira has taken it upon herself to be the one to groom her."

“Grandmother loves me, she would never deliberately turn my own queen against me.” My queen... Would Shyla really become that eventually?

“You have so much to learn.” My father shook his head in a solemn manner. I was about to ask why when the doors to the inner chambers opened.

“How is she?” I rushed to Liira’s side the moment she entered the chambers, inquiring about my mate. I had not seen her since the time in my chamber’s bath. I had every intention to be the one to bath her then, but the appearance of that birth mark had changed everything. She’d caught me staring at it and even when I saw her own confusion, I could not stay or offer her any answers. Because, truthfully, I had none. None that would make sense.

“Oblivious to how her world is about to change.” Liira shot me a disapproving look before she grabbed the cup of wine and downed all the contents. “You should not be drinking.” Another disapproving look was sent towards my father who only shrugged his shoulders.

“The boy needed to calm down.”

Liira glared, but said nothing more on the matter as she walked back out. “Lord Nevan is here.”

“Nevan?” I slipped out of my seat and followed Liira into the gallery. The lord of the noble house was staring at the many portraits, but even I could tell that it was by no means because he was fascinated. Perhaps just passing time while he waited.

“Your majesty.” The man greeted me with a bow which I acknowledged.

“What brings you here at such an awkward hour?”

“It may be nothing, but with what is going on, I thought the king might be interested to learn of our findings regarding his mate.”

What was going on? I refused to give substance to what the man was insinuating by asking him what he thought was going on and where. I had still yet to decide who my allies were.

“And what is it you think might interest me, Lord Nevan?” I asked nonchalantly when deep down I couldn’t wait for him to spill whatever it is he’d discovered. Anything about my mate right now was a welcome curiosity.

“Well, apart from what you already know, which is that she’d conceived without shifting, we realize that her shift had nothing to do with her becoming of age either.”

“What does that mean then?”

“We believe the pregnancy triggered her shift so her body could bear with the strain that comes with motherhood.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning she had no business shifting either as she was still not of age yet.”

“How is that even possible?” I turned to Liira but her expression remained ever so thoughtful.

“Unfortunately, I am unable to furnish you with an answer to that. But I could point out that perhaps the answer lies in her origins.” The lord bowed before excusing himself, leaving every one else in the room deep in thought.

“Well, its a good thing we are about to be faced with perhaps the only wolves to know about her origins.” Liira stated, but whether it was a good thing I was not sure.

“Your majesty, we came as soon as we could.” Two faces I had not gazed on for too long appeared with Rakon by their side. “Is anything the matter? Has my brother been found wanting? Did our house perhaps error in some way and angered his majesty?” The distress in the man’s tone who I sadly noted had aged for a wolf his age was evident. And suddenly I had one more reason to hope that this was indeed what it was. It was clear that the suffering which I had partly caused had taken a rough toll on the couple and I prayed to the gods that today they would find some peace and joy.

“It is nothing of the sort Lord Lydo. And do forgive me for making you ride at such an awkward hour. The matter could not wait I’m afraid.”

The man only sighed. One of those sighs that spoke of one having carried a heavy burden for too long. “Forgive me, your majesty, but I do not go by lord anymore. Not after handing that title over to my brother. Are you sure he is not the one you sought to summon?”

"I have made no mistake, fortunately. And I do hope that after the banquet you will reconsider your decision to give up your lordship." I hoped it would come to that, no matter the consequences.

"Reconsider?" Confusion marred the man's tired face. "Why would his majesty ever consider such a thing all of a sudden?"

"Perhaps before we spend our energies on thinking about reconsidering such grave decisions, may his majesty enlighten us on this delicate matter..." Florithe held on to her husband for comfort.

"Fair enough." I turned to my father and Liira wondering what the best way to peel off a scar covering a barely healed wound whose roots reached all the way into the soul was.

The King's Tainted Mate Chapter 68 - Tips

It would be so easy to be carried away today. By revenge, getting back at Myrna for what she'd done, relishing her fall from grace, but I wouldn't let myself fall into that trap. I wouldn't let myself be as my own parents were. Selfish, caring more about their own needs at my expense.

Today was about my child. The true heir to the throne of Xatis. I would do this for him as many were already doing.

The throne room was already filling up, according to Gol's reports. The people of Xatis were ready to welcome the young prince or princess. Having travelled from afar after the shortest possible notice, they'd come.

Around the palace many had not seen even a wink of sleep just so they ensured that everything was perfect for the banquet. From the grand reception halls meant to host the thousands of guests, to the tiniest detail of the right kinds of spoons to be used for dessert.

"I will do this for you." My hands fell to my belly, caressing it in assurance to my child. But despite my resolve and everything that was falling into place, I couldn't get rid of the nagging feeling that there was more to it than that. I had never seen it coming before, but right now I could feel the wheels of fate turning. Churning my belly while at it.

I stared at the skin on my arm bearing the tattoo of the two wolves, wondering if they were perhaps a part of what fate was about to throw in my path. Would

it be pain or would it be anything as beautiful as the two wolf figures. Was it strange that despite how they had appeared from nowhere, I had embraced them already?

“My lady, may we enter?” Astryn mumbled from my chamber’s doors. For whatever reason, she’d felt the need to be granted permission each time she wished to enter my chambers.

“Of course, you may. No need to ask for my permission.” I rolled my eyes. I had woken up to a very quiet atmosphere. It was so quiet I thought for a moment that I was the only living thing around the palace. That was until Astryn had knocked and delivered a hot pot of tea. It would make it the first time she’d refused to come in without my permission.

“All of us?”

“All of you?” I frowned, but my I got my answer when a stream of maidens flowed into the chambers carrying various things in their hands with Lord Quent right after them.

“My apologies, my lady, but we do need to get a move on. The time to head to the throne room is almost upon us.” The man was practically panicking and to put him out of his misery, I nodded. “I do hope you have had more than sufficient sleep.” I nodded to that too. After all of last night’s pampering. I’d slept like a baby. That was after I could finally get rid of the image of my mate dressed as a warrior and appearing all kinds of delicious.

“My lady, are you sure you are alright?”

Astryn’s concern had me turning to the mirror. Noticing the colour flooding my face, I waved her away before it got worse. “Of course I am.”

“If you say so.” Astryn turned her focus on whatever she’d come in with, but I did not miss the mischievous grin on her face.

Knowing that asking her what that was about would be to my own peril, I turned to Lord Quent and his seamstresses instead. The bunch, as usual worked with an efficiency that I was sure was out of this realm. Transforming everything about me into something I could never have imagined. My sleeping gown was discarded and replaced with beautiful under garments. The beauty, however, was wasted as the garments got covered up by an even more beautiful garment. Having had fitted into it when it was in mere pieces, I was

convinced Lord Quent was a wizard who possessed a magic wand that had magically stitched it up, leaving the exquisite flowy golden gown that fit me like a glove. Falling freely over my features, I couldn't help but stare.

"With this, the entire ensemble might be a little heavier than expected." Lord Quent said as he placed a golden cloak over my gown. "I'm afraid there is no alternative to the gold inscriptions required to be added to the sacred gown."

The entire ensemble was heavy, but its weight was not in the gold Lord Quent claimed to have added or the strange inscriptions Liira had said spoke of the history of the royal line. No. Its weight was in what it symbolized. In what it spoke of me. I was never one to be ashamed of my origins, but whatever I wore had erased every little bit of that. Nothing remained of the Shyla from the forgotten village. As I stood there, even without knowing how today would end, I knew one thing was true. I'd been reborn. I might not have possessed a crown or a throne, but the maiden who stared at me was a queen. A beautiful pregnant queen!

"My lady." Astryn's awe filled voice broke through the silence that suddenly fell over my chambers once I was done. "You look—"

"Spectacular, if I do say so myself." Lord Quent beamed with pride and with good reason.

"Thank you." Was all I could say.

"Oh, no need for that. It was a joy to—"

"Behold his Majesty the King!" A soldier loudly proclaimed right outside my chamber's doors, sending my heart racing. He was here? I knew I would meet him at the throne room so his appearance was a shock. One that had too many emotions overwhelming me. I wished to see him, but then I didn't. And when that wine scent embraced me, I knew there was nowhere to hide. So I clutched on to my gown and waited, heart racing, galloping and yet never really escaping. Figures slipped out of my room, leaving me alone to face him.

But then I realized that despite his scent that let me know of his presence, he'd not made a move to approach. Curious to understand why, I decided to look, yet not at him. I searched for him inside my mirror, afraid of what beholding him in person might do to me. I should have known that my choice was no different. I gasped when I was met with the brightest shimmer of the

gold in his eyes. His eyes were locked on my figure, silent yet devouring and igniting every part of me with need.

An appreciative growl, silent as the night, rumbled in his chest and I knew he'd caught it. Caught what he'd done to me. The longing in my centre that needed him and his touch. Rough and gentle. I turned fully, just because his reflection was no longer enough. I needed him and as though he could read my thoughts, he closed the distance between us, making me gasp.

"You are..." He trailed off while I hang on to his unfinished sentence, longing to know what he saw in words. But he merely watched, albeit painfully, but not in the very sense of the word. Painful because he couldn't take what he desired, couldn't give me what I longed for. He drew closer instead. "You are..."

"Yes?" I answered breathlessly, mouth needing his like yesterday.

"You, you, y—you'll be the death of me!" I drowned. Right along with his words as his lips devoured mine, albeit it roughly. And I, shameless and drunk on desire opened up in invitation, taking everything he offered as he kissed every inch of my mouth, leaving me close to asking if anyone would mind if we did not show up at the throne room. "I can't." He pulled back just as urgently as he'd dived in. Yet there was no hint of regret written on his face. Only desire. Raw and unbidden. "As much as I wish to live every one of my fantasies right here, right now, I can't. Liira will have my head if you are even a second late. Later?"

Now was more acceptable to me, but that promise in his eyes...I couldn't say no to that so I nodded. And beside's I was sure there would be a lot of disapproval from Lord Quent if I messed up even an inch of his master piece. "Later..."

"This is for you."

"F—For me?" My eyes darted from an exquisite golden crown to his golden gaze.

"It's meant to complete this very beautiful ensemble." His strong hands guided me back to my seat and carefully placed the little crown atop my head, taking my breath away.

"It's beautiful." My voice was barely a whisper.

“Not as beautiful as you.” A satisfied smile warmed my insides. “Shall we?”

“Of course.” For a moment, that beautiful magical moment, before everything changed, forgetting about everything, I let myself fall, as he held out his hand and brought me to my feet, I let myself be swallowed up in his deep dark abyss. And as he led me towards the throne room I couldn’t help but dream.

“I will see you in there.” We’d stopped and I hadn’t even realized it.

“Okay.” I mumbled as my gloved hand caressed my cheek, right where he’d placed his good bye kiss.

“I’m the queen, I deserve to go first!” Myrna all but growled, drawing my attention. She stood at the entrance to the throne room, her guards surrounding her. I did not even know how long she’d been there. Had my mate not seen her? Or had he and ignored her altogether?

She was beautiful as always, but perhaps not as beautiful as me. The unhappy frown that graced her face each time she looked my way was enough evidence of that fact.

“It does not matter who goes first. Let her be.” I mumbled when she insisted. The decision turned out to be something I appreciated. Somehow I realized that I did not wish to have someone behind me glaring at me with murderous eyes. And having her draw most of the attention to herself as we went down the aisle gave me enough chance to focus on my steps. That and the priest’s chanting that accompanied us all the way to the end of the aisle. My mate wore a serious expression even as he sat on his royal throne, giving nothing away.

“Your highness.” Myrna curtsied, in exaggeration, lips curled in a shameful flirtatious smile. None got acknowledged, thankfully.

“My queen, my lady, if you may.” We were both invited to stand on either side of the king by the priest. The elder maiden who’d sang to me in the bath broke out in song as she had last night. I let the sound calm me while I noticed an annoyed frown grace Myrna’s face. If she had her way I could have sworn Myrna would have had the maiden kicked out.

“My queen, shall we?” The priest stood in front of my mate a parchment in his hand and a dagger in the other, ready to begin the ritual. “A mix of the mother’s and father’s blood is of essence for what we are about to do.” Hands

were held out and the dagger used to pierce. Myrna flashed me a wicked grin as she joined her hand with my mate's.

Against my better judgement, a growl tore from my lips. I hated the sight of my mate's blood joining with hers, but I knew it had to be done. His gaze on me the entire time the priest kept chanting served to calm me too.

The blood dripped. One drop, two, three and the tiny bits of red fell on the parchment, instantly bringing the dead paper to life. It was as if the paper thirstily devoured their blood whole, leaving no trace. Confused at what was happening, I stared up at my mate and Myrna. The maiden I'd known to be my sister my entire life wore a smug smile and dared me to say something. I was not going to waste my breath, however, and focused on my mate instead. His gaze fell back on the parchment and stayed there, making mine do the same.

I did not know how long we waited but suddenly all that blood reappeared as if it had been spat out by the parchment, but instead of dripping to the floor it flowed gently following the many lines that criss crossed the parchment yet never touched any or crossing any.

"Your majesty..." The priest lifted the parchment and showed it to my mate before lifting it higher and showing it to the multitudes. "Humble people of Xatis, behold."

My chest tightened not knowing what in god's name that meant. The gasps and loud mumblings that ensued only made that feeling worse.

"My lady, it is your turn." My legs shook as I drew closer, more so when my mate's expression remained as indecipherable as ever. The piercing of the blade was but a sharp painful cut that took me by surprise. The whole action was as before with I and my mate's blood dripping on the parchment and being devoured just as before. Except when it was spat out, it took a different path than before. It was as if a magical being guided it as it flowed right over the lines that criss crossed the parchment, spreading out in all directions and yet keeping to the pattern.

"Your majesty..." Just as before, the priest showed the parchment to my mate. Except his voice was laced with something. Pride? Joy? I could not tell. "Humble people of Xatis, behold."

I expected some mumbling at the very least when the multitudes beheld the parchment. I was not prepared for what came next, however.

My hands flew to my ears and had it not been for a pair of strong hands that held me, I would have found myself on the floor as the most deafening noise filled the throne room. It took me a moment to realize that the noise was nothing to do with an attack. The people that filled the room were apparently celebrating?

“My king?” Warm hands cupped my cheeks and when I looked up that beautiful smile greeted me. “What does this mean?” I seemed to have forgotten whatever it was Liira had said would happen.

“Our son...or daughter has been welcomed by the royal ancestors.”

“And Myrna’s?” I couldn’t help but ask, but before he could answer loud protests filled the room.

“You have to do it again, priest! Something must have gone wrong with the parchment! Or...that dagger!”

“Enough!” Sarabeth? I could not recognize the once soft spoken queen of Xatis as her eyes glared at Myrna. I could have sworn if she possessed a whip, Myrna would have received a thousand lashes already. “You carry another wolf’s pup! I suggest you do not utter anymore words to embarrass the throne any further.”

“Sarabeth...I swear, it is not what you think.”

“It is queen mother to you.” The former queen of Xatis sneered. And if I thought Liira was scary, the usually calm queen was just as scary.

“Guards, take her away!”

“Mother!” My heart ached when my mate seemed to protest Sarabeth’s decision. And when he let go of my hands to take Myrna’s it cracked. And only the appearance of an ancient figure by his side kept me holding back the loud sob that threatened to escape.

“Do you have it?” My mate’s question was urgent.

The ancient figure’s long hair swayed in the non existent breeze. “As requested my king.” He opened up a now familiar wooden box and held out a sharp blade to his king.

“No! Elian!” When realization flashed in Myrna’s eyes, she protested loudly. “My king! Do not do this! I swear, it is not what you think. I did not betray you! Please...”

If my mate heard her, he made no point of showing it as he reached for the sharp blade and cut.

My eyes widened. There was no hesitation, no emotion... just that—

“Nooooooo!” Myrna screamed as she dove to pick up the two pieces of the twined strands of red and scarlet. And despite what she’d done to me, my heart went out to her as she attempted to reattach them with shaky hands. “No...” Her voice dropped to barely a whisper as her tears streamed down her face, washing away the many cosmetics that had been applied to her face.

“I Elian...King of Xatis, do hereby strip you Myrna of the position of queen and my wedded wife. And in the presence of the bond keeper do hereby sever the bond signifying our union and call upon our royal ancestors to recognize it no more.”

“Please...you don’t have to do this...”

“And for your treachery...”

Wait...There was more? If it were possible for my eyes to go any wider they did as I beheld the slow rising of the king’s golden sceptre. I had not even realized it was now in his hands. “...For your treachery in attempting to keep my mate from me...For plotting to kill my mate and my unborn child...” Jaws clenched tightly as he growled those words.

“Please don’t say it! Forgive me Elian...” Myrna attempted to get closer to the king, but a sword, ready and shiny stood in her path.

“Don’t.” I’d never seen Rakon so emotionless. The head of the king’s guard resembled an immovable pillar as he stood between Myrna and his king.

“Please...”

“...You are forever banished from this palace, from Xa—”

“No! Anything but that my king!” Myrna cried out while my mouth fell open.

"Be glad I did not choose to have your head." My mate's gaze was murderous when it fell on Myrna. "Be glad my mate's love for you has saved you today." He all but growled before placing his sceptre down. I on the other hand only gaped his way. It was astounding that even when I had said nothing of the sort he'd known. He'd known that I could not bear having her death on my conscience no matter what she had done.

"You are free to carry everything you possessed while you remained under the palace's roof." And he was giving her a means of survival while she went out there?

"I do not care about any of it!" Myrna growled at a couple of guards that shifted to her side, ready to escort her out of the throne room. "I only want you Elian. Let me stay... Please... I promise— Do not touch me!" Her growls filled up the throne room as she protested. I did not know how to feel about the sight of her, thrashing as she attempted to escape the guard's grasp.

The multitudes had surprisingly remained deathly quiet. Watching just as I did, not knowing what to do. Even when I had expected it, nothing could have prepared me for the heavy atmosphere that resulted or the punishment that had been lavished on the queen. She was finally gone... Her protests faded with her absence, leaving me with a strange feeling of loss. Was any of this worth it? Was it worth her efforts to get rid of me, the thorn in her side? I did not think so neither did she. That I was sure of.

"My king." The sound of the high priest's voice drew everyone's attention. "It is done." He folded the parchments and handed them over to the bond keeper. "The celebrations can begin."

And just like that cheers erupted at the high priests declaration but their king held up his hand to silence them. I expected him to say something, but he merely turned to me, sending my heart pounding in my chest. And when he closed the distance between us with those sure strides, the floor beneath me shifted and I barely remained upright, thanks to familiar arms that reached out at the right moment.

"Are you alright?" Breathless, I could only nod to which he smiled. "I would have you rest but this has waited long enough."

"My king?"

"There is someone I wish for you to meet." His smile was comforting, promising me something good. But even before he could say who that was, I knew. Their scents engulfed me and sent my wolf howling in my head.

"Are they really here?" Tears brimmed as I looked at my mate for assurance. I would die if it wasn't true.

"Why don't you find out for yourself." He turned me around and I found myself facing two figures. Strangers, yet familiar at the same time.

"My baby..." Arms stretched out, coaxing my feet forward. I had been loved my entire life. Well, up until everything went to hell anyway. I had known a parent's love, that I could not deny, but this...whatever was being offered to me, even with having known them for only but a moment, made me realize that it was more than a parent's love. And when I landed in their arms it was as if my soul finally found a part I had not even known was missing. "I never thought I would see you again." The woman cried, her hold getting tighter and tighter. I was not complaining, however. This counted for one of the best embraces I had ever received in my entire life.

Unfortunately it was cut short by someone.

"Brother? What is the meaning of this?" Someone whose wolf I also recognized too growled, their annoyance evident.

"Evarius." The man whom I knew to be my father even without introductions acknowledged the other man dryly. But if this Evarius was offended, he did not show it, but instead approached still.

"I did not expect to see you here. When did your taste for this place change?" Evarius' gaze shifted to take in the entirety of the throne room when in essence he spoke of the whole palace, I assumed.

"Not that I owe you an explanation, but as Lord of the third house and grandfather to the heir of Xatis, wouldn't you think it strange that I would not be in attendance during such an important ceremony?" A smile lingered on my father's lips, but I did not miss the underlying anger.

"Wait, what do you mean lord, Lydo?!" Evarius bellowed.

"That will be Lord Lydo to you, brother!"

The King's Tainted Mate Chapter 69 - Tips

I had finally done something right by her. Even though still seemingly unsure of herself and the new reality that had dawned on her, my mate was happy. Or I hoped she was. I knew it was one thing to find your true family, but another thing to know for sure that what you have known your entire life was a lie.

It was that lie that had led me to my chamber's balcony to ponder over the matter. Many things were right or they seemed to be. But if there was something I had learned from the whole ordeal with Myrna, it was that nothing was as it seemed.

"Seeing that you insist on partying alone, I come bearing gifts." Rakon came and stood by my side, a large pitcher in his hands. "It is known to quench a man's thirst and dampen sorrows too. Which is your fancy?"

"I'm afraid I do not know, but I'll have it regardless." I presented my empty cup of wine to be refilled.

"Will you not join them?" Rakon inquired. Even without saying, I knew who 'them' were.

"Not just yet." I sipped on my wine. "How is she?"

"If I'd only met her today, I would say happy." Rakon answered, his answer making me frown.

"And if you had met her way before today?"

"I would say she was missing something. A certain someone. Her eyes keep searching the crowd. Perhaps for a king?"

Something warmed at that answer, but I was not about to rush to my mate's side. "What of my former queen?"

"She is right where you asked, unharmed. I do not get your decision, however." My best friend turned to me, frowning. "None of those banished from Xatis ever get to see a wink of sleep within its boundaries, so then why does she get to stay?"

I sipped on my wine as I contemplated my answer. "It's simple really. She may be banished, but I'll be damned if I will let her run right into the bosom of my enemies. Many who would keep her safely within Xatis's boundaries." Myrna was many things, but stupid was not one of them. Something told me that her presence at the ritual was going to yield a positive result or at least she thought so. That in itself meant everything was not yet over.

"Someone you have in mind apart from the obvious ones?"

I had a couple, but I was not about to make those accusations yet.

"The whole point of inviting guests is so that you, as their host, can entertain them. Not hide away in some crevice somewhere." My father, surprisingly scolded over our mind link. I had expected such from Liira, but the matriarch seemed to have been occupied by God knows what.

"I'll be there." Not being in the mood to argue, I conceded. "This lone party has to come to an end unfortunately." I gulped the rest of my drink before setting my cup down.

"Argh...Do we have to?" Rakon all but whined.

"Whining does not look pretty on you." I patted my best friend as he dragged his feet towards my chamber's doors.

At the door, I was met with an unusual guest.

"Shyla?" She was about to turn back when I emerged. "Where is Gol, Samara and Norae?" I couldn't help the edge in my tone as I scanned the empty hallway, thinking of a million things that could go wrong just because she'd sneaked away from those charged to watch her.

"I did not sneak away from anyone." She mumbled as if she read my mind. And when I only eyed her incredulously she pointed down the hallway. "My guards happen to be that way. I merely requested for a little privacy." Colour bloomed in her cheeks when she said that, but I couldn't even stop to admire the sight as I was still rattled by the fact that she was alone in the palace that was full of potential enemies.

"Where the hell are you?!" Not that I did not believe my mate, I had to know where Samara and Norae were. Gol too.

“Down the hallway, your majesty.” They answered in unison.

“I will deal with them. You are scaring your mate.” Rakon glared.

My focus shifted back to my mate and only then did I notice that I was almost shifting. Her look, however, was not of horror as Rakon insinuated. It was more...was she sad?

“Are you alright?” I pulled her in and held on, cursing myself while at it.

“I am. More than actually, but it is a lot to take in and I just needed a moment.” And she’d sought me out? That perhaps was the best thing I had heard the whole day and having her melt in my arms so effortlessly just made it so much better.

The King’s Tainted Mate Chapter 70 - Tips

I was torn, yet again. One would think my world would be blooming with happiness now that I had been reunited with my family. Well, I was happy, beyond happy, there was no doubt about that, but perhaps the timing had left me overwhelmed with a thousand emotions. So much had happened today. Most of which I had not expected at all.

With the banquet, being Xatis’s centre of attention...I knew this would happen, but perhaps I had not fully understood to what extent that attention would go, or how far the pride of the people of Xatis reached regarding knowing of the sure future of their royal family.

The entire palace resembled a beast awakened from a century’s old slumber and nothing I’d known about the place was consistent with the happenings that now filled it after the ritual in the throne room. I was but a stranger within its walls as I witnessed and watched everything with awe and wonder. The usual calm had not only been replaced with its very many guests that talked excitedly among themselves, but it had also been filled with music, dancing and loud cheers. Wine poured from barrels non-stop as men and maidens alike toasted to the future of Xatis. Both the young and the old, noble and commoner drank and made merry, bringing the usually quiet grand reception halls back to life.

Outside the palace, men had at some point shifted too, their wolves howling to their hearts content. The resulting sounds, a melody of pride and happiness, singing of successes of both the current and future king.

I would have been glad to just be a witness to all of this, but that was not to be. Xatis, it seemed, was not only excited and happy about my child. With their queen having been banished, many had turned to me in the most natural and scary manner. I had barely come to terms with Myrna's banishment and yet many had bowed unnecessarily at the sight of me, smiles wide with their mouths a word short of proclaiming 'long live the queen'.

And then there was my family that I had no idea I'd lost until today. Tears had been shed, warm embraces shared. I'd been thrust into yet another world that was overflowing with immense love for me that was both beautiful and marred with pain. I'd felt it. The end to my parent's years and years of pain. It was in every tear shed, in every touch, every gaze, every embrace that was both comforting and a painful reminder of all I had lost.

Fate had outdone itself and I couldn't help but wish to escape. If only but for a moment.

My feet had led me straight to my mate and that moment had turned into one long one. I had had no intentions of staying for too long, but here, by my mate's side, surrounded by all the silence and his calming scent, I'd failed to bring myself to give that up.

We'd said nothing. Well, he'd said nothing, while I had mumbled a few words about the peaceful world made of the widespread vegetation down below. His chamber's balcony, I had to admit had become one of my favourite places in the whole palace. Or perhaps it was because it came with his presence.

He'd sat by my side ever so quietly, but I'd felt his gaze on me the entire time. The brief moments I had been curious and turned to meet it, I'd been plunged into a golden sea of countless emotions that I feared would merely add to my own overwhelming ones, so I'd looked away just as quickly each time. Of course it had done nothing to dim the curiosity I'd had lurking at the back of my mind. While holding his every attention was extremely desirable and very welcome to my wolf too, I wondered what it was he was looking for.

"This is not meant to be worn for longer than the ritual" He tugged at my gown gently, reminding me that I still wore the gown I'd been wearing before the wheels of fate made its final turn. It was a wonder I'd not felt its weight after so long. But was that what he'd been thinking about? My change of clothes?

"We should be able to find something more comfortable."

Wait, we? I was scooped up before I could protest and carried into the heart of his chambers. "He only wishes to get me changed!" I chastised my hopeless heart that painted visions of something more. Except that did nothing for my own flesh that had ignited with need at the sight of the very first of those visions, and damn the bond that let him know what I was exactly thinking.

His gaze was the deepest shade of its golden colour when he gently placed me on his bed that held the secrets of our very first moments of intimacy in his chambers. Secrets that had me blushing all shades of scarlet at the mere memory of them. Secrets that made me welcome the surprise warmth of his lips on mine.

The surprise, however, was not only in the action itself, but in the way my heart thundered in my chest at the contact. And despite the desire that threatened to run wild in my blood, his kiss tugged me into a whole new world. It was by no means chaste, yet it did not plunge me into the familiar fires of desire. There was no rush, no assault, just an almost sacred gentleness that caressed my very soul. How that was possible I did not know. Or perhaps I did not wish to acknowledge it.

"I—" He broke off the kiss, eyes searching mine with an overwhelming intensity. "I— There should be something lighter among your gowns." He pulled back just as surprisingly as he'd claimed my lips, leaving me yearning for more and wondering what he'd really meant to say.. His touch while he made work of the cloak that covered my gown only served to deepen that longing. "Do you perhaps prefer to have Astryn do this?"

Did I wish for anyone to intrude on this moment? To trade the intensity of his gaze and the feel of his touch with that of my maid? Did I wish to give up the promise of something more once those layers of fine material were finally peeled from my body? To give up the chance to indulge in untold pleasures that would effectively distract me from the heaviness of my newfound reality. "No." I reached for his hand, my own boldness surprising us both. "I wish for you to do it." His eyes glowed at the invitation. That alluring golden shade that had me biting back a moan summoned by the mere way he took me in. A change of clothes was clearly not what was on his mind. Definitely not on his wolf's either, but if he was going to indulge in pleasuring us both, that was a secret he kept closely guarded in his heart as he pulled me to my feet and got to work at relieving me of the burden of my gown.

I would have claimed him instead, but perhaps my own boldness did not stretch as far as seducing kings even if they were my mate. Especially not

when the want in their eyes had suddenly been replaced by something heavy and unrecognizable. He'd frozen, was distracted, the pealed layer of my cloak still in his hands.

"What is it?" I followed his gaze, my own eyes landing on the magical tattoo on my arm that had been exposed. His demeanour was a perfect replica of his reaction when he first beheld them while I lay in his bath. "They are something, wouldn't you say?" I mumbled when I was met with silence.

"They are." He hummed, finally, drawn out of his frozen state by my words. "And quite unforgettable. Even to a child."

"Unforgettable?" Curiosity had me shifting my gaze from the tattoo and back to him. "You've seen something like this before?" The idea had not occurred to me before now. The twin wolves still meant nothing to me, but what if they should have. Were they a family mark or something? I had not seen anything of the sort on my mother or father. But then again, they had kept those parts of their bodies covered.

A light side caress of my face was his only answer. Coupled with a very thoughtful look that had me rephrasing my question. "Have you seen these before?" My past was not something I wished to dive in just yet. If I had my way, I would choose a more pleasurable endeavor, but the way my mate looked at me stirred a new longing to want to know if there was a possibility that we had a shared past that involved the tattoo. "Of course, they have only surfaced now on my body, but if you have—"

"I have." That thoughtful look morphed into something that was both thought and a mix of pain. Or was that regret? "A very long time ago." He kept staring. "So long, I should have forgotten, but this image simply refused to fade from memory."

I did not know what to make of his words even as a strange fear to understand what lay behind them plagued me. "Why would you wish to forget?" I inquired despite my fears.

"Because you'd been lost right within these palace walls the night I beheld them and it was my fault."

I'd been lost at the palace?! That was...unexpected. And...it was his fault? "How is it your fault?" Hands held mine with a desperate grip at my question. A grip I returned without a second thought. Because, despite his confession, I

knew it would never be something I could hold against him. I was an infant when I'd been lost, so if whatever he spoke of were true, he would have been but a little boy himself. And once again here was evidence of our pasts being entwined, speaking of fate's choice and the impossibility of running away from it. Did I even wish to run?

"According to mother, I'd been so happy when you had arrived that I would not leave the chambers Florithe had given birth in. Being a young prince, they thought I'd do no harm if I stayed around, but I guess they were wrong." Bitterness dripped with his words.

I sought to comfort, naturally "I'm sure they were right. You were what, a few years older than I was? What could anyone so young do?"

"Doze off apparently." He chuckled bitterly.

"Doze off?"

"Well, I did. It would be the thing to ensure that you and your family experienced so much pain."

I frowned. "I do not understand. Why would you dozing off have anything to do with my being separated from my family?"

"It was night time and the moon was high and bright in the sky. I had wished to thank the moon goddess for the pretty baby."

"I was born during the full moon?"

He smiled and held me tighter before continuing with his tale. "Mother says I thought it was the most beautiful moon. As beautiful as the baby that lay in the crib. I'd watched it for a while, because I wished to get back to the crib and tell the baby all about it. I guess no one thought to look out for the little prince that stood too close to the large open window. Mother says when they did, all hell broke loose after they realized I had actually fallen out of the window. Everyone had spilled out of the room that held you and your mother right after. Their focus had been to retrieve the prince. Lord Lydo, your father had led the search. Hoping to find me before father got wind of the unfortunate accident. They found me, unharmed, luckily, still peacefully sleeping, but it was at a huge cost." He fell into silence at that, forcing me to look up at him, having an inkling of what that cost was.

"Your crib was empty when they returned. Florithe was in a deep sleep, that she later would not recall how she'd slipped into when she had been left watching over the crib.

"Well, that explained why my mother had spent the entire time holding on to me after being reunited in the throne room. She'd never had that chance before." I whispered. That was just heart breaking. Now that I was a mother myself, I couldn't even imagine such a thing happening to my own child. My hand went to my belly as if to ward off any of fate's ideas if it all it had any of the sort.

"Florithe blamed herself for a very very long time for not being able to protect you. Lydo felt much worse. As the lord of the third house he felt as though he'd failed everyone for failing to protect the house's heir."

Heir? I was the heir to a noble house?! My heart skidded to a stop at that and given our bond, it did not escape my mate's attention.

"Shyla?" He held me up, panic filling his eyes. "Are you alright? Is it something I said?"

"N-No. Well, yes." I croaked out when I finally found my breath, thanks to his panicked commands to get me breathing again. "It was a lot to take in, that's all." It seemed that was all today had to offer. What fate had to offer. Life altering discoveries that made the life I'd lived seem as a shadow compared to what it could have been.

"Which part?" Warm hands caressed my face gently. "I can stop if it upsets y—"

"Please don't." I held on tighter in protest. Somehow I knew hearing this from him saved me a lot of tears and heartache that would definitely grip my poor heart if my own parents were to be the ones to narrate this tale to me.

"Are you certain?"

"I am." I nodded. "This is not something I wish for my parents to relieve just because I wish to know my past."

"You should know they'd gladly do it, however." Elian searched my eyes as he sought to assure me of that fact. "They'd do anything for you. They did everything to find you, searched far and wide, but it was of no use. And the

more they searched and came up with nothing, the more their hope shattered and grief sank its claws in their hearts. Florithe and Lydo became but a shadow of their former selves even as they chose to withdraw from society. Their loss of you had been too great a battle for them to fight.”

A vision of me running wildly in the forgotten village’s forest brought a tightness to my chest. A feeling of guilt I did not think possible. I may not have had a noble’s upbringing but I was happy. Happy while my parents drowned in grief day after day. That was just sad.

“I have grown up knowing their grief. Shared in it too when I was old enough to understand what happened that night.” I stared at my mate. Had he blamed himself? All these years?

“You were but a child.”

“It didn’t hurt any less when I’d discovered why Florithe, Lydo and the pretty baby never came to the palace anymore. It didn’t even matter when mother had mentioned that I shouldn’t have dozed that night.”

“You shouldn’t have? I do not understand.”

Jaws clenched before he spoke. “It would eventually take Lord Nevan to determine that that was no natural sleep at all when I didn’t wake according to my usual morning routine. Florithe had also slept deeply for quite a long time. Too long even for a woman who’d just gone undergone the ordeal of childbirth.”

“Wait, it was someone’s doing?!” Anger bubbled. “Who was sick enough to poison a child?”

“Perhaps not the culprit’s intentions, but the young prince sharing Florithe’s cup of tea had worked perfectly for whoever had been set on taking you away. It created the right amount chaos and the perfect window to commit their crime. They were never caught. It would appear you had disappeared without a trace, until now.”

Anger raged in my soul at the person responsible, whose identity I was not even aware of. They’d kept me from my family and knowing their love. A path I should not have treaded was woven by someone’s selfishness...They’d kept me from my mate! How different would our story have been if I had stayed in my parent’s house?

It was just not Myrna, not just fate, someone else had been pulling at my life's strings and I had danced to their tune my entire life! The very thought angered me even more and if I were being honest, I desired to have their blood more than anything.